

Have you used your cell phone lately? Have you had occasion to employ a GPS (global positioning system) to find your way? You can thank COMSAT (Communication Satellite) laboratories. Established by an act of Congress as a public-private partnership in 1962, it was responsible for launching the first commercial satellite into geostationary orbit. Now there are more than 12,000 of them circling the earth.

What developers and planners call a “White Elephant” could be the Heart of the Community – giving residents from all backgrounds an icon they can all identify with, as well as local employment.

Please do not allow the demolition of the COMSAT Laboratories building. I support the adaptive re-use of the iconic building for the following reasons:

1. It is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, as the work of master architect Cesar Pelli at the state level of significance, and under Criterion C, in the areas of Science, Engineering, and Communications at the national level of significance.
2. The Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission found that COMSAT Laboratories continues to meet the designation criteria (identified by the Historic Preservation Commission in 2005) as listed in 24A-3(b) of the County Code.
3. COMSAT Laboratories is the only building designed by Cesar Pelli in Montgomery County, and one of only four buildings by Cesar Pelli standing in metropolitan Washington.
4. The United States would not have become the world leader in artificial communication satellites were it not for the work undertaken at COMSAT Laboratories. Real-time international phone communication and international, live television broadcast - aspects of global communication technology that we take for granted today - were pioneered by the scientists, researchers, and technicians at COMSAT Laboratories in the 1960s & 70s.
[quoted from the November 2024 Planning staff report on the Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan.]
5. The iconic structure, clearly visible from I-270, can be considered for many adaptive re-uses other than the single one [housing] considered by the company hired by Planning.
6. The preserved building could put Clarksburg on the map and join the diverse community together by giving them a common point of identity. Every time they use a cell phone or a GPS they will be reminded that where they live has a special place in history.
7. Any adaptive reuse would provide employment locally --- something the proposed plan is sorely lacking.

A building is a primary source of evidence of history and cannot be replaced by photos, street names or written descriptions. Once demolished it can never be replaced.

Please do not let this happen. Do not follow in the footsteps of the current U.S. president in tearing down historic government buildings.