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Council President

Subject: Support for SB0980/HB1327 to Increase MHAA Funding

Dear Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee and House Environment and Transportation Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Town of Mount Airy to express strong support for SB0980/HB1327, legislation that will open the possibility of allocating a greater share of the restricted Program Open Space fund to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA). Under this bill, up to \$12 million could be appropriated for MHAA—funds that are largely awarded as grants to nonprofits and government units for projects contributing to place-based heritage tourism. These grants already generate a documented, powerful economic and community impact across Maryland, and that impact will grow as the MHAA budget grows.

As a supporter of the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area—which serves Carroll, Frederick, and Washington Counties—I have seen firsthand how MHAA grants make a difference. Here in our region, MHAA grant support has led to projects that increase heritage tourism, sustain local jobs, and bolster the local economy. Statewide, the impact is even greater, with \$2.4 billion in economic contributions, 40,000 jobs supported, and \$320 million in state and local tax revenues generated annually.

In fact, the Town of Mount Airy would not have been able to restore the roof of our beloved historic train station—a defining piece of our town's history—without critical MHAA funding. This project not only preserved a key landmark but also boosted our town's heritage tourism efforts and revitalized community pride. We are also currently seeking MHAA support for our iconic Flat Iron Building, which is at risk. Without MHAA's guidance and support, both of these projects would put our certified downtown Main Street at risk of vacancies and the possible loss of historic structures that shape Mount Airy's unique character.

In FY26, we plan to request MHAA grant support specifically for the Flat Iron project, which will help us preserve this cornerstone of our local heritage and maintain the vitality of our downtown area. Under current law, only \$6 million may be directed annually to MHAA, leaving just \$5.1 million available for grants. Many worthy projects therefore go unfunded, meaning our communities—and the state—miss out on a significant return on investment.

Please support SB0980/HB1327, which will make it possible for up to \$12 million in Program Open Space funds to be transferred to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority. This legislation will help communities like Mount Airy, and communities across Maryland, preserve and share our unique heritage while fueling economic growth.

Thank you for your consideration, and I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB0980/HB1327.

Sincerely,



Ashley Collier
Director of Community Development
Town of Mount Airy