

November 30, 2021

By Electronic Mail

The Honorable Thomas Hucker, President and
Members of the Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Re: Testimony on Zoning Text Amendment No. 21-09

Dear Council President Hucker and Members of the County Council:

I am writing this letter as the CEO of Lantian Development in support of ZTA 21-09, Office and Professional – Biohealth Priority Campus. We view this legislation as a vital opportunity to create a favorable climate for biohealth companies to locate, grow, and expand in Montgomery County. The ZTA also firmly embraces the County’s Speed to Market initiative.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Lantian is a real estate investment and development company that focuses on advancing medium to large-scale development in Montgomery County. Lantian currently owns approximately 204 acres of land in Montgomery County, including most significantly, the Clarksburg Comsat Property along I-270 in the Technology Corridor. The potential redevelopment of the Comsat site to include significant employment opportunities is a prime example of how this ZTA should be utilized.

ZTA 21-09 creates a new definition for Biohealth Priority Campus that includes Life Sciences, Research and Development, or Medical/Scientific Manufacturing and Production. As proposed, the ZTA would apply to new facilities of 150,000 square feet or greater or existing County facilities that are expanded by at least 50,000 square feet. Moreover, ZTA 21-09 is permitted in Commercial/ Residential and Employment Office Zones that are (1) within or adjacent to a red policy area, (2) within Opportunity Zones, or (3) within a half mile of a Montgomery County Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route.

Lantian strongly encourages preserving ZTA 21-09’s scope of eligible properties to include those properties within a half mile of any current or proposed BRT route, including the Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT), which has would terminate on the Comsat Property. We would propose that the Council amend its language to make this point clear by use of specific references to CCT and potentially other rapid transit options. Opportunities for future development along important transit routes like the CCT are critical to County’s economic development and should be reflected in this legislation as this is where this type of development is likely to occur.

Additionally, Lantian would support either a revision or an amendment to the ZTA that would expand its application to allow for multiple user groups, rather than only a single commercial or industrial user. Expanding the scope of this legislation to allow for multiple users would allow smaller life science companies with higher growth potential to also benefit from this legislation, particularly in the case of new construction. There simply is not enough high-quality, bespoke life science space available in Montgomery County's supply constrained market. Smaller users represent the dominant number of firms in the biohealth market and often expand more quickly delivering important biohealth-related jobs. This is exactly the kind of life science and biohealth development that the ZTA should encourage. As such, we would suggest that a reasonable compromise may be to require a project to identify a particular user for at least 35% of the proposed building area and then allow for multiple tenants to occupy the remainder of the premises. This would allow for a project to move forward with a name tenant while still avoiding speculative development.

We are pleased that the Planning Board and its Staff have recommended approval of this ZTA. However, we would encourage the County Council to not only approve ZTA No. 21-09 but to also support amendments that strengthen the ZTA to fully realize its potential as an economic development tool for the County.

We appreciate the Council's consideration regarding our position on ZTA No. 21-09.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Elliott". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bob Elliott
CEO
Lantian Development