

Governor's Commission on Maryland Military Monuments

January 27, 2021 at 1:00 PM

Teleconference

Pursuant to notice, the regular meeting of the Governor's Commission on Maryland Military Monuments was held by teleconference.

Commissioners Present: Sandra Schrader, Chair; Nancy Kurtz, Lauren Schiszik, Ellen Chase, Cheryl Jewitt, Gail Schnell, Peter Morrill, Susan Soderberg, Jari Villaneuva, Alfred Mendelsohn, Dennis Rude, Anthony Wisniewski.

Commissioners Absent: David Craig, Jenny Carson, Barrett McKown, Stephen Hammond, Andre Martel, Bryan Fischer.

MHT Staff: Elizabeth Hughes, Steven Allan, Nell Ziehl, Anne Raines, Andrew Arvizu

MDP Staff: none.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Schrader called the meeting to order at 1:04 PM.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Mendelsohn made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Soderberg, that the October 2020 meeting minutes be approved. The Commissioners voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

III. Financial Report

Ms. Hughes reported that FY2020 monument conservation work for Maintenance Group 3 has been awarded to conservator Howard Wellman. Conservation work will be undertaken beginning in March of this year.

Ms. Hughes stated that FY2021 funds must be encumbered before the end of the fiscal year on June 30. Site visits to all monuments included in Maintenance Group 4 are being conducted now in order to document existing conditions and identify conservation needs. This information will be used to develop the scope of work for the conservation services RFP. Commissioner Kurtz added that she participated in the site visits and did not identify any unusual conditions or needs for these particular monuments. She noted that the monuments are still in good shape given the new four-year maintenance cycle.

Commissioner Morrill made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Schiszik, to accept the financial report as submitted. The motion was approved unanimously.

IV. Fort Babcock Monument Removal and Conservation

Ms. Hughes reported that Chair Schrader sent a letter to the War of 1812 Society in Maryland in support of conservation and relocation of the Fort Babcock Monument as instructed by the Commission at its prior meeting. Commissioner Schiszik explained that portions of the monument are currently at the MAC Lab for conservation and that the owner hopes to work with Weller Development on its reinstallation. In response to a question from Commissioner Kurtz, Ms. Hughes noted that the letter did not specifically mention the language on the plaque or any associated signage.

V. General Discussion of Monuments Issues

Ms. Hughes noted that at previous meetings there was discussion about the Talbot Boys Monument, located on the grounds of the Talbot County Courthouse in Easton, Maryland. This bronze monument has benefited from the Commission's cyclical maintenance program over the years. Consideration of this monument led to a broader discussion about the Commission's role related to the treatment of Confederate monuments generally. The Executive Order creating the Commission directs it to "identify, restore and publicize" Maryland's military monuments. The Commission will want to consider the limited nature of its mandate when exploring what role it will take in the issue of debated monuments.

Chair Schrader added that the Talbot Boys Monument is not owned by the Commission. She clarified that treatment of the monument will not be undertaken as part of the FY20 conservation contract as it remains in stable condition while the Elkton WWI Monument is in more urgent need of repair.

Commissioner Morrill stated that deferring maintenance on the Talbot Boys Monument was appropriate since spending state dollars to maintain a monument, when there is uncertainty about whether the local government will let it stand, did not seem prudent. Commissioners Schiszik and Kurtz supported this statement.

Commissioner Chase inquired whether the State has promulgated any guidelines, such as Virginia has, about how to address debated monuments. Ms. Hughes indicated that MHT has been involved in the unresolved question of the specific Confederate monuments which were removed in Baltimore, since MHT holds an easement on three of these monuments, but that MHT has not issued any best practices or guidance. Other State agencies may have engaged with this issue in other ways. Commissioner Wisniewski inquired whether the status of the Baltimore Confederate monuments was the same as reported at the last meeting, and Ms. Hughes responded that MHT is still working with the City to find an appropriate solution which provides protection and public access. Commissioner Wisniewski stated that respect for the rule of law is necessary on both ends of the transaction.

Chair Schrader suggested that the Commission has a very specific charge, and she advised against taking on an issue which is outside this body's jurisdiction. Commissioner Wisniewski agreed that it would not be fruitful to discuss monuments which are not within the Commission's jurisdiction. Commissioner Chase suggested that the group should consider how to approach the debated monuments that it does oversee, beyond just deciding to defer maintenance. Chair Schrader observed that the conversation will be continued as events warrant.

VI. US Semiquincentennial Commission

Ms. Hughes drew the Commissioners' attention to the Governor's Executive Order creating the Maryland Semiquincentennial Commission which was included in the meeting materials. She noted that Congress established the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission (DBA America 250) and that many states have created parallel commissions. Maryland's Commission will be a 30-member body with broad duties including the identification and interpretation of Revolutionary War heritage, creation of a model school curriculum, and working with local commissions and nonprofits undertaking related initiatives. She added that the federal budget will likely include a grant program to support activities nationwide. She suggested that this body consider how it would like to move toward the observance of the 250th in 2026, or what suggestions it may make for the consideration of the Maryland Sesquicentennial Commission.

Commissioner Soderberg noted that the Executive Order overlooked an important event in Maryland related to independence and revolution. On November 23, 1765, 12 judges in Frederick, Maryland, repudiated the British Stamp Tax, refusing to enforce it. There is now a plaque to the "12 immortal judges". Commissioner Soderberg suggested that the Commission consider whether it should extend its interest to monuments related to patriotic but non-military actions such as this, particularly since there were no Revolutionary War battles in Maryland.

Ms. Hughes noted that the Maryland Semiquincentennial Commission may find it useful to compile a list of memorials and monuments that are related to the 250th, whether or not they are within MMMC jurisdiction, as potential candidates for conservation funding using State funds (potentially through the MMMC) or some other fund source. Commissioner Kurtz supported the idea that the Commission could begin to put together such a list. Commissioner Soderberg noted that a fairly small proportion of the monuments under the purview of the Commission are related to the Revolution (including one which is located on Long Island, New York). Commission staff will begin compiling a list of memorials and monuments related to the 250th for review at the next meeting.

Commissioner Soderberg stated that the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) has already been working toward placing a 250th anniversary memorial plaque on the grave site of every Revolutionary soldier whose grave they can locate in Maryland; this commemoration also extends to others whose actions were notably patriotic (for example, a Germantown tax collector who collected revenues that paid for weapons, supplies, and soldiers' pay). This might be an example of a partnership opportunity with the Maryland Semiquincentennial Commission. In response to a question from Commissioner Mendelsohn, Commissioner Soderberg noted that the DAR plaques are on private property.

Chair Schrader indicated that membership on the Maryland Semiquincentennial Commission is still being established, and it is possible to apply to participate through the Governor's Appointment Office website. She also noted that since MHT and the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives will be staffing the Maryland Semiquincentennial Commission, this body will have a good conduit for information and idea sharing.

Commissioner Morrill expressed support for conservation of monuments as an integral part of the commemorations and hopes the Commission will play a role during this anniversary. Commissioner Chase also noted that the commemoration could serve as a conduit for educational outreach related to how and why conservation is important. She cited “Save Outdoor Sculpture!”, as an effective but now defunct example of how to conduct this outreach (<https://americanart.si.edu/research/inventories/outdoor-sculpture>). Commissioner Kurtz suggested that a story map or virtual tour, which might include before and after photos of conservation work, could also be created. Commissioner Schiszik supported that idea and also suggested using existing social media platforms (MHT’s) for which Commissioners could contribute relevant content. Commissioner Kurtz also emphasized the importance of partnerships with local government in the jurisdictions owning the monuments.

VI. 2021 Meeting Calendar

Ms. Hughes reported that meetings for the remainder of the year are proposed for April 7, July 28, and October 27. There were no objections to the proposed meeting dates.

VII. Announcements

The next meeting of the Commission will be held on April 7, 2021 (the agenda indicated April 8, which was incorrect). If conditions allow, the meeting will be held in person at 100 Community Place in Crownsville, MD. Otherwise, the meeting will be held by teleconference.

Meeting adjourned at 1:48 p.m.