

**SUMMARY OF THE
MASONVILLE CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING (MCAC)
March 4, 2025, 5:30 PM - Hybrid Meeting**

Attendees:

Action Baybrook: Kevin Hodges
Baltimore Office of Sustainability: Natalie Cohen
BayBrook Elementary Middle School: Herelys Parks
Canton Kayak Club: Ray Scurr
Chesapeake Bay Association: Frank Neighoff
EcoLogix Consulting Group: Dr. Mamie Parker - *Facilitator*
Friends of Masonville Cove: Jason Brannock, Tieya Parker
Living Classrooms Foundation (LCF): Grace DeLuca, Lorraine Warnick
Maryland Port Administration (MPA): Bertrand Djiki, Rachael Gilde, Katrina Jones, Kelvin Moulden, Darren Swift
Maryland Environmental Service (MES): Matias Orrego
Medstar Harbor Hospital: Brian Gray
MCAC Chair: Anita Kestel
National Aquarium (NA): Swathi Ayyagari
Riviera Beach Community Member: Karen Wanner
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Dr. Ela-Sita Carpenter

Action Items:

- MPA will review signage and navigation markers for kayak access, including potential high-visibility markers and webpage updates. MPA will look into the feasibility of Masonville Cove water trail maps on the Baltimore Blueway website if possible.
- MPA will explore the possibility of installing brown highway signs along I-895 and I-95 to guide visitors to Masonville Cove, highlighting its designation as the First Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership and a key recreational destination.
- NA will engage with the Baltimore City Clean Port Program and extend an invitation to participate in the upcoming May 7th Workforce Development Program.
- Ms. Fisher will distribute invitations to all committee members for the March 29th field trip.
- MPA will review feedback from the workshop session to refine future meeting agendas and improve balance between structured presentations and interactive discussion.
- MPA will identify and engage additional community groups, local organizations, policymakers, and businesses to participate in future MCAC meetings.

1.0 Welcome and Introductions

**Dr. Mamie Parker, Facilitator
Anita Kestel, MCAC Chair**

All meeting materials can be found here: [MCAC Share Drive](#). Dr. Parker and Ms. Kestel convened the meeting. The Committee accepted the September 3, 2024 MCAC meeting summary. Action items from the September 2024 meeting were all completed.

2.0 Office of Navigation, Innovation, and Stewardship Updates

**Darren Swift, MPA
Bertrand Djiki, MPA**

Mr. Swift announced that the Office of Harbor Development was recently changed to the Office of Navigation, Innovation, and Stewardship (NIS) to better reflect the mission of ensuring safe passage for cargo vessels, maintaining navigation channels, and supporting environmental stewardship in the Chesapeake Bay.

Mr. Swift noted the success of the 2024 Dredged Material Management Program (DMMP) Annual Meeting, which saw a 30% increase in attendance, with 120 participants from 65 organizations. The meeting also featured a successful panel comprising a community representative, port industry leader, and an educator, helping to demonstrate the office's core priorities of advocating for funding and policies that support sustainable dredging management solutions, maintaining compliance with environmental regulations, and fostering partnerships with local communities and stakeholders. Mr. Swift also informed participants of recent personnel updates, including the appointments of Ms. Rachel Miller as the Budget & Contract Manager and Mr. Kelvin Moulden as the Chief of Innovative Reuse, Strategy, and Partnerships. Mr. Swift invited attendees to review the DMMP Annual Report, accessible on the resources tab on www.maryland-dmmp.com, which details progress on dredged material management and environmental sustainability efforts.

Mr. Djiki updated the committee on the progress at the Masonville Dredged Material Containment Facility (DMCF). Dike raising to +30 feet began in November 2023 and is 65–75% complete with completion anticipated by late 2025. Once the +30-foot dike expansion is completed, MPA will transition into the next phase of construction towards a final dike elevation of +42 feet.

The final phase of design for +42 feet elevation is currently at 80% completion, with environmental permitting in progress. Upcoming milestones for +42 feet construction include the 90% design submission to MES/MPA on March 17, 2025, 100% design submission to MDE on May 26, 2025, and Erosion & Sediment Control Permit submission to MES/MPA on April 7, 2025 and to MDE on April 21, 2025. Construction is expected to begin in 2026. These expansions will ultimately provide 10.4 million cubic yards (mcy) of storage capacity and sustainable operations.

Mr. Djiki also discussed recent enhancements for the project including improved stormwater drainage, erosion control via an innovative steep-slope mechanically stabilized earth (MSE) wall design, and additional habitat restoration measures and environmental mitigation. Drainage system improvements will prevent stormwater runoff from impacting the neighboring Mercedes facility and is now 95% complete, with only final paving remaining once weather conditions allow.

The MSE wall will provide structural reinforcement while maximizing the capacity of the site and simultaneously provide space for grasses to be planted which minimize erosion and seepage concerns on the outside of the wall. The outside slope will have a 2:1 gradient, while the inside remains at 3:1 for stability. Maintaining vegetation on the MSE wall will be a challenge, as any overgrowth can complicate maintenance. Mr. Djiki clarified per Ms. Jones' question that the grass planting was an intentional part of the design to prevent erosion. He also addressed Ms. Wanner's inquiry on maintenance, explaining that regular mowing and maintenance will be necessary to prevent tree growth, which could compromise the wall's integrity and cause seepage over time.

The Access Zone 2 Nontidal Wetland Improvement Project began in 2022 and was completed in Spring 2024. Challenges remain in establishing vegetation growth, as weather conditions have slowed the process. The final inspection by MDE is pending until sufficient vegetation is established, and additional planting may be necessary in the coming months.

3.0 Masonville Cove Connector (MCC)

Joseph Ross, MPA

Mr. Ross provided updates on the MCC project, which aims to enhance safe and equitable pedestrian access to Masonville Cove. The project initially presented eight design concepts, which have since been narrowed to four concepts through community and local stakeholder engagement. Concepts are currently

divided between having a shared-use path on either the north or south side of Frankfurst Ave., with differing sizes in buffers and the number of lanes. Mr. Ross noted that a recent traffic study revealed that Frankfurst Ave. is over-designed for current needs, meaning a reduction in lanes is feasible without compromising vehicle traffic and local industry needs. The MCC final design is expected to be selected by late 2026, with construction projected to align with broader infrastructure timelines extending into 2028. Ms. Kestell asked why the final design choice has not been narrowed beyond the four options and Mr. Ross clarified that the process will next eliminate three of the options at once, resulting in a single final design rather than a staged elimination. The south side option appears more favorable due to its alignment with the new traffic signal intersection.

Mr. Ross also highlighted challenges related to interagency coordination, as the connector project must align with upcoming Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) toll reconfigurations along I-895 and Baltimore City sewer replacement projects. A new off-ramp design from the toll reconfigurations will allow for a traffic signal intersection near Masonville Cove, improving pedestrian safety. The new configuration will also include traffic calming measures to reduce nearby highway-style speeds. Baltimore City's 7,000-linear-foot sewer main replacement project along Frankfurst Ave. and Hanover Street plans to begin soliciting bids for contractors in April 2025, with construction potentially starting in late summer 2025. However, past delays raise concerns about whether this timeline will be further interrupted. Coordination between MDTA and Baltimore City's Department of Public Works (DPW) has been limited, but Mr. Ross serves as an informal liaison between the agencies and is meeting quarterly with MDTA and monthly with DPW to relay updates. Ms. Cohen asked whether DPW and MDTA were aligning their construction schedules and Mr. Ross confirmed that Baltimore City DPW may accelerate their timeline depending on MDTA efforts.

Mr. Ross also reassured participants that meetings have been conducted with Federal Highway Administration officials, who confirmed that current funding is secured. However, the long-term funding outlook remains uncertain due to shifting federal priorities.

4.0 Canton Kayak Club Update

Ray Scurr

Mr. Scurr with the Canton Kayak Club (CKC) addressed the need to improve water-based access to Masonville Cove for kayakers. CKC currently offers seasonal access with shared kayaks from various locations including the Baltimore Peninsula across the channel and the neighboring Middle Branch Park. Around 350 of the club's 700 members are new to kayaking, and for the past several years new kayakers account for approximately 50% of membership each year. Given the increase in new kayakers and various levels of experience, providing clear, well-marked routes for safe navigation is essential.

Current challenges at locations like Masonville Cove are due to inadequate signage and unclear waterway markers. Mr. Scurr highlighted the need for designated water trails, better signage, and clear navigation markers to guide kayakers safely. While kayakers can rely on visible structures like bridges, water towers, or Captain Trash Wheel, these landmarks are not always obvious, especially for first-time visitors. Many kayakers may also mistakenly aim for the fishing pier instead of the designated beach landing area, creating potential conflicts due to eagle nesting restrictions.

The Baltimore Blueway website previously provided mapped water trails to Masonville Cove, but these trails were unexpectedly removed, making it more difficult for kayakers to plan their routes. Ms. Jones noted past discussions about the Baltimore Blueway website and raised concerns about kayakers crossing commercial shipping lanes, particularly near Vulcan Materials, where large cargo ships and barges operate. Mrs. Warnick noted that barges carrying gravel frequently travel through the area and may not be able to stop or maneuver quickly if a kayaker is in their path. Mr. Scurr acknowledged these risks and

agreed that educating kayakers on safe routes is critical and suggested an alternative path that avoids major shipping zones be identified.

Mr. Scurr and participants proposed that high-visibility markers be installed near the beach as a kayak landing area, ensuring paddlers can easily identify where to land, that the Masonville Cove water trail maps on the Baltimore Blueway website are reinstated if possible, to add a Google Maps pin for the Masonville Cove Kayak Launch to improve wayfinding, and to implement clear signage with a phone number or QR code that provides instructions and site waivers for kayak visitors to sign in.

5.0 Baltimore City Office of Sustainability - Chesapeake Gateways Update **Natalie Cohen**

Ms. Cohen, from the Baltimore Office of Sustainability and the Reimagine Middle Branch Resiliency Manager, presented information on the Chesapeake Gateways initiative and Masonville Cove's involvement. This watershed-wide program, hosted by the National Park Service, links a variety of natural, cultural, and historical sites to promote sustainable eco-tourism. Ms. Cohen joined Ms. Fisher and Ms. Gilde among others, and attended the Chesapeake Gateways Community Workshop in January 2025 where Masonville Cove was highlighted and regional partners discussed strategies to build community-focused economic opportunities through tourism.

Ms. Cohen highlighted a comprehensive community asset mapping process from the workshop, which identified key neighborhoods including Brooklyn, Curtis Bay, and Cherry Hill, and emphasized the importance of integrating local transit and cultural assets into Masonville Cove's future vision. Masonville Cove stands out among the selected Chesapeake Gateways communities, which are largely Eastern Shore towns with established tourism industries, as a unique urban ecological site. The strategic focus for Masonville Cove as a Chesapeake Gateway site is community-centered regenerative tourism, which supports local businesses in a sustainable and non-gentrifying manner. Ms. Kestell suggested Masonville Cove leverage its distinction of being the nation's first Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership for greater recognition and potential tourism improvements with brown highway signs along I-895 and I-95 to direct visitors to the site.

The workshop also supported the commitment to establish the Friends of Masonville Cove as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization as necessary to enhance fundraising and capacity-building efforts. MPA recognized they cannot fully develop and sustain Masonville Cove's tourism potential alone due to property and jurisdictional limitations. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit status would allow the friends group to secure independent funding for tourism and community projects, hire a dedicated coordinator to manage community engagement efforts, and expand educational programming and conservation initiatives. Ms. Fisher noted that 2025 will serve as a year of learning for the group, with nonprofit status targeted for late 2025 or early 2026. Committee members are encouraged to join the Friends of Masonville Cove to help guide this effort.

6.0 Partnership Updates

National Aquarium (NA)

Swathi Ayyagari, NA

Ms. Ayyagari updated committee members of NA's initiatives at Masonville Cove, highlighting community engagement, workforce development partnerships, and environmental education programs. NA hosted successful First Friday events including December's Nature Ornament Crafting where 23 attendees enjoyed making pine tree decorations and snowmen. February's event was the second annual Black in Conservation event, which featured guest speaker Curtis Bennett, NA Director of Equity & Community Engagement, who led a discussion on conservation careers and his journey with 15 attendees.

Spring events include a workforce development event, the Read to Reef program, and the City Nature Challenge. The workforce development event will bring together organizations from the Greater Baltimore region, followed by a networking lunch to connect participants with environmental professionals involved in site maintenance, restoration, and conservation work at Masonville Cove. Ms. Cohen suggested inviting the Baltimore City Clean Port Program, which recently expanded its South Baltimore team to support cleaning and greening efforts and Ms. Ayyagari agreed to connect with them. Read to Reef is a literacy-based initiative in partnership with the Enoch Pratt Free Library system, which provides four free National Aquarium tickets to children, grades five and below, who read five books focused on marine life, conservation, and ecology from a list. City Nature Challenge will take place from April 25-28th and is a community science initiative that encourages Baltimore residents to document local wildlife using the iNaturalist app. This event also qualifies for service-learning hours students may need.

Living Classrooms Foundation (LCF)

Lorraine Warnick, LCF

Mrs. Warnick presented updates on LCF education and outreach initiatives. LCF education programs connect Baltimore City's youth with real-world conservation practices including stream studies with 9th-grade students, School Leadership in Urban Runoff Reduction Program projects (SLURRP), and LCF's monthly Saturday programs. Outreach has continued with local schools and recreation centers, while new community members have been welcomed and supported in running their own programs including yoga led by community member Katie Detrich. April and May will be especially busy due to Earth Month and related celebrations.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Dr. Ela-Sita Carpenter, USFWS

Dr. Carpenter provided updates on wildlife monitoring and USFWS programs happening at Masonville Cove, including updates on mammal surveys, pollinator conservation, bald eagle monitoring, and bird banding programs. The annual mammal survey program uses trail cameras to document the presence and behavior of species on campus including foxes, opossums, raccoons, and deer, while opportunistic observations have confirmed the presence of coyotes and river otters. Community members are also engaged as volunteers and high school students help review camera images to catalog wildlife activity and receive service-learning hours for participation. Bird banding at the site will also resume this spring and USFWS will continue to support the program. She also noted that despite technical challenges with the eagle camera, she observed behavior that confirmed the successful hatching of the eaglets.

Dr. Carpenter informed members that the monarch butterfly is currently under review for potential listing as a threatened species. The final decision on its conservation status is pending, but regardless of the outcome Masonville Cove will support monarch tagging, pollinator education and outreach, and continue to support plantings of native pollinators and close monitoring of the species.

Maryland Port Administration

Danielle Fisher, MPA

Ms. Fisher shared additional information on the development of the Friends group, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) GeoGirls program, and March's First Friday event. MCAC and community members are invited to join a visit to the Patuxent Research Refuge on March 29th for an opportunity to learn about successful Friends groups, view the Bee Lab, and network with peers. Transportation from Masonville Cove to Patuxent will be available and Ms. Fisher will send an invitation to all committee members. The MDNR GeoGirls program held in October 2024 was successful, and 65 sixth-grade girls enjoyed a full day of kayaking, fishing, and nature walks at Masonville Cove. A subsequent GeoGirls program is being planned for Fall 2025. Ms. Fisher also invited all attendees to the First Friday Vision Board Party on March 7, celebrating the contributions of women in conservation.

Ms. Fisher concluded by sharing updates on Masonville Cove Partnership Retreat and how it helped unify

the Partnership's strategic planning and mission to enhance Masonville Cove as a sanctuary for both people and wildlife. The retreat also supported establishing plans to continue improving the visitor experience, support key initiatives, and update the official strategic plan visioning for the next five years.

7.0 Workshop

Dr. Parker facilitated an interactive visioning session to gather feedback on how the MCAC should evolve and what improvements could be made to its meetings. The discussion revolved around agenda structure, content, outreach, and in-reach. Participants suggested reducing the number of PowerPoint-heavy presentations in favor of more interactive discussions. Additionally, designating time for open discussions and Q&A sessions was recommended. Members requested more updates on innovative reuse efforts, major city and state projects, and ongoing environmental restoration initiatives. Members agreed that it would be ideal to expand outreach efforts and include more community groups, educators, and elected officials in the committee. Members also discussed ways to better share meeting outcomes and engage members between meetings through email updates, website alerts, and social media engagement.

8.0 Adjournment

The meeting concluded at 7:30 pm. The next MCAC meeting is scheduled for **May 6th, 2025**.