

Minutes of a Meeting of the
Maryland Heritage Areas Authority
Executive Committee
April 9, 2020

The April 9, 2020 meeting of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) Executive Committee was convened via web conference call. The public was notified about the meeting on April 6, 2020 and had the opportunity to listen via phone or web.

MHAA Executive Committee Members Present:

Robert McCord, Secretary, MD Department of Planning, and Chair, Maryland Heritage Areas Authority; Robert D. Campbell (Governor's Appointee for Historic Preservation and serving as Vice Chair for the Maryland Heritage Area Authority); Marty Baker (representing MD Department of Transportation Secretary Gregory Slater)

MHAA Executive Committee Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Jennifer Ruffner, Ennis Barbery Smith (Maryland Historical Trust); Paul Cucuzzella, Rieyn DeLony (Maryland Office of the Attorney General)

Others Present: Elizabeth Shatto, Emily Huebner (Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area); Carol Benson (Four Rivers Heritage Area); Julie Gilberto-Brady (Heart of Chesapeake Country Heritage Area); Brigitte Carty (Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway); Pete Leshner (MHAA); Natalie Chabot (MHAA); Elizabeth Fitzsimmons (MHAA)

Please note that those who called in after the introductions did not have the opportunity to introduce themselves and are not included in the list above. Not all callers stayed for the entire call.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m. by MHAA Chair and Secretary of the MD Department of Planning, Robert McCord.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. McCord began by welcoming everyone and thanking everyone for taking the time to join the teleconference meeting. He introduced himself and the other Executive Committee members, Bob Campbell and Marty Baker, and the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority staff in attendance, Jennifer Ruffner and Ennis Barbery Smith.

Paul Cucuzzella and Rieyn DeLony, both with the Maryland Office of Attorney General also introduced themselves.

Ms. Ruffner listed those members of the public, heritage area directors, and MHAA members joining the group by phone.

ACTION ITEMS

MHAA Emergency Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Mr. McCord asked Ms. Ruffner to summarize the actions taken since the last MHAA Executive Committee Meeting on April 2, 2020.

Ms. Ruffner reported that following the last meeting, MHAA staff developed a draft document outlining the process and criteria for awarding MHAA emergency grants in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. MHAA staff circulated this document to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority and the heritage area directors of the 13 Certified Heritage Areas on April 3, 2020, with a request to provide input by April 7, 2020. MHAA staff received written comments via email from several heritage area directors and staff members and from OAG staff, and they shared the written comments with the Executive Committee on April 8. MHAA staff also revised the document, incorporating elements of the input received, and they recirculated an updated document on April 9, 2020.

Ms. Ruffner reported that no resolution is needed to endorse the MHAA COVID-19 Emergency Grant criteria, but a resolution would be needed if the Executive Committee, acting on behalf of MHAA, would like to delegate authority to award these emergency grants to the MHAA Administrator.

Mr. McCord suggested reviewing the process and criteria document, section by section, but first asked if the other Executive Committee members had any fundamental concerns about the document that should be addressed before a more detailed review process. Hearing none, he initiated section-by-section review of the document.

Mr. McCord went over the first section, regarding grant eligibility:

“Eligibility – Nonprofit heritage tourism organizations located within the boundaries of a Certified Heritage Area who are experiencing disruption of operations due directly to the economic implications and ramifications of the State of Emergency enacted on March 5, 2020.”

All Executive Committee members endorsed this language.

Mr. McCord went over the second section, regarding additional eligibility criteria and application timing:

“A maximum of \$20,000 in emergency operating awards per fiscal year (may be a single \$20,000 grant or multiple smaller awards),” and “Grantees who chose to convert an existing grant are not eligible to apply for an emergency grant until the following fiscal year. Grantees are being alerted that this is possible and are asked to make an informed decision on conversion of a grant.”

He continued, “Applications will be reviewed on a monthly basis – recommend first deadline is May 1, decisions made by May 15 at the latest. Agreement and payment processing will be expedited as possible, but probably would take 45 days. If funds in a fiscal year run out, any eligible, unawarded applications will be rolled into the next fiscal year’s round for consideration.”

There was discussion of the timing.

Mr. McCord went over the next section regarding review process and award criteria:

“Staff select a review panel of 4-6 MHAA members to help review applications. Executive Committee delegates authority to staff to make the final award based on the review committee’s recommendations to expedite the process.” He noted that delegating the authority to make final award decisions would require a vote from the Executive Committee.

There was discussion. There was consensus that number of MHAA members should be an odd number – three or five – in order to allow for a tie-breaking vote.

There was discussion of an appeals process, such as the one that the Maryland State Arts Council has instituted, and what that would entail for MHAA.

There was consensus that the MHAA Administrator has the latitude to seek input from MHAA and the Executive Committee for any reason.

Mr. McCord went over the next section of the document regarding the maximum award amount:

“\$20,000 is recommended as the maximum award amount, which must be matched one to one with any combination of cash and in-kind non-state support; No minimum award amount is recommended. Funds, if awarded, will be disbursed in a single lump sum upon execution of a simplified grant agreement. A final report will be submitted at the end of the grant period, including a certification of expenditures. Grantees will be subject to random spot-checking of financial documentation.”

All Executive Committee members endorsed this language.

Mr. McCord went over the next section of the document regarding the review criteria:

“A scaled rubric like the one utilized by MSAC would be created.

- Do organizational mission and activities align with MHAA and local Heritage Area goals? – The Heritage Areas would review any applications from their heritage area and provide this information to the review panel by email within a week of receipt.

- How significant is the heritage tourism and historic preservation value of the site or organization? A short answer is recommended to address the significance of the site or organization.

- What is the degree of anticipated loss of revenue and/or increase of costs due to the crisis? – This is intended to elicit a short answer and can be general, as there are many unknowns.

Examples would include cancelled fundraisers, cancelled school trips and tour groups, lost rental

revenue, lost visitor income, decreased donations and memberships. Decreased funding from local municipalities, extra cleaning costs, extra staffing costs, costs for setting up telework and remote meeting, costs for virtual experiences and learning opportunities, and marketing expenses to maintain awareness and target audiences.

- Severity and Urgency of Need: What actions will they be forced to take due to lost revenue if they are not able to secure alternative sources of funding? How quickly will they hit a point where they need to take these actions? This is intended to elicit a short answer and can be general, as there are many unknowns. Examples would include reduction in staff, inability to pay rent or utilities, and potential closure of the organization.
- How will the funds help the organization? Examples would include allowing the organization to keep staff on payroll for an additional period of time or covering utility bills for a number of months.
- Geographic Diversity: This could be assessed among each month's applications, and – as more grants are awarded – over the course of the program.
- Organizations that represent Maryland's cultural and human diversity: This could be assessed among each month's applications, and as more grants are awarded, over the course of the program.”

There was discussion.

Mr. Ruffner clarified that this list of criteria is also intended to correspond with questions that would be part of the streamlined application.

There was consensus that geographic diversity, as well as cultural and human diversity, were important to take into account but could not be scored in the same way as the other criteria. The Committee asked that these two points be placed under the heading of “Other Considerations,” rather than included as review criteria.

There was discussion.

There was consensus that a time-frame for the expenditures made as part of these grants should be established to include expenses dating after March 5, 2020 and before 90 days after the Governor of Maryland rescinds the State of Emergency Declaration related to COVID-19.

There was discussion of defining eligible expenses in more detail.

There was consensus that another question should be added to the application to ask grantees if they had applied for other sources of emergency funding due to COVID-19 and that this should be another consideration to include under the heading “Other Considerations.”

There was discussion of allowing applicants to attach supporting documents and consensus that they should be invited but not required to do so.

Mr. Cucuzzella shared the resolution he had drafted after the Executive Committee discussed delegating authority to the MHAA Administrator to award the COVID-19 MHAA Emergency Grants.

Since several edits had been requested during the discussion, Mr. Cucuzzella suggested that the committee should vote on the resolution now, ask Ms. Ruffner to do the following to finalize the Process and Review Criteria for COVID-19 MHAA Emergency Grants: revise the document to reflect the edits requested during the meeting, send the document to the Executive Committee for their review, and make any additional edits – as requested – to reflect what was decided at today’s meeting.

Mr. McCord called for a vote on the motion.

Dr. Baker made the following motion:

IT IS RESOLVED that the Executive Committee of the Maryland Heritage Area Authority (MHAA) delegates to the Administrator of MHAA the authority to award COVID-19 MHAA Emergency Grants consistent with the Process and Review Criteria for COVID-19 MHAA Emergency Grants endorsed by the Executive Committee.

Mr. Campbell seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

The final version of the Process and Review Criteria for COVID-19 MHAA Emergency Grants can be found here:

https://mht.maryland.gov/documents/PDF/grants/Grants_MHAA_COVIDGuidelines.pdf

ADJOURN

Mr. McCord thanked everyone for their time spent attending the meeting and shared a personal story, emphasizing that COVID-19 is a significant threat to Maryland communities and that this meeting had been time well spent.

Mr. McCord called for the meeting to be adjourned at 3:40 pm.