

**Minutes of the
One Hundred and Fourteenth Meeting of the
Maryland Heritage Areas Authority
April 9, 2026**

The one hundred and fourteenth meeting of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) was convened virtually on April 9, 2026. The public had the opportunity to view the meeting and speak during Public Comment via Google Meet.

Authority Members/Designees Present

Secretary Rebecca M. Flora (MD Department of Planning and serving as the Chair of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority); Melissa Archer (representing MD Department of Housing & Community Development Secretary Jake Day and serving as the Vice Chair of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority); Dennis Doster (Governor's Appointee for Heritage Tourism); Elizabeth Hughes (State Historic Preservation Officer); Tara Balfe Clifford (Speaker of the House representative); Pete Leshner (Maryland Association of Counties representative); Lawana Holland-Moore (Governor's Appointee for Historic Preservation); 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); Daniel Schuster (representing MD Higher Education Commission Acting Secretary Elena Quiroz-Livanis)

Authority Members/Designees Absent

Nicholas Redding (President of the Senate representative); Luis Cardona (representing MD Department of Commerce Secretary Harry Coker, Jr.); Peter Ramsey (representing MD State Superintendent Dr. Carey M. Wright); Julie Schablitsky (representing MD Department of Transportation Secretary Katie Thomson); Jonathan Hughes (Speaker of the House representative);

Maryland Heritage Areas Program/Maryland Historical Trust Staff Present

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

Heritage Area Representatives Present

Elizabeth Shatto (Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area); Lucille Walker (Southern Maryland National Heritage Area); Brigitte Carty (Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway); Brandon Rosario (Southern Maryland National Heritage Area); Katherine Gill (Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage Area); Emily Heubner (Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area); Dee Dee Ritchie (Passages of the Western Potomac Heritage Area); Mary Prusetto (Heart of the Chesapeake Heritage Area); Meagan Baco (Anacostia Trails Heritage Area); Gail Owings (Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area); Jane Cox (Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage

Area); Kim Folk (Passages of the Western Potomac Heritage Area); Craig Sewell (Southern Maryland National Heritage Area); Amber Sanders (Mountain Maryland Gateway to the West Heritage Area); Shauntee Daniels (Baltimore National Heritage Area); Aaron Shapiro (Patapsco Valley Heritage Area)

Call to Order

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

Mr. Andrew Arvizu conducted the roll call.

Closed Session Agenda Item

As stated in the meeting agenda, Secretary Flora announced that the meeting would be closed pursuant to the General Provisions Article § 3-305(b)(7) to consult with counsel to obtain legal advice. The topic to be discussed is the rationale for rescinding the Authority's MBE policy and waiving related regulations. The Secretary asked for the written statement of the reason for closing the meeting to be read.

Secretary Flora then called for a motion to go into closed session. Ms. Elizabeth Hughes made the motion, which was seconded by Ms. Melissa Archer. The motion passed unanimously. The Authority went into closed session at 1:05 and returned to the open meeting session at 1:34.

As required by the Open Meeting Act § 3-306(c)(2), the events of the closed session are summarized below to disclose what topics were discussed, who attended the closed session, and what actions the Authority took in the closed session:

Time of closed session: 1:05 PM– 1:34 PM

Place: Virtual Google Meet Breakout Room

Purpose: To consult with counsel to obtain legal advice

Members who voted to meet in closed session: 11 (Audrey Broomfield is non-voting member)

Persons attending closed session: 12 MHAA members included: Secretary Rebecca Flora, Melissa Archer, Daniel Schuster, Elizabeth Hughes, Pete Leshner, Sandy Turner, Lawana Holland-Moore, Dennis Doster, Chief Donna Abbott, Tara Clifford, Hilary Bell; Audrey Broomfield (non-voting) and; 3 staff included: Rieyn DeLony, Adam Snyder, Ariane Hofstedt.

Authority under § 3-305 for closing: § 3-305(b)(7) To consult with counsel to obtain legal advice on the rationale for rescinding Authority's MBE policy and waiving related regulations.

Topic discussed in closed session: The constitutionality of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority's policy and related regulations requiring recipients of capital grants and loans of \$90,000 or more to make a good faith effort to meet the Authority's 29% minority business enterprise (MBE) participation goal.

Each action taken: A motion to close the closed session was made by MHAA member Tara Clifford and seconded by Daniel Schuster; all members voted to return to open session (except for Audrey Broomfield who is a non-voting member).

Approval of Minutes January 8 , 2026 Meeting

Resolution R-100 to Approve Minutes from January 8, 2026 meeting

After returning from closed session, Sec. Flora called for a motion to approve the minutes from the January 8 meeting of the Authority. Ms. Hughes made the following motion, which was seconded by Ms. Archer. The motion passed unanimously with no abstentions.

RESOLVED, that the Authority approves the January 8, 2026 Minutes as presented.

Chairperson Report

Legislative Update

Sec. Flora discussed the ongoing legislative session. She explained that the administrative bill from MDP HB238 (cross filed with SB226) "Maryland Heritage Area Authority and Heritage Areas - Alterations" has passed in both Chambers and awaits the Governor's signature to become law. If it passes it will be implementing recommendations that came out of the strategic planning process.

MHAA Member Updates

Sec. Flora discussed appointments to the Authority. She explained that Mr. Pete Leshner will be leaving the Authority as the MACO representative and William Raymond Atkinson will be replacing him in October. Additionally, recommendations for Mr. Hughes and Chief Abbot were not completed ahead of their expiry, but they will both continue to serve on the Authority until renewals can be completed or replacements can be found. Sandy Turner and Dennis Doster's appointments were renewed.

Emergency Grant Update

Sec. Flora reported that the Executive Committee approved an emergency grant on February 11, 2026 under Resolution R-100 FY26 Emergency Grant Request from Historic Annapolis, Inc. The award provides Historic Annapolis, Inc. with \$20,000 to complete an in-kind replacement of the rear exterior staircase at the William Paca House that is located at 186 Prince George Street, Annapolis MD 21401 all other eligible costs shown in the MHAA project budget. These expenses were deemed an emergency and needed to correct a safety risk to visitors and are to be funded with FY 2026 MHAA emergency grant funds. All eligible expenses may be covered by the grant and required matching funds.

She noted the need to revisit the emergency grant procedures and criteria to better define them in the future.

Vote to Amend MBE Policy

Sec. Flora introduced the recommendation to rescind MHAA's 2014 MBE policy.

Resolution R-200 to Rescind the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority MBE Policy

Sec. Flora called for a motion for the following resolution. Ms. Hughes made the following motion, which was seconded by Ms. Holland-Moore. A call for discussion followed.

Mr. Dan Schuster asked for another motion to table the vote until the next meeting. Sec. Flora noted that there was already a motion on the floor and proceeded with that vote. The vote was 7 in favor and 3 against. With a majority, the motion passed with no abstentions.

In favor: Pete Leshner, Elizabeth Hughes, Melissa Archer, Hilary Bell, Chief Donna Abbott, Sandy Turner, and Dennis Doster.

Against: Dan Schuster, Tara Clifford, Lawana Holland-Moore

Abstained: Secretary Flora

RESOLVED, that the Authority rescinds the Minority Business Enterprises Policy adopted on July 10, 2014, and waives the provisions of COMAR 14.29.03.07(D)(2)(d) and 14.29.04.07(D)(2)(d) requiring a grantee or loan borrower to comply with the Authority's Minority Business Enterprise Program, having determined that the application of those provisions would be contrary to the purposes of the Act, which is to support Maryland's system of recognized heritage areas and certified heritage areas in a manner that is consistent with applicable regulatory, statutory, and constitutional requirements.

Vote to Approve \$300,000 for MHT Non-Capital Grant Funds in FY27

Resolution R-300 Distribution of up to \$300,000 to the Maryland Historical Trust to be awarded as Non-Capital Historic Preservation Grants

Sec. Flora introduced the resolution to fund the Non-Capital Historic Preservation Grant Program for FY27.

Ms. Hofstedt explained that the Authority has the ability to approve an amount up to \$300,000 and shared that historically the full amount has been applied in past years.

Sec. Flora proposed a motion to approve the resolution with the full \$300,000 being distributed to the Non-Capital Historic Preservation Grant program. Mr. Pete Leshner made the following motion and Ms. Sandy Turner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with Elizabeth Hughes abstaining.

RESOLVED, that the Authority approves the distribution of \$300,000 from the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority Financing Fund to the Maryland Historical Trust to be awarded as FY 2027 Non-Capital Historic Preservation Grants pursuant to Natural Resources Article § 5-903(a)(1)(ii), which provides "(ii) Of the amount transferred under subparagraph (i) of this paragraph, up to \$300,000 may be distributed to the

Maryland Historical Trust within the Department of Planning to be awarded as noncapital historic preservation grants.

Since Resolution R-300 passed, Resolution R-400 to Award an Additional Amount up to \$300,000 of MHAA Funds to FY 2027 Grants became obsolete and therefore not presented.

Vote to Approve Heritage Area Management Entity Action Plans

Resolution R-500 to Delegate Review of Action Plans to MHAA Program Staff

Sec. Flora thanked the heritage areas for their hard work and submitting their Action Plans on time. She introduced the resolution for delegating the review of the Action Plans to the MHAA program staff, who will make recommendations on approval to the Authority.

Sec. Flora called for a motion to approve the following resolution. Ms. Tara Balfe Clifford made the following motion, which was seconded by Ms. Holland-Moore. The motion passed unanimously with no abstentions.

RESOLVED, that the Authority delegates review of the Action Plans submitted by heritage area management entities to MHAA program staff, who will make recommendations to the Authority for approval or improvement as needed.

Vote to Approve Heritage Area Management Entity Action Plans

Resolution R-600 to Approve Completed Action Plans Starting in FY27

Ms. Hofstedt also thanked all 13 heritage area directors and their board for completing their Action Plans a full year earlier than expected. She explained that, in the future, this process will follow a staggered schedule that will eventually result in a 4-year cycle. After today, the Authority will only need to review 3 – 4 Action Plans a year. She explained that the template for the Action Plans was revised this year and that they are the first and most important step in completing both the new cooperative agreements that are being rolled out this year and the new Management Grant applications. Additionally, all Action Plans have been approved by local heritage area boards.

Ms. Hofstedt recommends all 13 Action Plans for approval with two suggestions:

1. If heritage areas already have board approved DEIA statements have them add them in the organizational overview section of their Action Plan. We are not asking them to create a statement, but if they have one it would support the DEIA principle that is in the Maryland Heritage Areas Program strategic plan.
2. Ask every heritage area to add the following objective and action under Goal# 3 related to organizational sustainability. This ties to “stewardship” principle in the program’s strategic plan and provides a blanket statement that connects all work to their Management Grants requests.

Objective: Effective Operational Oversight and Stewardship of Funds

Action: “Continue to effectively oversee the operations of the state-certified heritage area, including the thoughtful, equitable, and transparent management and reporting of any funds, including those awarded by MHAA.”

Sec. Flora called for a motion to approve all 13 action plans, with the inclusion of staff recommendations. Ms. Clifford made the following motion, which was seconded by Mr. Lesher. The motion passed unanimously with no abstentions.

RESOLVED that, based on the recommendations provided by MHAA program staff, the Authority approves the Action Plans of the following heritage area management entities beginning in FY2027, with staggered completion dates as presented:

- Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (5-year plan with completion date June 2031)
- Beach to Bay Heritage Area (6-year plan with completion date of June 2032)
- Baltimore National Heritage Area (4-year plan with completion date of June 2030)
- Canal Place/Passages of the Western Potomac Heritage Area (3-year plan with completion date of June 2029)
- Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage Area (6-year plan with completion date of June 2032)
- Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area (6-year plan with completion date of June 2032)
- Heart of Chesapeake Country Heritage Area (3-year plan with completion date of June 2029)
- Lower Susquehanna Heritage Area (4-year plan with completion date of June 2030)
- Montgomery County Heritage Area (3-year plan with completion date of June 2029)
- Mountain Maryland Gateway to the West Heritage Area (5-year plan with completion date June 2031)
- Patapsco Valley Heritage Area (6-year plan with completion date of June 2032)
- Southern Maryland Heritage Area (5-year plan with completion date June 2031)
- Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area (4-year plan with completion date of June 2030)

Vote to Approve MHAA Summer 2026 Intern

Resolution R-700 to Approve a Distribution of Operating Funds for a Summer Intern 2026

Sec. Flora introduced the hiring of a summer intern to create an interactive story map using prior-year unspent operating funds.

Ms. Clifford made the following motion and Ms. Turner seconded. The motion passed unanimously with no abstentions.

RESOLVED, that the Authority approves up to \$5,000 for the purpose of hiring an intern for the summer of 2026 to work for the Maryland Heritage Areas Program staff to create an interactive online digital StoryMap. Funding for the position will be provided by prior year unspent operating funds in the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority Financing Fund.

Management Report

Ms. Hofstedt shared the financing fund report. She explained there is currently \$237,113.99 in the grants reserve fund and \$282,455.87 in operating reserve funds. She explained that there is an excess of \$137,113.99 in the grants reserve fund, which the staff is currently in the process of applying to the next 4 applicants on the FY26 reserve list that the Authority approved in July 2026.

Ms. Hofstedt provided some administrative updates. She discussed the annual report. She shared title changes for MHAA program staff. The Administrator will change to Program Director and Assistant Administrators will become Program Officers.

Ms. Hofstedt shared information about the procurement of the new grants software. On April 1, the Board of Public Works approved a contract with EUNA Solutions to start developing a new grants software platform. Staff will spend the next year building the system internally and it will most likely not be utilized by MHAA grant applicants until FY29.

Next, Ms. Hofstedt shared that some of the findings from the recent audit are prompting revisions to the financial spot check policy. She noted that this is an internal administrative policy with MHT and MHAA does not need to approve it.

Finally, she shared that 2026 is the 30th anniversary of MHAA, and that a reception will be held in October to celebrate. A poll will be going out shortly to gauge everyone's availability.

Mx. Arvizu discussed the status of FY26 Grant Agreements and Reserve Grants. They explained that out of 94 grants, 91 were active, 2 were in process, and 1 was closed. They also reiterated that there are 4 reserve list grants that will be funded shortly, 3 fully and one partially.

For FY27 grant round, Ms. Hofstedt shared some key dates including the launch on December 19, 2025, the project application deadline on March 31, 2026, and the Management Grant applications due on May 18th. She explained that the program received 155 project grant applications totaling more than \$7.7 million in requests. Ms. Hofstedt also shared that there were 7 new members added to the Grant Review Panel, bringing the total number of reviewers up to 40, divided over 8 small groups. Additionally, she highlighted the election of a new chair of the panel, Kym Rice. Finally, she shared the achievement this year of enforcing a single deadline for project grant applications.

Per MHAA's direction, Ms. Hofstedt shared that the new Management Grant application and process will be going into effect for FY27. Management, marketing, and block grant funding has been combined into a single revised Management Grant application that allows heritage area management entities to ask for up to \$200,000 with no limits on the amounts that can be requested for each category. Instead of 3 payments, there will be 2 distributions with the first being for 80% at the time the grant is executed and the second being for 20% after final report has been approved. MHAA program staff will be reviewing the Management Grant applications using revised review criteria and a scoresheet that support the strategic plan desired results. Program staff will make funding recommendations for the Management Grants to the MHAA at the July meeting.

Ms. Hofstedt provided a chart which explained how the upcoming Cooperative Agreements which are scheduled to be rolled out for FY27 will help reduce requirements for heritage area management entities, but still uphold accountability. Cooperative agreements are aimed to create a contract between MHAA and management entities, defining partnership responsibilities and allowing heritage area management entities to apply for annual management grants. Program staff provided an overview of the cooperative agreements to the Coalition on March 12 followed by a draft copy and then they were given 2 weeks to review and comment. Questions from one heritage area were received that were minor and did not call for any changes. Cooperative agreements will be active for the same time period as their Action Plans, and they both get renewed at the end of their terms. Finally, in the last year of the cooperative agreement, MHAA will conduct an evaluation of each heritage area's Action Plan to include, but not limited to, a summary report that will be submitted by heritage area directors which will be a combination of all final reports submitted during the active period. The goal is to have all the cooperative agreements signed by April 30, 2026 ahead of the Management Grant deadline of May 18.

Ms. Hofstedt then shared a flow chart showing how the Action Plans, Cooperative Agreements, and Management Grant process worked together.

Ms. Clifford commended the staff for these changes.

Sec. Flora excused herself to attend another meeting and thanked the Authority. She called on Vice Chair Ms. Melissa Archer to run the remaining portion of meeting.

Ms. Hofstedt updated the Authority on strategic plan highlights. She explained that the goal was to provide updates on items from the strategic plan at each MHAA meeting to show progress on the plan. She shared slide summarizing that to date the team has completed 4 out of 20 tactics in priority 1 (grantmaking), 3 out of 12 tactics in priority 2 (supporting heritage areas), 2 out of 18 tactics in priority 3 (MHAA governance), and 1 out of 12 tactics in priority 4 (program messaging).

Ms. Archer commended the staff for making progress on the strategic plan.

Discussion Items/Member Announcements/New Business

Ms. Archer shared that MHT will be holding a virtual informational Roadshow about its different programs on May 11, 2026 from 10:30-12:00 and DHCD's State Revitalization Program opens this spring.

Public Comment

No members of the public chose to speak during public comment.

Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition Report

Ms. Lucille Walker introduced herself and the SMNHA. She explained the role of the Maryland Heritage Area Coalition to the new members of the Authority. She shared information about the Maryland Liberty Tree Project, including the fact that Maryland is the only state with a surviving liberty tree clone. Events will be taking place throughout the year.

Ms. Walker thanked the program staff for their hard work. She recognized that the intent of the cooperative agreements and management grant and action plan changes is to streamline the process. However, she felt there was a disconnect between what she thought the task force had agreed to and what is being implemented. She noted the challenge of heritage area directors not being able to directly contribute to these meetings in real time.

Ms. Walker discussed the Coalition's advocacy efforts to lift the funding cap from \$6 million to \$12 million including this legislative session with SB638 cross filed with HB654 "Natural Resources - Maryland Heritage Areas Authority - Funding and Grants." One third of the Senate has signed on to the Coalition's legislation this year because they believe in the program. She explained how the program is funded through Program Open Space. She noted that the Coalition's bill has been amended to retain the \$300,000 for MHT's Non-Capital Historic Preservation Grant Program and to align the language with the Department of Planning's bill.

Ms. Brigitte Carty shared that she is in her 20th year of serving the program. She commended her other directors in the program which holds 250 years of collective experience. She noted that there were some briefing materials for this meeting that were not shared with the heritage area directors and asked if everyone could receive the same documentation ahead of each meeting. She invited the Authority to the next Coalition meeting on April 27th.

Ms. Archer asked for clarification of the materials that were sent to the Coalition.

Ms. Hofstedt confirmed that the agenda is the only document we are required to share with the public prior to meeting. We are not required to send the other briefing materials to anyone other than Authority members. As a courtesy, we have shared other materials that are appropriate with the heritage area directors. This does not always include all the briefing materials, especially those directed specifically to MHAA.

Heritage Area Director Highlights

Ms. Walker presented a video to the Authority on the 250th anniversary and the SMNHA passport program. She discussed the passport and stamp program. Additionally, she explained how the heritage area was engaging in data collection to better understand its impact.

Ms. Shauntee Daniels with the Baltimore National Heritage Area shared one of eleven historic neighborhood StoryMaps videos based on GIS to show the impact of the heritage area. It highlights historic figures in the city of Baltimore's Sharp-Leadenhall Historic Neighborhood, including Mary Pickersgill and Francis Ellen Watkins Harper.

Ms. Amber Sanders with the Mountain Maryland Gateway to the West Heritage Area provided an update on a new mobile kiosk for a children's program via the heritage kids program. She also highlighted a heritage area informational table in Garrett County's Visitor Center. Additionally, she shared the Garrett County Experience Pass. These passes are free and provide tours through one of four different categories of experiences, from barn quilts to natural heritage. She highlighted Garrett 250, including an essay contest and a National Road drawing contest. Finally, she discussed the Peggy Jamison Heritage Preservation Award.

Adjourn

Ms. Archer thanked the Authority and Coalition. She asked for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Hughes made the motion, which was seconded by Mr. Doster. The motion passed unanimously with no abstentions.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:22 PM.