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Minutes of the
Ninety-Seventh Meeting of the
Maryland Heritage Areas Authority
November 10, 2022
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The ninety-seventh meeting of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) was convened on November 10, 2022 via web conference call and live-streaming. The public had the opportunity to listen/watch via live-streaming.

Authority Members/Designees Present
Robert S. McCord, Secretary, MD Department of Planning and Chair of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority; Daniel Spedden (MD Tourism Development Board representative); Marianne Harms (Speaker of the House representative); Lee Towers (representing MD Higher Education Commission Secretary James D. Fielder, Jr.); Elizabeth Fitzsimmons (representing MD Department of Commerce Secretary R. Michael Gill); Dennis Doster (Governor's Appointee for Heritage Tourism); Janice Hayes-Williams (Speaker of the House representative); Natalie Chabot (Representative for MD Greenways); Nina Settina (representing MD Department of Natural Resources Secretary Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio); Elizabeth Hughes (State Historic Preservation Officer); Burt Kummerow (President of the Senate representative)

Authority Members/Designees Absent

Nicholas Redding (President of the Senate representative); John A. Kinnaird (MD Municipal League representative); Pete Lesher (MD Association of Counties representative); Amy Seitz (representing MD Department of Housing and Community Development Secretary Kenneth C. Holt); Marty Baker (representing MD Department of Transportation Secretary James F. Ports); Rowland Agbede (representing MD Department of Agriculture Secretary Joseph Bartenfelder); Bruce Lesh (representing MD State Superintendent of Schools Mohammed Choudhury); Robert D. Campbell (Governor's Appointee for Historic Preservation and serving as the Vice Chair for the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority)

Staff Present

Ariane Hofstedt (Maryland Historical Trust); Nell Ziehl (Maryland Historical Trust); Martha Waldron (Maryland Historical Trust); Andrew Arvizu (Maryland Historical Trust); Brenna Spray (Maryland Historical Trust)

Heritage Area Directors/Staff Present

Lucille Walker (Southern Maryland Heritage Area and Co-Chair, Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition); Brigitte Carty (Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway and Co-Chair, Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition); Sarah Rogers (Montgomery County Heritage Area); Elizabeth Shatto (Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area); Carol Benson (Chesapeake Crossroads/Four Rivers / Annapolis, London Town and South County Heritage Area); Meagan Baco (Maryland Milestones / Anacostia Trails Heritage Area); Kim Folk (Mountain Gateway to the West Heritage Area); Aaron Shapiro (Patapsco Valley Heritage Area); Holly Gilpin (Heart of

Chesapeake Country); Brandon R. (Southern Maryland Heritage Area); Gail Owings (Stories of the Chesapeake)

Additional Individuals Present

Aadila Bhabha (Symphonic Strategies), AJ Robinson (Symphonic Strategies), Natalia Victoria (Symphonic Strategies)

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. McCord called the meeting to order at 1:04 PM.

ROLL-CALL ATTENDANCE

Mr. Andrew Arvizu conducted a roll call to confirm MHAA members' attendance. With 10 members in attendance and 9 members absent, there was a quorum present.

Mr. McCord invited Mr. Robinson of Symphonic Strategies to begin the racial equity report presentation.

Symphonic Strategies: Racial Equity Report Presentation

Mr. Robinson greeted the Authority and provided background information and a general outline for this conversation at the State level, emphasizing two perspectives: getting into the minutia of how the MHAA program works, including how the application process works, how funds are appropriated, etc. and conversations about equity, commitments to anti-racism and the participation and representation of Maryland's Black community.

Mr. Robinson presented various structural barriers at the State level that impact grantees related to access, utilization, relevance, and effectiveness and then asked if there were any questions from the Authority.

Ms. Harms asked for clarification about how many people were interviewed by Symphonic for this study and if those people identified as people of color.

Ms. Bhabha explained that she met with all the Heritage Area directors and various individuals within four focus groups, including applicants who had received funding and those who had not. These individuals were not all Black voices but were selected for "diversity."

Mr. Spedden acknowledged the frustrations with rigid and cumbersome applications and mentioned two of his favorite grant programs as a grant recipient, both of which move very quickly: the Washington County Hotel Rental Tax and the State Highway Administration Recreational Trails Program.

Mr. Johnson encouraged the Authority to remember that the rigidity and requirements of most programs have been used to formally exclude and reminded folks to think of this not only from the program perspective but from an anti-racism/equity perspective that goes beyond Maryland.

Ms. Harms asked about the MHAA grant program's structure and the rigidity of its regulations and process and wondered if these are mandated by the State.

Mr. McCord replied that there are no regulations that dictate whether something must be out by a certain date or held for a length of time, but the process of tracking the grants takes time. Mr. McCord emphasized that we should be willing to learn if there is another State program that is working quicker than MHAA but expressed the importance of MHT's unique programs and their record of clean audits.

Mr. Robinson mentioned the Paycheck Protection Program and the Small Business Administration as two Federal grant program examples that thought out these barriers well.

Mr. Robinson continued his discussion of the report by offering a few recommendations to combat the existing barriers within a "whole-of-government approach."

Ms. Chabot asked how the current outreach was evaluated.

Ms. Bhabha replied and said that the program's outreach was evaluated at the local level, and it really varies from heritage area to heritage area. There are certainly some who are applying best practices, but it is inconsistent.

Mr. Robinson clarified that in order to be effective and successful at the local level, a structure that support racial equity at the State level is crucial.

Mr. Robinson continued to present recommendations for the Authority to consider.

Mr. Spedden commented about the importance of quick turn-around time and ease of application.

Ms. Harms asked about why individuals who participated in the focus groups may have felt disgruntled.

Mr. Robinson offered a few reasons for this, including the experience of navigating numerous hurdles. As a State entity, the program needs to work harder to minimize these experiences for communities that are constantly navigating hurdles in society based on their ethnicity. It can be a blueprint for other entities.

Mx. Baco asked if Symphonic thought about evaluating the content of the projects or the makeup of the organizations supported by MHAA.

Mr. Robinson responded, no, but it is an excellent suggestion for Phase 2 of this work.

Mr. Doster urged the Authority to look at this report through a lens of empathy and an understanding of the historical context.

Ms. Chabot mentioned that the frustrations with MHAA's grant process apply across various other grant programs and are not necessarily specific to the Heritage Area program.

Mx. Baco offered a positive review of the MHAA program's inclusive drop-down menus and hopes this feeling can be heightened through changes in the system for other applicants too.

Mr. McCord offered closing remarks and urged everyone to sharpen their focus on the people who are impacted by this program. He asked that if anyone had feedback on the report to provide it.

Ms. Hofstedt followed up to say that the Symphonic Strategies presentation and report was previously shared with the Racial Equity Working Group and the Heritage Areas coalition. She will be consolidating any comments from these groups for us to discuss next steps with Symphonic.

Mr. McCord adjourned the meeting at 2:19.