Maryland Inventory of Cemeteries and Burial Sites Working Group
Meeting 1 – June 16, 2025 at 2:00 PM
MHT Board Room, 100 Community Place, Crownsville, MD

Working Group Members Present: Elizabeth Hughes, Deborah Rappazzo, Maya Davis, Hope Metzler, Dr. Julie Schablitsky, Christiana Limniatis, Corey Lewis, Beth Burgess, Mark Edwards, Daniel Phalen, Tina Simmons, Donna Nelson, Glenn Easton, Reginald Bishop

MHT Staff Present: Dr. Matthew McKnight, Gregory Brown

OAG Staff Present: Adam Snyder, Lucy Laudeman

I.   Introductions

Working Group members introduced themselves.

II.   Review of SB354 Provisions

The Working Group reviewed the provisions of SB354 and the December 1, 2025 deadline for completion of a report to be submitted to the Maryland General Assembly. The Working Group is required to:

1.   Identify and review the various definitions of the terms "cemetery" "burial group" "burial site" and any related terms in the Maryland Annotated Code and recommend a single definition for each term.
2.   Identify and evaluate current cemetery documentation practices used by county governments and municipal cultural resource management and historic preservation programs, nonprofit preservation organizations, and private entities.
3.   Identify and evaluate cemetery inventory systems implemented in other states to determine best practices for and challenges to designing, implementing, and maintain a cemetery inventory system in the state.
4.   Evaluate existing cemetery inventories maintained by county governments, historic preservation programs, and genealogical organizations to determine the best methods for integrating existing information into a State cemetery inventory system.
5.   Identify and recommend a set of categories for data collection and maintenance and system functions, including a public search function, for a State cemetery inventory system.
6.   Recommend the appropriate entity to collect data for and maintain a State cemetery inventory system.
7.   Determine the cost of designing, implementing, and maintaining a State cemetery inventory system and recommend a source of funding to implement a State cemetery inventory system beginning in fiscal year 2027.
8.   Evaluate the feasibility and cost of establishing a grant program to provide financial assistance to governmental entities and nonprofit genealogical and historical organizations to expedite identification of cemeteries and recommend the funding amount and source for a grant program beginning in fiscal year 2027.

III.   Cemetery and Burial Site Definitions

Office of the Attorney General intern Lucy Laudeman provided an overview of cemetery and burial site definitions found in statute, providing a table for review which addressed the location of the term in statute, the definition of the term, the statutory context and related notes. The Working Group thanked Ms. Laudeman for her comprehensive review.

Working Group members suggested additional terms for consideration including potter's field, graveyard (which was not found in statute), interment, entombment, pet cemetery, etc. They also suggested that a review of terms used by other states or at the local government level may inform this section of the report.

Mr. Snyder asked that the group review the list of terms and identify any gaps in the list of terms. He also indicated that understanding where there have been problems in the use of the non-uniform definitions will be helpful in determining where statutory changes may be needed.

IV.   Cemetery Data Collection and Access

A. State Inventory Programs: A spreadsheet documenting state cemetery inventory programs, prepared in 2022, was shared with the group. It included information on 32 states which maintained historic cemetery data. Mr. Edwards indicated that he had conducted in depth research on 8 to 10 states which are particularly good models for Maryland to review. He will share his research with the group. Ms. Metzler indicated that Rhode Island was a good model as it has dedicated staff to manage the inventory and each cemetery has been given an inventory number and a sign. Ms. Laudeman will be researching state cemetery inventory programs prior to the next meeting.

Ms. Rappazzo indicated that the Maryland Office of Cemetery Oversight (OCO) maintains an inventory of both historic and active cemeteries which can be used to populate the Maryland cemetery inventory. The OCO is required by law to track Maryland cemeteries and has a cemetery inventory sheet that is used to populate the database. The OCO database is used for licensing.

Dr. Schablitsky reported that the Maryland Department of Transportation has created a cemetery database which is crowd sourced.

B. Local Government Inventory Programs: A spreadsheet documenting local government cemetery inventory programs in Maryland, prepared in 2022, was shared with the group for review. Ms. Burgess reported on Howard County's approach to maintaining a cemetery inventory. The County has a staff person dedicated to cemetery issues and a Cemetery Advisory Board appointed by the County Executive. Members serve 3-year terms and report to the Planning Board. Volunteers have been used to complete cemetery inventory forms. Currently, local government data on cemeteries is not shared with the Office of Cemetery Oversight.

Mr. Edwards has conducted in depth research on local government cemetery programs which he will share with the group. Counties he has reviewed include: Howard, Montgomery, Prince George's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Washington, Wicomico, and Worcester.

    C. Privately Managed Inventory Programs: Ms. Simmons indicated that she has a list of 5,824 Maryland cemeteries with includes names and location – many of these have been collected from Find A Grave. Mr. Phelan reported that the Baltimore County Genealogical Society collects information on cemeteries from across the state.

    V.   Cemetery Inventory Discussion

The Working Group reviewed a draft list of data categories which was largely drawn from what is used by the Baltimore County Genealogical Society. Going forward, the Working Group will need to agree on the functional requisites of a Maryland cemetery and burial site inventory database. Considerations include:

- Data categories must be able to be updated over time.
- A data category should be added to identify whether a cemetery is abandoned, maintained, or has been relocated.
- There should be an acreage data field.
- ADC data category may no longer be relevant.
- Type of cemetery category should allow you to select more than one "type"
- Condition data category is subjective; may be better not to include.

The Working Group discussed how access to the database should be controlled. Access concerns included:

- If it is a family cemetery, data access could be limited – e.g. lat/long not made available.
- There are concerns about looting of abandoned cemeteries which suggest hiding location may be desirable.
- In GIS, we can decide whether we are using points or polygons to map the cemeteries to make the location more or less specific. The first task is getting access to cemetery addresses – ideally in the form of an access database or excel spreadsheet with lat/long information. The most time-consuming part of this project will be inputting the addresses. Some groups may want the state to pay for the cemetery data – there is no budget for this.
- Perhaps government entities may be permitted more access to the database than the general public.
- The MHT Archaeology Synthesis project may be a good model for how to share information safely – by only providing locational data within a half square mile. It also has a general public access component and a component that provides more detailed information for which you must register in order to get access.

The Working Group also discussed how to maintain quality control over cemetery data that is submitted for inclusion in the inventory. Just because someone fills out a form doesn't mean

there is a cemetery there. What data needs to be provided in order to confirm that the reported cemetery may be included in the database?

   VI.   Next Meeting Date

Ms. Hughes will distribute a meeting poll in order to identify the day and time that is most convenient for future meetings. Future meetings will be virtual.