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WHERE MY COMSAT?

New ownership could threaten one of Cesar Pelli's - and Maryland's - most beloved works of architecture.



COURTESY PRESERVATION MARYLAND

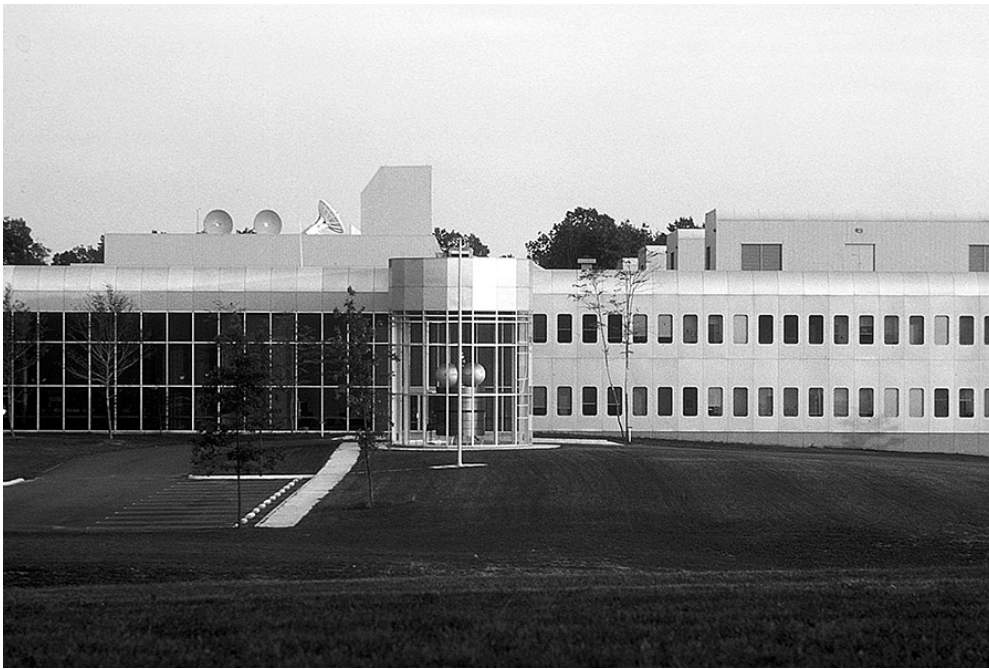
One of architect Cesar Pelli's best-known works, the former Comsat building in Clarksburg, Maryland, has been sold to a developer and faces an uncertain future.

Pelli's building is part of a 204-acre tract that was purchased by Lantian Development, a real estate investment and development company based in Bethesda, Maryland.

Completed in 1969, the 496,000-square-foot COMSAT building was constructed as a research facility and headquarters for the Communications Satellite Corporation (COMSAT), created by the Communications Satellite Act in 1962. COMSAT sold the property in 1997 but continued to lease it for a time.

Isabelle Gournay, a University of Maryland professor who specializes in modern architecture, said Pelli's building is an exceptional example of the "machine in the garden" aesthetic and an ideal candidate for adaptive reuse. "You can still do a lot of things with this building," she said. "The interior is a big, empty shell."





THE COMSAT BUILDING BY 1995 AIA GOLD MEDAL WINNER CESAR PELLI FEATURES ROUNDED ALUMINUM CLADDING AND A CYLINDRICAL, GLASS ENTRANCE ARM EXTENDING INTO THE LANDSCAPE.

COURTESY PELLI CLARKE PELLI ARCHITECTS

Pelli's building is unprotected by any landmark designation, local or federal, and preservationists have feared for years that it could be torn down for new development. To lose it "would be a tremendous loss," said Gournay.

"There's no question that this is one of the finest buildings we have in Montgomery County," said Clare Lise Kelly, a staff preservationist with the county and author of *Montgomery Modern*. "The future of that building is one of our biggest concerns."

The previous owner, LCOR, put the property up for sale this year as raw land zoned for commercial development. Lantian, launched in 2014, paid \$11.5 million in a sale that was announced in early December.

According to local news reports, Lantian is considering new uses for the property, including a pharmaceutical research facility. Company officials did not immediately address the fate of Pelli's building.

Janet Yoder, communications director for Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects, said the 89-year-old architect hopes the new owner will preserve the building.

Montgomery County planning director Gwen Wright said she also hopes Lantian will reuse Pelli's building. As of mid-December "we have not received any specific proposals from them," Wright said.

Ed Gunts

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