

April 9, 2024

Reuben Collins  
President  
Charles County Commissioners  
200 Baltimore Street  
La Plata, Maryland 20646

**Re: Bill 2024-07 Zoning Text Amendment #23-176 – Aviation Business Park (“ZTA”); Bill 2024-08 Zoning Map Amendment #23-02 Aviation Business Park (“ZMA”)**

Dear Commissioners:

As past Presidents/Chairs of the Charles County Chamber of Commerce, we urge you to adopt the above referenced Zoning Text Amendment and Zoning Map Amendments. The proposed ZTA and ZMA will restore valuable employment land to the County’s tax rolls and provide an opportunity for economic redevelopment in the Bryans Road area. The Chamber has long supported both the economic potential of the land surrounding the Maryland Airport and the existing businesses along Ray Drive.

***(1) Maryland Airport- Adjacent Properties***

The Maryland Airport is a significant component of the Federal and State air infrastructure. Rezoning the land adjacent to the Airport provides the citizens of Charles County and the State of Maryland the ability to recognize the economic benefits of having one of only five privately owned/public use airports in the United States. To date, over \$20 million dollars of federal and state monies have been invested in this privately owned but important public asset.

According to a 2018 Maryland Aviation Administration publication:

Maryland’s economic well-being is interconnected with its vibrant airport system and its robust aviation industry. The State’s aviation system allows the community at-large to capitalize on an increasingly global marketplace.

Aviation in Maryland both sustains and leads economic growth and development. ***Protecting and investing in airports will support the aviation industry and sustain the industry’s positive impact on local, regional, and state economies. With continued support, Maryland’s dynamic aviation system will continue to provide a significant economic return in the years to come. (emphasis added)***

When the regional and local economic impacts of Maryland’s 34 public-use general aviation and scheduled commercial service airports (excluding Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport) are added together, over 9,900 jobs can be traced to the aviation industry. These employees receive more than \$583 million in total payroll, and generate nearly \$1.1 billion in total economic activity – over \$867 million in business revenue and \$272 million in local purchases.

The total employment numbers for Maryland’s public-use general aviation and scheduled commercial service airports includes nearly 5,000 direct jobs created by airport and visitor activity at these airports. Over 2,300 jobs were supported in local economic sectors as a result of purchases for goods and services by those 5,000 directly-employed workers; and, over 2,600 indirect jobs were supported by over \$272 million of local purchases by airport tenants.

Nearly \$583 million dollars in personal wages and salary income was created in the State of Maryland by the activity at these 34 airports.

Over \$867 million in business revenue was created from airport tenants, support services, and visitor services performed for the general aviation and scheduled commercial service aircraft and visitors using the 34 airports.

This is consistent with the FAA Aerospace Forecast for 2023-2043 which finds, “The long-term outlook for general aviation” is “promising.”

It is also consistent with the May 2023 United States Government Accountability Office Report to Congress, which reports there continues to be strong demand for and growth in the aviation job market. Per the GAO report:

The federal government and the aviation industry forecast that demand for pilots will continue to be strong in the future. For example, BLS projects an average of about 18,000 job openings annually until 2031 for the aircraft pilots and flight engineers occupational group, which is broader than airline pilots.

The GAO report further noted:

The federal government and the aviation industry forecast that demand for aviation maintenance workers—including aircraft mechanics—may be strong in the future. For example, BLS projects an average of about 11,500 job openings annually for the aircraft mechanics and service technicians occupational group from 2021 until 2031.

As part of the FAA’s approval of the Maryland Airport’s Master Plan in 1999, the FAA requested and the County Commissioners took action to zone lands around the Maryland Airport either Business Park (“BP”) or Light Industrial (“IG”). FAA’s request for such zoning was to ensure the

creation of a buffer between the dedicated airport property and surrounding residential and commercially zoned properties. The FAA and the County Commissioners recognized that the biggest threat to an airport is encroachment from incompatible uses, such as residential development. The 2017 designation of the property around the Airport as WCD, which permits residential development, creates the threat of encroachment and jeopardizes the Airport's economic potential.

The ZTA and ZMA will allow limited and compatible “thru-the fence operations”, create jobs, tax revenue and educational opportunities for our children. Located in the midst of a regional hub of air transportation, Charles County and Bryans Road is poised to take advantage of this economic asset. For this reason, the Maryland Department of Planning strongly encouraged the Commissioners to ensure sufficient employment and light industrial lands be maintained around the Maryland Airport.

The Maryland Airport has been an essential part of the Charles County Community and has served its Nation, State and County since 1945 when Charles Bauserman, his neighbors and members of St. John's Church petitioned the State to designate it as a flight school and airport. It is a vital part of Charles County's past, present and future.

Federally regulated, the Airport meets the highest environmental standards and has state of the art stormwater management facilities. Facilities which were constructed under the supervision of the Maryland Department of the Environment. Ensuring the balance between aviation, economic development and environmental sustainability, the FAA and EPA are working with the aviation community to develop and implement regulations to eliminate aviation gas lead emissions by 2030 or sooner.

## ***(2) Ray Drive***

Equally important, the proposed ZTA and ZMA will restore the “Light Industrial” zoning previously for existing tax-paying businesses along Ray Drive. Ray Drive is the home to a number of existing long-standing businesses which both employ County residents and contribute to the County's tax base. In 2017, these businesses lost their base zoning and became “legally existing non-conforming uses.” It is very difficult for “non-conforming uses” to obtain financing. This makes expansion or re-financing difficult. Additionally, the County Code limits the ability of non-conforming uses to expand or grow. Many of these businesses located on Ray Drive because of the underlying IG zoning. Now they find themselves on land which is difficult to finance and which (because of its non-conforming status) would be difficult to sell. The proposed ZTA and ZMA will enhance the retention and growth of these businesses.

**(3) 4075 Livingston Road, Indian Head, Maryland - 50 Acres**

In 2005, Charles County acquired 50 acres from the State of Maryland. The acreage was part of a 1998 agreement between the State Maryland and Charles County, Maryland. We understand the Agreement included concurrence from the Mattawoman Watershed Society and the Sierra Club. The 50 acres was deeded to Charles County for “economic development” related to the Airport. This land was to compensate the Charles County citizens for the 2,225 acres purchased by the State and removed from the County’s tax rolls. Rezoning the 50 acres back to employment uses, allows the Property to develop as promised by the State of Maryland and the various groups which were party to the 1998 Agreement. Most importantly, it fulfills the promise made to the citizens of Charles County, Maryland.

Respectfully,

**Past Chamber Presidents/Chairs**

Phil McDonough      Tom Blandford

Darlene Breck      Sue Greer

Brad Howard      Evie Hungerford

Leigh Ann Keller      Stephen Kensinger

Danny Mayer      Daniel Michael

Bonnie Morris      Craig Renner

Joseph Shannon      Billie Stachura