



Council Meeting

MEETING MINUTES

June 4, 2026
10:00am – 2:00pm
Eastern Shore Land Conservancy
1114 S Washington St UNIT 101, Easton, MD 21601

In attendance:

Councilors: Ruby Lopez Harper, Albita Rivera, Tonya Miller Hall, Gregory Tucker, Paige Hernandez, Marva Jo Camp, Kathy Beachler, Yolanda Acree, Midge Ingersoll, Shelley Morhaim

Staff: Steven Skerritt-Davis, Ryan Patterson, Ryan Koons, Abby Neyenhouse, Emily Sollenberger, Laura Weiss, Chad Buterbaugh, Elizabeth Morales, Alysha Suryah, Nora Howell, Elli Hernandez, Brad Bittner, Kirk Amaral Snow, David Mitchell, Leslie Gillard, Jess Porter

Call to Order

Ruby Lopez Harper called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. and reviewed the guiding documents and agenda.

Welcome

Joan Levy, Executive Director of the Talbot County Arts Council, welcomed attendees and expressed appreciation for the Maryland State Arts Council's continued partnership and support of arts organizations throughout the county.

Creative Assignment

Chad led a creative exercise inviting participants to anonymously recognize another Council member or staff member by describing the qualities they bring to the Council's work. The exercise concluded with participants reflecting on the collective strengths of the Council and its staff and considering how those qualities support the Council's mission.

Chair Remarks

Ruby delivered closing remarks marking her final meeting as Council Chair. She thanked fellow Council members for their thoughtful service, respectful dialogue, and commitment throughout her tenure. She expressed deep



appreciation to MSAC staff for their professionalism, resilience, and dedication to implementing Council policy while navigating increasingly complex administrative and political challenges. She reaffirmed the Council's responsibility to steward public resources in ways that benefit the entire state, and encouraged Council members to continue asking difficult questions, supporting staff, and making decisions that serve the broader public interest rather than individual organizations or constituencies.

Tonya moved to approve the March 12, 2026 minutes. Greg seconded the motion. All in favor, the motion passed.

Shelley moved to approve the July 19, 2024 Special meeting minutes. Yolanda seconded. All in favor, the motion passed.

Executive Director's Report (Skerritt-Davis)

- Steven welcomed Council members and thanked Ruby for her leadership and partnership during her tenure.
- Steven provided staffing updates and announced the addition of Hadassah St. Hubert as Independent Artist Services Program Director.
- Steven provided the following updates:
 - Department of Commerce:
 - March All Commerce meeting
 - Department Strategic Plan Implementation
 - Legislative Wrap Up:
 - Operating Budget
 - Capital Budget
 - Artist Rights Bill SB289 and HB352
 - PACE Act
 - Councilor appointments
 - Looking Ahead:
 - Preparing legislative concepts for departmental bills
 - Legislator Education
 - Constituent Education
 - Grant Programs:
 - Staff successfully awarded all available grant funds for the fiscal year and reallocated available resources where appropriate to maximize grant funding across programs.
 - Professional Development:
 - Staff continue to expand professional development offerings, including business, legal, and capacity-building opportunities for artists and organizations.
 - Arts & Health:
 - MSAC continues its partnership with SocialRx, working to establish a statewide social prescribing ecosystem. Staff



hosted a community partner meeting with strong participation and continue outreach to healthcare and community partners.

- Poetry Out Loud:
 - Maryland's Poetry Out Loud program concluded another successful year, with Maryland's state champion representing the state at the national competition.
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA):
 - Procedural Audit
 - State Arts Partnership
- Office of Legislative Audits (OLA):
 - OLA has begun its routine audit of the Department of Commerce, including MSAC grant administration. Staff are cooperating fully and using the audit as an opportunity to strengthen agency procedures.

Executive Committee Report

- Ruby provided updates from the May 21, 2026 committee meeting to include the following:
 - Recommendations to later be presented by the Program Policy & Evaluation (PPE) and Finance Committees.
 - Recent legislative language affecting MSAC's line-item funding policy.
 - The possibility of forming an advocacy or legislative outreach workgroup to engage with legislators before the 2027 General Assembly.
 - Reviewed preliminary ideas for recognizing MSAC's 60th Anniversary in 2027 and encouraged staff to incorporate anniversary recognition into future communications and events.
- Steven clarified that budget bill language enacted by the General Assembly supersedes Council policy where applicable and that further discussion would occur during the Grants Committee Report.

Program Policy & Evaluation Committee Report

- Albita reported that the Program Policy & Evaluation Committee met on May 21, 2026 and unanimously recommended several policy revisions for Council approval, to include:
 - Arts in Education
 - Arts Capital Program
 - Public Art Across Maryland
 - Creativity Grants
 - Professional Development Opportunity Grants
 - Touring Program
 - Grants for Organizations



- County Arts Development and Arts & Entertainment District Programs

Marva Jo moved to approve all PPE policy recommendations and send them to the Secretary of Commerce for approval. Paige seconded. The motion passed. Kathy abstained.

Fiscal Report

- Marva Jo provided updates from the May 21, 2026 Finance Committee meeting, and gave a budget update on the FY26 budget and proposed FY27 operating budget.
- Brad provided updates on the following:
 - FY26 expenditures
 - Expending the agency's appropriation by fiscal year-end
 - Grant awards and payments
 - Capital grant obligations.
- Steven presented the proposed FY27 budget, noting:
 - Revenues from:
 - General Funds, including legislative line-item appropriations
 - Special Funds
 - Federal Funds
 - Capital Funds
 - Expenses
 - General Administration
 - Grants Program Allocations

Midge moved to approve the FY27 recommended operating budget and send it to the Secretary of Commerce for approval. Shelley seconded. The motion passed.

Grants Committee

- Greg gave updates on the May 28, 2026 Grants Committee meeting.
- Greg gave the County Arts Development (CAD) overview and discussed the funding formula and grant recommendations.

Shelley moved to approve the FY27 CAD grant recommendations. Albita seconded. The motion passed. Ruby, Kathy, Yolanda abstained.

- Councilors provided abstentions for organizations where there was a conflict of interest.
 - Ruby - Arts & Humanities Council of Montgomery County
 - Kathy - Garrett County Arts Council
 - Yolanda - Caroline County Council for the Arts



Grants for Organizations

- The Councilors discussed reconvening after lunch to receive the Grants Committee Report regarding Grants for Organizations and the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee correspondence, and moving forward with the Nominating Committee Report.

Nominating Committee

- Albita provided recommendations for the slate of officers from the April 23, 2026 meeting.

Kathy moved to vote for Paige as Council Chair. Ruby seconded. All in favor, and the motion passed.

Ruby moved to vote for Kathy as Council Vice Chair. Yolanda seconded. All in favor, and the motion passed.

Paige moved to vote for Marva Jo as Council Secretary/Treasurer. Midge seconded. All in favor, and the motion passed.

Grants for Organizations Continued

- Steven provided the following FY27 GFO Cycle updates:
 - An overview of the letter received from the Senate and Budget Taxation Committee.
 - Background of the Council's Equitable Funding Formula.
 - Intent of the Council's Line Items policy.
 - General Assembly intents.
 - Policies included in the FY27 guidelines published in summer 2025.

Discussion

- Councilors and staff engaged in discussion regarding the history of the equitable funding formula, its intended outcomes, and the need to carefully evaluate the implications of the legislative correspondence before taking action.
- Emily and Laura presented several funding scenarios illustrating the potential impact of responding to the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee letter while complying with enacted budget language.
- Emily and Laura provided context regarding the continued growth of the GFO program.

Discussion

- Councilors discussed the potential impacts of each scenario, emphasizing the importance of understanding both the legislative requirements contained in the FY27 budget bill and the additional



requests contained in the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee correspondence.

- Councilors discussed opportunities to increase statewide arts funding through future legislative initiatives and emphasized the importance of educating legislators about the purpose and demonstrated impact of the equitable funding formula.
- Councilors discussed the origin of the letter, and agreed additional clarification was necessary before taking action on FY27 GFO recommendations.
- Councilors recommended the following:
 - Request additional clarification regarding the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee correspondence.
 - Work with the Department of Commerce and the Office of the Secretary to determine the appropriate response and engagement strategy.
 - Continue discussions with legislative partners, including Maryland Citizens for the Arts, to better understand the legislative concerns and develop educational materials regarding the equitable funding formula.
 - Distribute the funding scenario materials to Council members for further review.
 - Reconvene the Council at a future meeting to consider FY27 Grants for Organizations recommendations after the requested clarification had been received.

New Business

- Steven recognized the conclusion of Ruby Lopez Harper's term as Council Chair and thanked her for her leadership, thoughtful service, and commitment to advancing equitable access to the arts throughout Maryland.
- Steven reminded Council members that staff are discussing MSAC's upcoming anniversary celebration and invited them to submit ideas to Chad to commemorate the agency's milestone year.

Public Comment

- Representatives from several Talbot County arts organizations thanked the Council for its continued investment in Maryland's arts community and shared examples of how MSAC funding has strengthened local programming.
 - Emily Moody - Easton Choral Arts
 - Ricky Vitanovec - Crashbox Theatre Company
 - Kerry Folan - Shorelit
 - Wes Hagood - Colonel Tench Tilghman Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution



- A Council member shared an update on construction of the Three Cultures Center in Dorchester County.

Final Thoughts, Adjourn

Ruby thanked the Academy Art Museum, the Talbot County Arts Council, the staff, the Council members, and the members of the public for their participation.

The meeting adjourned at 1:51 p.m.

Councilors and staff were invited to participate in a guided tour of the Academy Art Museum following adjournment.