

January 19, 2026

Dear County Council Members:

This written testimony is submitted on behalf of the COMSAT Alumni and Retiree Association (COMARA), comprised of former COMSAT employees. COMARA was established in 2002 as an organization dedicated to providing networking and related support for former COMSAT employees and to preserving the unique legacy of the groundbreaking efforts of the Communications Satellite Corporation to bring the benefits of satellite telecommunications technology to all countries of the world, and thereby promote greater world peace and understanding, consistent with the vision first articulated by President Kennedy in 1961.

We are writing to express strong support for the recommendation previously made by the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), following a public hearing and work session conducted on January 22, 2025, for an environmental setting of 33.47 acres for a COMSAT Master Plan Historic Site as part of the Clarksburg Gateway Sector Plan now under consideration by the Montgomery County Council.¹ Unfortunately, the HPC's recommendation was subsequently rejected by the Montgomery County Planning Board and the Master Plan document now under consideration by the Montgomery County Council does not contain this recommendation.

The case for this historic designation is extremely compelling, as articulated by the HPC, in terms both of the architectural significance of the structure and, in our opinion, even more importantly, based on the nature and broad reaching impact of the research and development work that was performed there, which served as the backbone for all aspects of satellite technology in use today. Indeed, COMSAT Laboratories, at its facilities in Clarksburg, Maryland, is where the foundation of modern satellite technology was invented and first developed. Virtually all the communications satellites we rely on today can trace their technology back to COMSAT Laboratories.

Over the years, hundreds of engineers from around the world learned about satellite technology at COMSAT Laboratories, which they were then able to share this knowledge with their home countries. In recognition of the groundbreaking work done there, COMSAT Laboratories received several awards, including two Emmys and the NASA/US Space Foundation Space Technology Hall of Fame Award. As of 1999, COMSAT Laboratories had a patent portfolio covering numerous aspects of satellite communications technology, including approximately 100 active patents, with another 70 in the filing process.

¹ COMARA submitted a detailed summary of the historical significance and accomplishments of COMSAT Laboratories for consideration by the HPC, and a copy of that document has been separately submitted to the County Council.

It is for these reasons that COMARA strongly encourages the County Council to accept the recommendation of the HPC regarding the status of COMSAT Laboratories.

In the event, however, the HPC recommendation is not accepted, we believe that significant measures to preserve and provide proper recognition for the historic achievements at COMSAT Laboratories would be essential. We take note in this regard that the Planning Board has indicated that, if the building were not preserved, it would seek to impose certain mitigation measures on the building owners or site developers regarding preservation of COMSAT Laboratories' true legacy. While we appreciate this commitment, we are concerned that these mitigation measures remain relatively vague and open ended, and it remains unclear how they will operate in practice.

One specific suggestion that we believe merits further consideration would be preservation of at least the front portico and lobby area of the main building, which could be easily transformed into a pavilion or gazebo-like structure, as a public meeting venue, and where important details about COMSAT Laboratories' significant achievements could be publicly presented and preserved. This measure would go a long way to helping preserve the COMSAT Laboratories legacy in a meaningful way, if the building in its entirety is not saved. Moreover, in the event that destruction of the main structure were to occur, COMARA would request that it have an opportunity to directly participate in whatever arrangements are made with respect to mitigation measures required, to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to properly capture and present COMSAT Laboratories' legacy as one of the seminal research and development facilities in this country's history.

Respectfully submitted,

COMSAT Alumni and Retirees Association

By Maury Mechanick, President