

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF S.A.V.E ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT (ZTA 25-01)

Good afternoon, Councilmembers, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is John Sweeney, and I represent Tourbineau Real Estate Partners, a national developer with a focus on adaptive re-use projects, transforming vacant buildings across the country. We're here today to express our support for the Street Activation and Vacancy Elimination or "S.A.V.E." Zoning Text Amendment.

When our company looks at converting existing office buildings, we strive to find the highest and best use for that given project. As such, we evaluate a variety of uses including residential and hospitality. There are certain properties, however, where office-to-residential or office-to-hospitality conversions are simply not feasible. When these types of uses are not viable, we have found that a self-storage use provides a meaningful benefit—especially when combined with other public amenities, as required by the S.A.V.E. Zoning Text Amendment. As such, the approach of the S.A.V.E. ZTA aligns with our commitment to revitalize "ghost" buildings in urban environments creating a net positive impact to the surrounding neighborhood.

We have seen properties both in Montgomery County and other areas of the country, where owners have tried many approaches to disposing of these ghost buildings. This has included putting these vacant office buildings up for sale through an auction process, at a significantly discounted price. But, there are properties that have significant site complexities and market challenges, which make even auctioned properties unattractive for sale and redevelopment. It is this subset of buildings that become these "ghost" building, which are dark, un-activated along the street, and make no contribution to the community.

The S.A.V.E. Zoning Text Amendment presents a valuable opportunity to revitalize these problem and long vacant buildings. While the ZTA is very restrictive in its scope, it ensures that a property owner will be required to activate the street by bringing in a philanthropic and/or cultural institution on the ground floor, a use that would positively impact the community. Specifically, the S.A.V.E. ZTA is a game changer for non-profits that we have found need spaces. And, the requirement that such institution be located on the ground floor – has an added benefit of activating the adjoining and surrounding pedestrian environment.

The S.A.V.E. ZTA also requires the preservation of the character of an existing office building. As part of any redevelopment, a property owner would be required to maintain the façade and windows, ensuring that the building continues to read as an office building.

The S.A.V.E. ZTA provides a path forward to eliminate problem and long-term vacant buildings, with the result benefitting the community as a whole. We respectfully ask for your support for the S.A.V.E. ZTA and this important initiative.

Thank you.