



Heart of Chesapeake Country Heritage Area Action Plan

FY27 - FY29 (July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2029)

Each heritage area management entity is required by the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) to complete an Action Plan using this template. Action Plans serve the following purposes:

- Supplement the most current approved version of each heritage area management entity's Management Plan
- Outline the activities the heritage area management entity anticipates pursuing in the specified time
- Serve as the required attachment to the heritage area management entity's annual funding requests to MHAA as part of their Management Grant application and corresponding Cooperative Agreement
- Outline how the activities of the heritage area management entity support the Maryland Heritage Areas Program's Strategic Plan: A Statewide Vision for Success July 2026 – June 2032 (FY26 – FY32), specifically the strategic results and three core areas of focus and impact: tourism, community enhancement, and sustainability.

This Action Plan was approved by the heritage area management entity's governing body, Heart of Chesapeake Country Heritage Area Management Board, on March 3, 2026 and the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority on April 9, 2026. Action Plans can be updated as needed by the heritage area management entity. Any updates must be approved by their governing body and MHAA, in that order.

Heritage Area Management Entity Overview

Heritage Area Name (legal and DBA, list both if different):

Heart of Chesapeake Country Heritage Area

The County Council of Dorchester County serves as the management entity for Heart of Chesapeake Country Heritage Area

Date Original Management Plan Approved and Heritage Area Certified: July 1, 2002

Date Management Plan Amended (if none, enter NA): NA

Proposed Addition/Changes to Management Plan (if none, enter NA): NA

List Other Pertinent Planning Documents (i.e. interpretation plans) and Dates of Approval (if none, enter NA): NA

Description of Current Boundary (including date(s) of amendments, if applicable):

Beginning in Secretary, the boundary circles the county by water, following the Choptank River to the Chesapeake Bay, around the Bay and up the Nanticoke River to Vienna. From there, the boundary follows Route 50 west to the railroad paralleling Linkwood Road and goes north to East New Market and west to Secretary. The town of Hurlock is included as a non-contiguous area."

Mission Statement:

1. Leverage public and private partnerships to assist individuals, organizations and government Entities to protect, preserve and promote Dorchester County's unique historic, cultural and Natural resources.
2. Broaden and deepen the beneficial effect of heritage tourism on the local economy through Advocacy, interpretation, and preservation that enhances assets and people's awareness, Understanding and appreciation of those assets.

Vision Statement:

To protect and build awareness of historic places and cultivate community by maximizing the economic, cultural and recreational opportunities that benefits our communities and enhances heritage tourism for generations to come.

List of Current Staff Members (names and titles and indicate if full- or part-time):

Holly Gilpin –Heritage Area and Tourism Director –FT

Mary Presutto –Heritage Area Consultant-PT/ON CALL

List of Current Board Members (names and professional affiliations):

Veronica Taylor –City of Cambridge Representative

Barb Seese – County Representative

Susan Banks-County Representative

Valencia Stagg-Towns of East New Market and Secretary Representative

Earl Murphy-Town of Hurlock Representative

Pat Johnson –Town of Vienna Representative

Ray Pateria- At large –Blackwater Refugee

Midge Ingersoll-At Large-Handsell

Lou Hyman-At Large –Nathan Skipjack

Current Interpretive Themes/Subthemes:

Themes	Subthemes
African American Heritage & Freedom Stories	Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park - Blackwater landscapes of resistance and freedom - Ongoing African American cultural legacy -Handsell & Indigenous People –Enslaved at Handsell
Working Waterways & Maritime Heritage	Skipjacks (Nathan of Dorchester) and seafood traditions - Watermen culture and Chesapeake Bay ecology - Maritime craftsmanship and oyster industry history-Richardson Maritime Museum. Ruark Boat works -Vienna –John Smith and Nanticoke and Nause -Waiwash Indians
Historic Towns & Architecture	Cambridge Historic District and waterfront revitalization - Vienna, East New Market, Secretary, and Hurlock heritage - Industrial and transportation history
Nature, Environment & Outdoor Recreation	Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge - Birding, paddling, and eco-tourism - Climate resilience and coastal change

Goals, Objectives, Strategies/Action Items

The goals outlined below support the three stated core areas of focus for the Maryland Heritage Areas Program and should remain the same for all heritage area management entities.

Goal #1: Tourism: Promote economic development through place-based heritage tourism experiences for visitors and residents

Heritage Tourism Definition: When historic, cultural, and natural resources are used to attract visitors and residents to an experience that provides access to places, stories, activities, and artifacts of the past and present that represent Maryland's unique heritage. In doing so, heritage tourism also contributes to local economic prosperity, conservation of resources, and social connections that support thriving communities.

Visitor Definition: People traveling overnight or same-day to a destination in pursuit of place-based experiences related to recreation or personal interest, while making use of local resources and contributing to local economies.

Examples of tourism activities to be conducted by a heritage area management entity might include, but are not limited to staff time that is overseeing the development of walking tours, installment of interpretive panels, website enhancements, creation of trails, education programs, photo contests, marketing to visitors/residents, tourism publications, newsletters, e-blasts, films, cookbooks, brochures, commemorative events, work with Destination Marketing Organizations, etc.

Objectives	Strategy/Action Items	Deliverables/Measures of Success	Duration (start and end dates listed by FY, or ongoing)	MHAA Funding Type (list or highlight all that apply)	Partners and Resources	Strategic Results Aligned with Activity (list or highlight all that apply)
Expand and enhance heritage tourism experiences	- Develop and promote Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad experiences - Promote scenic byways - Expand maritime heritage programming: including skipjack Nathan of Dorchester, The Dudley - Install interpretive signage and develop immersive visitor experiences - Package itineraries linking Blackwater NWR, historic	3 new or enhanced visitor experiences Annually - Increased visitation and length of stay - Growth in partner Participation and tourism metrics	Ongoing to begin FY27	- Management Marketing - Mini-Grants - Other	- State Park - Blackwater NWR - Dorchester County Tourism - local towns - Heritage sites - HT Educational Museum - HT	- Helps to enhance and preserve Maryland's assets and make them accessible to the public - Supports equitable, robust, and sustainable local economies - Helps communities and visitors be connected and enriched by Maryland's heritage and cultural traditions - Expands or strengthens partnerships and networks in the heritage area

	towns, and water trails • Utilize marketing platforms and technology to enhance and promote all that Dorchester County has to offer its residents and tourists. Showcasing activities that create memories for all groups will enhance the visitor to return and share their experiences with others. Promote Heritage events held in Dorchester County. Ex: Groove City Black Heritage					
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	Festival, Handsel Ice and Oyster Festival, Hurlock Fall Festival, Friendship Day in East New Market, DCA Showcase					
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Goal #2: Community Enhancement: Cultivate heritage-related strategic investments and projects that will enhance communities in the heritage area

Community Enhancement Definition: When strategic investments and projects improve the quality of life and long-term health of a community including its people, businesses, local jurisdictions, and natural and built environments. Grants from the Maryland Heritage Areas Program support community enhancement through the lens of heritage to include, but not limited to, education, historic preservation, the environment, recreation, and economic impact.

Heritage Definition: Features belonging to the culture of a particular society, racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural group - such as traditions, languages, built and natural places, food, art, and music - that were created in the past or present and hold historical importance and/or relevance.

Examples of community enhancement activities to be conducted by a heritage area management entity might include, but are not limited to mini-grant program(s), technical assistance to project applicants/grantees, local review of MHAA

grants, work focused on telling underrepresented stories, annual meetings/networking events/workshops, project coordination across multiple partners/convening local partners, etc.

Objectives	Strategy/Action Items	Deliverables /Measures of Success	Duration (start and end dates listed by FY, or ongoing)	MHAA Funding Type (list or highlight all that apply)	Partners and Resources	Strategic Results Aligned with Activity (list or highlight all that apply)
Anticipate, manage, develop and deliver exceptional visitor experiences that inspire people to return	Promote Heritage related programs and training. For the community and visitors related to History of the county. Assist with admin of grants as well as providing trainings as needed to organizations through the year.	Photography, media plan, calendar of events, strategy to coordinate events.	Ongoing	- Management Marketing - Mini-Grants - Other	Tourism Dir, Heritage Consultant	- Helps to enhance and preserve Maryland's assets and make them accessible to the public - Supports equitable, robust, and sustainable local economies - Helps communities and visitors be connected and enriched by Maryland's heritage and cultural traditions - Expands or strengthens partnerships and networks in the heritage area

Goal #3: Sustainability: Align the resources of the heritage area management entity so they contribute to the long-term sustainability and prosperity of the heritage area

Sustainability Definition: When a community or project aligns people, the environment (built and natural), and economic results in a manner that benefits the larger society and contributes towards its prosperity.

Examples of organizational sustainable activities to be conducted by a heritage area management entity might include, but are not limited to board development, updating or developing planning documents, committee work, fundraising activities, Coalition activities, trade shows/conferences, partnerships with organizations, participation on advisory boards, national heritage area designations, updating management plans/themes, boundary expansions, etc.

Objectives	Strategy/Action Items	Deliverables/Measures of Success	Duration (start and end dates listed by FY, or ongoing)	MHAA Funding Type (list or highlight all that apply)	Partners and Resources	Strategic Results Aligned with Activity (list or highlight all that apply)
Ensure long-term organizational and financial sustainability	- Strengthen board development and governance - Diversify funding through grants, partnerships and sponsorships - Participate in statewide heritage initiatives and coalition efforts - Align programming with	Increased funding – diversity Active board engagement Sustained partnerships and regional collaboration	Start FY27-Ongoing	- Management - Marketing - Mini-Grants - Other	HCCHA Board Members	- Helps to enhance and preserve Maryland's assets and make them accessible to the public - Supports equitable, robust, and sustainable local economies - Helps communities and visitors be connected and enriched by

	Environmental and economic sustainability goals					Maryland's heritage and cultural traditions • Expands or strengthens partnerships and networks in the heritage area
Effective Operational Oversight and Stewardship of Funds	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.	Secure and effectively manage funding for operations, including annual MHAA Management Grants Successfully steward funds Effectively oversee operations	Ongoing	• Management	• MHAA and other various funding sources • HCCHA Board Members • HCCHA Staff	• Helps to enhance and preserve Maryland's assets and make them accessible to the public • Supports equitable, robust, and sustainable local economies • Helps communities and visitors be connected and enriched by Maryland's heritage and cultural traditions • Expands or strengthens partnerships and networks in the heritage area

