

**Minutes of the
One Hundred and Ninth Meeting of the
Maryland Heritage Areas Authority
May 15, 2025 Special Meeting**

The one hundred and ninth meeting of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) was convened virtually on May 15, 2025. The public had the opportunity to listen/watch via live-stream and sign up for public comment. This was a special meeting convened to approve the Strategic Plan for the Maryland Heritage Areas Program and to approve the proposal to expand the boundaries of the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (ATHA).

Authority Members/Designees Present

Secretary Rebecca M. Flora (MD Department of Planning and serving as the Chair for the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority); Melissa Archer (representing MD Department of Housing & Community Development Secretary Jake Day and serving as the Vice Chair for the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority); Sandy Turner (Maryland Tourism Development Board representative); Nicholas Redding (President of the Senate representative); Hilary Bell (representing MD Department of Natural Resources Secretary Josh Kurtz); Dennis Doster (Governor's Appointee for Heritage Tourism); Elizabeth Hughes (State Historic Preservation Officer); Pete Leshar (Maryland Association of Counties representative); Julie Schablitsky (representing MD Department of Transportation Secretary Paul Wiedefeld); Nathan Brown (Maryland Municipal League representative); Geoffrey Newman (representing Maryland Department of Higher Education Secretary Sanjay Rai); Tara Balfe Clifford (Speaker of the House representative); Chief Donna Abbott (President of the Senate representative); Lawana Holland-Moore (Governor's Appointee for Historic Preservation)

Authority Members/Designees Absent

Luis Cardona (representing MD Department of Commerce Secretary Harry Coker, Jr.); Rowland Agbede (representing MD Department of Agriculture Secretary Kevin Atticks); Peter Ramsey (representing MD State Superintendent Carey M. Wright, Ed.D.); Jonathan Hughes (Speaker of the House representative)

Staff Present

Ariane Hofstedt (Administrator, Maryland Heritage Areas Program); Martha Waldron (Assistant Administrator, Maryland Heritage Areas Program); Andrew Arvizu (Assistant Administrator, Maryland Heritage Areas Program); Nell Ziehl (Chief, Office of Planning, Education and Outreach, Maryland Historical Trust); Rieyn DeLony (Deputy Principal Counsel, Office of the Attorney General)

Call to Order

Secretary Rebecca Flora called the meeting to order at 2:32 PM.

Ms. Martha Waldron conducted the roll call.

Ms. Ariane Hofstedt confirmed that the three newest members of the Authority are confirmed and eligible to vote: Tara Balfe Clifford, Lawana Holland-Moore, and Chief Donna Abbott.

Presentations

Secretary Flora presented the Strategic Plan for the Maryland Heritage Areas Program, highlighting sections that had been updated since the last time the Authority discussed the draft plan at the April 10 meeting. There were no questions or comments from the Authority.

Secretary Flora introduced Mx. Meagan Baco, director of the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area, and applauded their efforts on the proposal to expand the heritage area boundary.

Mx. Baco thanked Secretary Flora and members of the Authority who were present at the public hearing on May 6, 2025, and continued on to present their proposal for expanding the boundary to encompass all of Prince George's County.

After the presentation, Secretary Flora acknowledged the Authority members who were present at the public hearing and asked if there was anything they wanted to note from hearing the testimony in support of the proposal firsthand.

Ms. Turner and Ms. Balfe Clifford were very complimentary of the proposal, referencing the local support given at the public hearing.

Mr. Doster also complimented Mx. Baco's efforts and noted that he will abstain from the vote because he works for Prince George's County. He noted that this expansion backs up the discussion of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the proposed Strategic Plan with action, thereby including communities and heritage resources that have previously been excluded by the boundaries.

Secretary Flora invited the rest of the Authority to ask questions or make comments on the proposal. A discussion ensued.

Ms. Hughes commented on how the Maryland Heritage Areas Program has expanded and matured from where it started as a targeted, focused program with tight geographic boundaries. She noted the possibility that other heritage areas may follow ATHA in becoming county-wide, thereby greatly expanding the program and who can access the financial incentives. Recognizing that ATHA is the first to make this change, Ms. Hughes asked Mx. Baco to comment on how to position the program with county-wide heritage areas for the General

Assembly, for example. She mentioned that inclusivity is certainly one way to discuss it and questioned how these expansions impact the health and vitality of the program.

Mx. Baco referenced ATHA's smaller boundary expansion in 2017 as one approach: it specifically targeted sites to add rather than the county-wide approach which made it clear that the entire county fit within the heritage area's priorities and parameters. The consultant ATHA worked with developed four cluster areas that included heritage resources, encompassing most of the county. When thinking about the areas that were not included in those areas, it began to feel like exclusion.

Mx. Baco also shared that over time, the heritage area management entities have developed to operate and sustain multiple components beyond their relationship with the Maryland Heritage Areas Program. Mx. Baco also referenced the strong partnership ATHA has with the Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission that operates in Prince George's County and manages many sites but not all.

Mr. Leshar noted that with a larger boundary, the interpretation that binds the heritage area together becomes more challenging to present. He asked about the interpretive challenges for ATHA.

Mx. Baco shared that the themes outlined in ATHA's management plan really boil down to four categories: arts, history, culture, and nature. There are endless ways to program and package these for visitors.

Mr. Redding offered additional thoughts and perspective about Ms. Hughes' question about county-wide heritage areas. He shared that the Authority can't be unaware of the reality of what's happening with historic preservation at this time and the huge potential for reduced federal support. Our state heritage area program is critical to the future of historic preservation and we will need every tool at our disposal to fund and support these efforts. We might find that in the future, heritage areas operate at a county-wide basis and that might just be an evolution that we need to support and accept. He complimented Mx. Baco's efforts and expressed that this expansion should be used as a model moving forward.

Secretary Flora noted that there was no testimony in opposition to the proposal.

Ms. Hofstedt confirmed that twelve letters of support were received. She shared that ATHA submitted their proposal to expand the boundary on April 7, 2025 and per MHAA Regulations, the Authority needs to make a decision whether to 1) approve, 2) approve with modifications, or 3) disapprove the proposal within 90 days (July 6, 2025). One of the other requirements is the public hearing, which took place on May 6, 2025. All of the materials that were required for consideration were submitted and are in order. These materials were shared with the Authority via email.

Mx. Baco thanked the Authority for their consideration.

Public Comment

Elizabeth Shatto, director of the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area

Ms. Shatto provided a few comments on the Strategic Plan and asked for more clarification surrounding the fundraising strategy. She also made comments about the fiscal year 2026 grant round review process and asked about the status of federal funding to State Historic Preservation Offices.

Lucille Walker, director of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area

Ms. Walker expressed support for the boundary amendment and shared that the federal boundary of the Southern Maryland National Heritage Area encompasses parts of southern Prince George's County. She also provided a few comments on the organizational chart outlined in the Strategic Plan.

Action Items

Resolution R-100 to Approve Maryland Heritage Areas Program Strategic Plan

Secretary Flora called for a motion to approve the Strategic Plan. Mr. Leshner made the following motion, which Mr. Brown seconded.

RESOLVED, that the Authority approves the Maryland Heritage Areas Program Strategic Plan "A Statewide Vision for Success July 2025 – June 2032"

The resolution passed unanimously.

Resolution R-200 to Approve a Request by the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area and Prince George's County to Amend the Boundary of the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area to all of Prince George's County.

Secretary Flora called for a motion to approve the boundary amendment request. Mr. Brown made the following motion, which Mr. Redding seconded.

RESOLVED, that the Authority approves—in accordance with Sections 13-1008(10) and 13-1111(m) of the Financial Institutions Article of the Code of Maryland, and COMAR 14.29.02.05.C.—the request by the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area and Prince George's County to Amend the Boundary of the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area to all of Prince George's County.

The motion passed with Mr. Doster abstaining. No Authority members opposed.

Secretary Flora congratulated Mx. Baco and ATHA.

Ms. Hofstedt shared that for the amendment to go into effect, there are four requirements: 1) approval of the Authority, 2) publication in MEDUSA, 3) publication on the Maryland Heritage Areas Program webpages on the Maryland Historical Trust's website, and 4) notification to the county clerk in which the Certified Heritage Area is located.

Closing Remarks

Ms. Hofstedt updated the Authority on the fiscal year 2026 grant round and shared that the local grant review were recently completed and the state level grant review is still in process. On June 13, a confidential list of funding recommendations will be sent to the Authority to review prior to the July 10 MHAA meeting where the recommendations will be voted on.

Secretary Flora reminded the Authority that this review was built into the process last year at the request of the Authority to have more time before the July meeting. She emphasized the importance of confidentiality.

Ms. Hofstedt shared that the Maryland Heritage Areas Program staff will review the Management and Block grant applications submitted by the heritage area management entities but need 2-4 members of the Authority to volunteer to serve on a review panel for the Marketing grant applications.

Ms. Archer and Ms. Turner volunteered.

Secretary Flora reminded the Authority of the next two meetings: July 10 (virtual) and October 22 (in Cumberland, Maryland) and asked if Ms. Hughes could provide an update on the status and impact of federal funding on historic preservation and the Maryland Historical Trust.

Ms. Hughes shared that the Historic Preservation Fund, which supports various competitive grant programs as well as annual allocations to State and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices to conduct duties allocated to them through the National Historic Preservation Act, have been zeroed out in the President's fiscal year 2026 budget. The Maryland Historical Trust receives about one million dollars from this fund to support 18 positions in whole or in part as well as sub-grants that are distributed to Certified Local Governments. In addition, because the budget was passed so late, the fiscal year 2025 money is still forthcoming and SHPOs across the country have not received notification to apply for this annual allocation. There is concern and confusion about why this previously allocated funding has not been distributed. Certain SHPOs across the country are laying off staff because they are unable to make payroll. This has large repercussions on the national historic preservation framework and how federal duties are carried out by states.

Mr. Redding provided additional information about how the Historic Preservation Fund is funded and shared that Maryland is well represented among historic preservation advocates at the national level.

Secretary Flora concluded by sharing that the Governor's Office has estimated a one billion dollar impact on Maryland and there will likely be a special legislative session in the fall to work through state budget impacts.

Adjourn

Secretary Flora called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Redding made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Leshner.

The meeting adjourned at 3:59 PM.