

**Minutes of a Meeting of the  
Maryland Heritage Areas Authority  
Executive Committee  
March 20, 2025**

The March 20, 2025 meeting of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) Executive Committee was convened virtually and streamed live for the public. The purpose of this meeting was to review the draft strategic framework of the Maryland Heritage Areas Program Strategic Plan.

**MHAA Executive Committee Members Present:**

Secretary Rebecca L. Flora, Dennis Doster, Melissa Archer, Bob Campbell, Peter Leshner

**Staff Present:**

Ariane Hofstedt, Andrew Arvizu, Martha Waldron

The meeting was called to order at 1:02 PM.

**Opening Remarks**

Secretary Flora welcomed the group and thanked the Executive Committee and Due East Partners for their engagement in the strategic planning process thus far.

Ms. Hofstedt, Administrator of the Maryland Heritage Areas Program, reminded the group of the meeting's agenda which is to walk through and discuss the draft strategic framework looking at particular sections that have been edited since the small working group meetings with Authority members and the March Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition meeting and ultimately, decide on what will be put forward as a recommendation for approval to the full Maryland Heritage Areas Authority at the upcoming April 10 meeting.

**Review of Draft Strategic Framework presented by Due East Partners**

Bess Langbein of Due East Partners walked through the draft strategic plan, including the vision, purpose, priorities, desired results, and strategies for the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority and Program staff.

Secretary Flora asked the Executive Committee members to discuss any components that may be giving them pause.

A discussion ensued about the proposed three focus areas - heritage tourism, community enhancement, and sustainability - for the Program's grantmaking efforts.

**Public Comment**

Ms. Lucille Walker, executive director of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area, referenced the letter from her board of directors that was sent to the Program staff. She expressed concern and confusion with some aspects of the plan and the timeline given to review it.

Ms. Brigitte Carty, executive director of the Lower Susquehanna Heritage Area, echoed Ms. Walker's sentiments about the need for an extended review period and expressed confusion about the plan's components.

## **Discussion**

Secretary Flora thanked Ms. Walker and Ms. Carty for their comments and asked for the executive committee members to take them into consideration and ask any additional questions or offer reflections on the plan as presented.

Ms. Archer shared that she found this strategic planning process to be extremely helpful in understanding what this program is about. She feels like this plan has the potential to empower the Authority members to get more involved in the governance of the Program.

Mr. Doster asked for clarification between the strategic plan versus the implementation plan. He understands the specific details and tactics for achieving the priorities and strategies, like the number of Authority meetings held annually, to be part of the implementation plan, which will be finalized later in the process.

Secretary Flora confirmed that this is correct. The implementation plan is not part of the Authority's approval of the strategic plan. Approving the implementation plan is a separate step that will come after.

Ms. Langbein added that some key components, or tactics, of the implementation plan were shared with stakeholders during the planning process to gather early feedback in an effort to move seamlessly into that phase of the work.

Secretary Flora reiterated that when the Authority meets in April, it will be to approve the strategic plan only which will be followed by work to develop the implementation plan.

Mr. Leshar noted the continued definitional challenge expressed in the letters from the Coalition and referenced in the testimony given during the meeting. He feels like the documents are clear that this is a plan for the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority and Program staff at the state level and not for the individual heritage area management entities but asked if there can be added clarity. He also mentioned that the outcome of Senate Bill 980 and its implications on the Program are not yet known.

Secretary Flora noted that this element further emphasizes the importance of the implementation plan, which help define the annual activity that can be carried out based on funds and other issues. She also addressed Mr. Leshar's first comment and suggested that these definitions be clarified further, perhaps in diagram form.

Ms. Hofstedt reviewed the next steps of the planning process, which include finalizing the plan narrative like summarizing the process, including a glossary, clarifying roles, etc. and the continued implementation planning which will go beyond April.

Secretary Flora emphasized that her number one priority is to ensure that this was a robust process. She believes this has been achieved but shared that if more time is needed for a comment period, then we can take more time.

The executive committee endorsed the strategic plan as presented to be put forward to the entire Authority for approval in April.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:08 PM.