

ZTA 26-03

BIOHEALTH PRIORITY CAMPUS - ELIGIBILITY

Description

This ZTA amends the definition of a Biohealth Priority Campus to lower eligibility thresholds for new or expanded square footage to encourage more projects to utilize the Expedited Approval process.

ZTA 26-03
Completed: 2-12-26

MCPB
Item No. 7
2-19-26

2425 Reedie Drive
Floor 14
Wheaton, MD 20902

<i>BB</i>	Benjamin Berbert, Planner IV, Design, Placemaking, and Policy Division Benjamin.Berbert@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-4644
<i>LG</i>	Lisa Govoni, Supervisor, Design, Placemaking, and Policy Division Lisa.Govoni@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-650-5624
<i>AS</i>	Atul Sharma, Chief, Design, Placemaking, and Policy Division Atul.Sharma@montgomeryplanning.org , 301-495-4658

ZTA SPONSORS

Sponsors:
Councilmember Friedson

Co-sponsors:
Council President Fani-González and councilmembers Luedtke, Balcombe, Evans, and Stewart

INTRODUCTION DATE

January 27, 2026

COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING DATE

March 3, 2026

REVIEW BASIS

Chapter 59

Summary

- The current definition of a Biohealth Priority Campus requires a single business to construct at least 150,000 square feet of new commercial space or expand an existing space by at least 50,000 square feet.
- This ZTA would reduce the new construction threshold to 100,000 square feet, reduce the addition threshold to 25,000 square feet, and allow the repurposing of existing office to qualify.
- Planning Staff recommends supporting the ZTA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1 – BACKGROUND	3
Rationale For Introduction	3
SECTION 2 – ZTA 25-11 ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	3
ZTA 26-03 As Introduced	3
SECTION 3 – CLIMATE ASSESSMENT	5
SECTION 4 – CONCLUSION	5
SECTION 5 – ATTACHMENTS	5

SECTION 1 – BACKGROUND

Rationale For Introduction

Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 26-03, Biohealth Priority Campus – Eligibility was introduced on January 27, 2026 by Councilmember Friedson and co-sponsored by Council President Fani-González and Councilmembers Luedtke, Balcombe, Evans, and Stewart (Attachment A). The ZTA is scheduled for a District Council Public Hearing on March 3, 2026.

ZTA 26-03 amends the definition of a Biohealth Priority Campus to lower the thresholds of new construction from 150,000 square feet to 100,000 square feet, and additions from 50,000 square feet to 25,000 square feet. This change is intended to further incentivize the Biohealth industry, and to better position Montgomery County for growth in the sector when the industry recovers. New with this ZTA is also allowing the repurpose of existing office space to qualify as a Biohealth Priority Campus. Qualifying as a Biohealth Priority Campus allows an applicant to utilize the Expedited Approval Plan process under Section 59-7.3.5. which includes a shortened regulatory review timeline. While the process of repurposing existing office space into Biohealth space itself does not often trigger regulatory approvals such as site plans, there may be larger changes envisioned to the exterior of a building or the site itself that would require a site plan review. Applicants could choose whether the existing site plan (or site plan amendment) process, or the expedited review plan process works best for their project.

SECTION 2 – ZTA 25-11 ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ZTA 26-03 As Introduced

All of the changes proposed by ZTA 26-03 are within the definition section for a Biohealth Priority Campus.

SECTION 3.5.8.E.1. BIOHEALTH PRIORITY CAMPUS - DEFINED

The ZTA amends the definition of a Biohealth Priority Campus (lines 10 – 12) to reduce the criteria for qualifying. The requirement for 150,000 square feet of newly constructed space is lowered to 100,000 square feet, and also includes the provision for repurposed space from any other Office or Professional use under Section 3.5.8. The ZTA also reduces the amount of newly added space to an existing facility from 50,000 square feet down to 25,000 square feet. Lowering the qualification thresholds and allowing repurposed space to count is a response to the County’s continued commitment to the Biohealth industry while recognizing the market realities that have diminished

activity in that sector. The ZTA maintains the space that needs to be committed to a single known business, which shows commitment to expansion in the County.

Recommendation: Support the reduction in qualification for a Biohealth Priority Campus.

There is also a minor technical update proposed at the end of the definition section (line 25). This line of code requires a Biohealth Priority Campus to be within 1/2 mile of a planned or existing BRT route¹ or the Corridor Cities Transitway. The Corridor Cities Transitway is no longer a planned facility and was replaced with a series of high-quality bus transit routes called the Corridor Connectors. The ZTA would replace the Corridor Cities Transitway with the Corridor Connectors when describing which properties are eligible for a Biohealth Priority Campus use.

Recommendation: Support replacing Corridor Cities Transitway with Corridor Connectors.

EXPEDITED APPROVAL PLAN

Planning Staff found upon review of the ZTA that the code in this section still references the Biohealth Priority Campus plan as the approval process for a Biohealth Priority Campus. ZTA 25-03 consolidated the Biohealth Priority Campus Plan, along with the Signature Business Headquarters, Mixed Income Housing Community, and the newly created Commercial to Residential Reconstruction into one new Expedited Approval plan under Section 59-7.3.5. A few references to these old plan types were inadvertently left in the code. Some were amended as part of ZTA 25-12 Omnibus at the end of 2025, however this reference was not amended.

Planning Staff recommend replacing references to the Biohealth Priority Campus plan Section 7.3.6. to the Expedited Approval plan section 7.3.5. These updates would be on lines 29, and 34 of the ZTA. The amended sections would be amended as follows:

A sketch plan and a site plan are not required for a Biohealth Priority Campus if the Planning Board approves an Expedited Approval Biohealth Priority Campus plan under Section 7.3.56.

b. Development of a Biohealth Priority Campus should proceed under the standards of Chapter 50 and the underlying zone, including any overlay zones, except as modified by Section 3.5.8.E. and in conformance with the hearing and review schedule in Sections 7.3.56.C and 7.3.56.D.

Recommendation: Update references to Biohealth Priority Campus plan Section 7.3.6. to Expedited Approval plan Section 7.3.5.

¹ Proximity to a BRT route is only one of many options that qualify a site as eligible for a Biohealth Priority Campus. The code also allows Biohealth Priority Campuses to be in a red policy area, or an opportunity zone.

SECTION 3 – CLIMATE ASSESSMENT

Bill 3-22, passed by the County Council on July 12, 2022, requires the Planning Board to prepare a climate assessment for each Zoning Text Amendment, Master Plan, and Master Plan Amendment, effective March 1, 2023. Each Climate Assessment must include the potential positive or negative effects a ZTA may have on climate change (including greenhouse gas emissions) and on community resilience and adaptive capacity. The climate impact assessment for ZTA 26-03 is attached in Attachment B.

Planning Staff anticipates that ZTA 26-03 will have minor mixed impacts on greenhouse gas emissions and indeterminate impacts on sequestration with minor negative impacts from building embodied emissions and minor positive impacts of encouraging development on infill and transit accessible areas. Minor positive impacts are also anticipated in community resilience and adaptive capacity from enhanced economic activity in transit accessible locations. The assessment also identified 11 actions of the climate action plan that may be impacted by the ZTA. There are no identified amendments or actions recommended to mitigate negative impacts of the ZTA, but the assessment broadly supports any efforts that would lower the carbon impact of building materials, construction waste, and reducing commercial energy demand.

SECTION 4 – CONCLUSION

Planning Staff recommends the Planning Board support ZTA 26-03 with the proposed amendment updating references from Biohealth Priority Campus plans to Expedited Approval plans. This ZTA provides reasonable adjustments to the criteria qualifying applications as a Biohealth Priority Campus that both support the industry while ensuring meaningful economic development opportunities as a threshold for using the Expedited Approval plan process.

SECTION 5 – ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Zoning Text Amendment 26-03 Intro Packet

Attachment B: Climate Assessment 26-03