

MAIN STREET MIDDLETOWN

19 West Main Street, Middletown, Maryland 21769

Name: Becky Axilbund, Executive Director

Organization: Main Street Middletown, MD Inc.

Issue: SB0980/HB1327

Position: Favorable

Date: 2.28.2025

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, March 4, 2025

House Environment and Transportation, March 5, 2025

I am writing in support of SB0980/HB1327, legislation that will open the possibility of a greater share of the restricted Program Open Space fund for the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA). The statute will allow for up to \$12 million to be appropriated for MHAA. Most of the MHAA budget is awarded in grants to nonprofits and government units, for projects that contribute to place-based heritage tourism. The impact of MHAA grants is already well documented, and it will grow as the MHAA budget grows.

As the Executive Director of Main Street Middletown, MD Inc. we are active members in our local Heritage Area - the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, a nonprofit serving Carroll, Frederick and Washington Counties. I am proud that Main Street Middletown, MD Inc. with MHAA grant support, has contributed to statewide heritage area program impact: \$2.4 billion in economic contribution, 40,000 jobs supported and sustained, \$320 million in local and state tax revenues generated annually.

Main Street Middletown, MD Inc. has benefitted from the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority through several impactful projects. Most notably, they supported our efforts at purchasing two endangered historic buildings along our Main Street. Subsequently, with additional aid from the Heritage Area, we were able to rehabilitate these two structures converting one into a local welcome center. The Heritage Area also played a prominent role when the Town of Middletown commemorated its 250th anniversary in 2017 with funds going towards the creation of an unused lot into a pocket park with seating, landscaping, and several large/awe-inspiring historic interpretative signs. Earlier support was garnered in 2014 for the 150th commemoration of the Civil War Monocacy Campaign when Civil War soldiers threatened Middletown with a ransom payment or it would be set on fire. The Heritage Area funds allowed us to preserve the ransom note and create a display case to allow for public viewing. The Heritage Areas has been a consistent partner in Main Street Middletown's initiatives at attracting people to our downtown businesses by helping to build our tourism products.

When funded under the current statute, up to \$6 million may be budgeted annually for MHAA, with \$5.1 million available for grants. That's far too little; many worthy projects are unfunded, which means loss of ROI for local communities and the state. Please support SB2980/HB1327, which will make way for up to \$12 million in POS funds to be transferred to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority.

For the sake of all Marylanders, I hope you will support SB0980/HB1327.