

**Minutes of the  
One Hundred and Thirteenth Meeting of the  
Maryland Heritage Areas Authority  
January 8, 2026**

The one hundred and thirteenth meeting of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) was convened virtually on January 8, 2026. The public had the opportunity to view the meeting and speak during Public Comment.

**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); Nicholas Redding (President of the Senate representative); Dennis Doster (Governor's Appointee for Heritage Tourism); Elizabeth Hughes (State Historic Preservation Officer); Tara Balfe Clifford (Speaker of the House representative); Luis Cardona (representing MD Department of Commerce Secretary Harry Coker, Jr.); Pete Leshner (Maryland Association of Counties representative); Lawana Holland-Moore (Governor's Appointee for Historic Preservation); Peter Ramsey (representing MD State Superintendent Carey M. Wright, Ed.D.); Audrey Broomfield (representing MD Department of Agriculture Secretary Kevin Atticks); Chief Donna Abbott (President of the Senate representative); Nathan Brown (Maryland Municipal League representative); Sandy Turner (Maryland Tourism Development Board representative); Hilary Bell (representing MD Department of Natural Resources Secretary Josh Kurtz)

**Authority Members/Designees Absent**

Julie Schablitsky (representing MD Department of Transportation Secretary Paul Wiedefeld); Jonathan Hughes (Speaker of the House representative); Geoffrey Newman (representing Maryland Department of Higher Education Secretary Sanjay Rai)

**Maryland Heritage Areas Program/Maryland Historical Trust Staff Present**

Ariane Hofstedt (Administrator, Maryland Heritage Areas Program); Martha Waldron (Assistant Administrator, Maryland Heritage Areas Program); Rieyn DeLony (Deputy Counsel, Office of the Attorney General)

**Heritage Area Representatives Present**

Lucille Walker (Southern Maryland National Heritage Area and Co-Chair, Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition); Brigitte Carty (Lower Susquehanna Heritage Area and Co-Chair, Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition); Elizabeth Shatto (Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area); Emily Huebner (Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area); Meagan Baco (Anacostia Trails Heritage Area); Valerie Woodall (Anacostia Trails Heritage Area); Aaron Shapiro (Patapsco Valley Heritage Area); Kyla Cools (Patapsco Valley Heritage Area); Mary Presutto (Heart of Chesapeake)

Country); Gail Owings (Stories of the Chesapeake); Shauntee Daniels (Baltimore National Heritage Area); Amber Sanders (Mountain Maryland Gateway to the West Heritage Area); Deidra Ritchie (Passages of the Western Potomac Heritage Area); Kim Folk (Passages of the Western Potomac Heritage Area); Jane Cox (Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage Area); Brandon Rosario (Southern Maryland National Heritage Area); Sarah Rogers (Montgomery County Heritage Area)

### **Call to Order**

Secretary Rebecca Flora called the meeting to order at 1:01 PM.

Ms. Waldron conducted the roll call.

### **Approval of Minutes for October 22, 2025 Meeting**

#### Resolution R-100 to Approve Minutes from October 22, 2025 meeting

Ms. Broomfield noted a typo on page 7: “Flora” is spelled incorrectly. Ms. Clifford made the following motion, which was seconded by Mr. Leshner. The motion passed unanimously with no abstentions.

RESOLVED, that the Authority approves the October 22, 2025 Minutes as corrected.

### **MHAA Chairperson Report**

Secretary Flora provided a brief update on the administrative bill put forward by the Maryland Department of Planning to update the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority statute: the final draft was sent to the Department of Legislative Services in October. The proposed changes support the Program’s strategic plan, including updates to membership and the removal of caps on grant amounts and allowing the Authority to determine these as they see fit along with matching requirements.

Secretary Flora reported that the Executive Committee approved a resolution to award an Emergency Grant in the amount of \$15,000 to the Warren Historic Site for capital repairs at the Martinsburg Negro School. Secretary Flora also reported that the Executive Committee thoroughly reviewed all comments on the draft strategic implementation plan and is recommending its approval to the full Authority today.

### **Management Report**

Ms. Hofstedt provided a report on the Financing Fund, which currently holds \$113,886.36 in grant reserve funds. Since this amount exceeds \$100,000, the staff is planning on applying the

excess \$13,886.36 to the next grant on the reserve list. For FY26 grants, 87 out of 94 awarded grants are active, with the remaining seven in process.

Ms. Hofstedt also reported that the FY27 grant round launched on December 19, 2025, with Intent to Apply forms due February 2, 2026 and full applications due March 31, 2026 for project grants. The heritage area management grants are being revised per the strategic plan, combining management, marketing, and mini grant funding into one management grant due May 18, 2026. Heritage areas can request up to \$200,000 for these grants with no caps on the amount that can be requests from each category, and program staff are proposing they receive 80% of their funding up front and the remaining 20% distributed after all grant and match funds have been spent.

Finally, Ms. Hofstedt reported that new Action Plans will be submitted by heritage area management entities in FY27 to correspond with the active time period of the new Cooperative Agreements that will be used to execute the new management grants. The Action Plans will need to be approved by heritage area boards before being presented to the Authority for approval at the April meeting and submitted with their management grant applications in May. The Action Plans and corresponding evaluations will be staggered over the next three to six years, ensuring the Authority reviews no more than four per year. These evaluations will eventually be on a four-year cycle.

### **Action Items**

#### Resolution R-200 to Approve Reservation of \$100,000 in FY27 Emergency Funds

Ms. Clifford made the following motion which was seconded by Ms. Archer. The motion passed unanimously with no abstentions.

RESOLVED, that the Authority approves the reservation of \$100,000 from MHAA's FY27 annual appropriation, to be used to fund FY27 emergency grants in accordance with MHAA's Emergency Grant Policy.

#### Resolution R-300 to Approve the Election of a Vice Chair

Following a call for no new candidates, the following motion was made by Mr. Leshner and seconded by Ms. Turner. The motion passed unanimously with no abstentions.

RESOLVED, that the Authority approves a motion to elect Melissa Archer to serve as Vice Chair of the Authority, pursuant to MHAA Bylaws, Article V, Section 3(b).

Secretary Flora thanked Ms. Archer for agreeing to serve as the Vice Chair for another year. Ms. Archer expressed enthusiasm for serving another year and continuing to support the Program.

Resolution R-400 to Approve a Request by the City of College Park to convert its FY 2023 Non-Capital Grant for “Lakeland Community Heritage Augmented Reality Tour Phase II” to support the Lakeland and Berwin Heritage Markers Project.

Ms. Waldron provided an overview of the scope amendment request from the City of College Park. Due to issues including procurement delays and legal concerns over digital content rights, the originally funded project is no longer viable. The grantee would like to utilize the funds to create and install interpretive signage in the Lakeland and Berwyn neighborhoods. Mr. Leshar made the following motion which was seconded by Ms. Clifford. The motion passed unanimously with no abstentions.

RESOLVED, that the Authority approves Grantee’s request to convert its \$30,000 FY 2023 Non-Capital Grant (Lakeland Community Heritage Augmented Reality Tour Phase II) and match to support fabrication of interpretive signs and posts, graphic design, content development, brochure redesign and printing, webpage development, and installation.

Resolution R-600 to Approve a Request by the Accident Drane House Foundation to convert use of a portion of its FY 2025 Capital Grant for “Drane House Restoration Project” to support non-capital project costs for Grantee's interpretive planning.

A last-minute scope amendment was presented by Ms. Waldron. The grantee, having received substantial federal and state funding for exterior capital work, is requesting to use the MHAA funds for interpretive planning and a furnishing plan for the interior of the building instead, in preparation for the 100th anniversary of Garrett County and the upcoming 250th anniversary of Maryland. The grant amount was adjusted from \$50,775 to \$50,000 to comply with the non-capital project funding cap. The excess \$775 will be applied to the grant reserve fund. Ms. Hughes moved to approve the following resolution, which was seconded by Mr. Leshar. The motion passed unanimously with no abstentions.

RESOLVED, that the Authority approves Grantee’s request to convert \$50,000 of its FY 2025 Capital Grant (Drane House Restoration Project) and match to support costs associated with developing an interpretive plan, a furnishings plan, and an implementation plan.

Resolution R-500 to Approve Implementation Plan for the Maryland Heritage Areas Program Strategic Plan

The strategic implementation plan was brought forward for final approval by the Authority, with a recommendation for approval from the Executive Committee. Mr. Redding asked about needing approval from a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) on marketing funds and the participation of heritage area directors in Authority meetings.

Ms. Hofstedt clarified that the requirement for a letter of support from DMOs for marketing funds was removed from the plan, and heritage areas would instead be encouraged to collaborate and report on that work in their final reports.

Secretary Flora remains committed to providing opportunities for input in Authority meetings through Coalition reports, heritage area highlights, public comment, and direct engagement with heritage area directors for specific agenda items.

Mr. Leshner made the following motion which was seconded by Ms. Turner. The motion passed. Mr. Redding abstained from the vote.

RESOLVED, that the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority approves the Implementation Plan that outlines how to put into practice the Maryland Heritage Areas Program Strategic Plan: A Statewide Vision for Success July 2025 – June 2032.

### **Discussion Items**

Ms. Hughes initiated a discussion item, asking if any state agencies on the Authority were exploring the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for grant scoring and ranking, noting that their department received questions about using AI to streamline work in the 2026 legislative session. Ms. Bell, Ms. Broomfield, and Mr. Cardona confirmed that their agencies are not currently using AI for grant reviews but are observing the topic with caution, pending internal guidance and best practices. Ms. Holland-Moore from the National Trust mentioned their organization is also not using AI for grant review but is noticing applicants utilizing it in their submissions.

### **Public Comment**

Elizabeth Shatto, Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area

In response to the conversation about AI, Ms. Shatto requested guidance from MHAA on the position regarding applicants' use of AI in grant applications moving forward.

### **Member Announcements/New Business**

None

### **Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition Report**

Ms. Carty and Ms. Walker presented the Coalition report, thanking staff for their hard work and communication on various topics, including the marketing funds discussion and the new Action Plans. Ms. Walker reiterated that the heritage area directors continue to find the format of not being able to contribute directly to the Authority's discussions an ongoing issue.

Ms. Walker provided an update on Senator Corderman's intent to introduce legislation in partnership with the Coalition concerning additional funding for the program, stating they are working closely with their office to ensure it does not conflict with MDP's legislation.

### **Heritage Area Director Highlights**

Ms. Walker (Southern Maryland National Heritage Area), Ms. Challenger (Beach to Bay Heritage Area) and Mx. Baco (Anacostia Trails Heritage Area) presented highlights and updates from their respective organizations.

Secretary Flora confirmed that the Maryland250 initiatives are coming to fruition, noting the Maryland Heritage Areas Program's approaching 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2026. She reminded attendees of the upcoming legislative session, noting that she will be spending significant time in Annapolis, and mentioned the Governor's focus on affordability, the reality of the state's budget, and competitiveness.

### **Adjourn**

Secretary Flora called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Redding made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Brown. The meeting was adjourned at 2:31 PM.