

Beach to Bay Heritage Area

Charting Our Course: Beaches, Bays & Water Ways

A five-year action plan to elevate, celebrate and sustain the stories, traditions and natural heritage of Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore

Executive Summary: FY 2024 to 2029





Beaches, Bays & Water Ways

On Maryland's Eastern Shore

The Lower Shore's identity is linked by water.

Most everything comes back to water.

Historically, trades and industry were dominated by water.

Now, water is essential for tourism and recreation.

Our past and present are linked by water. Our communities are linked by water.

Suzy Taylor, Ayers Creek

A strategic action plan to promote, preserve and protect
the cultural heritage, historical linkages and natural assets
of Maryland's Beach to Bay Heritage Area

Lisa Challenger, Executive Director

Kristen Goller, President

BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

- 2022 Marks the 20th Anniversary of the Beach to Bay Heritage Area's (BBHA) founding* by individuals and organizations committed to protect, preserve and promote the cultural heritage, historical linkages and natural assets of Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester counties.
- In recognition of this milestone -- and in conjunction with the Maryland Heritage Area Authority's (MHAA) request for an updated 5-year action plan -- BBHA's board and executive director (Lisa Challenger) initiated a planning initiative to guide the process and ensure the organization's relevance and sustainability for the next 20 years.
- The board reviewed BBHA's original management plan, assessed the organization's progress, and articulated five-year priorities and goals.
- Thanks to funding provided by the MHAA, BBHA contracted with Andrea Vernot -- a strategic planning and destination marketing specialist -- to serve as the project's consultant, launching a year-long planning and stakeholder engagement process in July 2021.
- As a result, BBHA updated the original vision, affirmed its mission, and revised -- where no longer relevant -- previous planning objectives.
- The process codified six strategic goals for BBHA (FY 2024-2029) aligned with MHAA's activity categories and the heritage area's interpretive themes, planning tools, and brand marketing.
- Over the next five years, the strategic framework seeks to: Build partnerships; heighten awareness; fortify management; develop heritage initiatives; and strengthen heritage area infrastructure and capacity.
- Guided by a Certified Heritage Area Management Plan approved by the state of Maryland, BBHA receives operational funding from the MHAA and through private and public donations. Special thanks to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, Rural Maryland Council, and members of the Beach to Bay Heritage Area.

**Officially and originally designated a certified heritage area in 2002 as the Lower Eastern Shore Heritage Area.*

The Beach to Bay Heritage Area board and executive director began organizational work to develop a comprehensive five-year action in July 2021. After reviewing the direction provided by MHAA, the executive committee initiated a ‘plan to plan.’ In doing so they:

- Reviewed the original management plan and five-year action agendas
- Audited accomplishments (page 8), articulated goals and organized internal planning resources
- Outlined a planning framework and inclusive stakeholder engagement process grounded in identified goals, brand marketing and interpretive themes (page 10)
- Invited board member, stakeholder and subject matter participation
- Conducted a planning workshop at the Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art in Fall 2021 including a SWOT analysis (page 11), affirmation of vision/mission (page 7), and development of tactical strategies aligned with a heritage area’s planning tools
- Recorded and analyzed break-out session recommendations in four categories: Heritage Product Development; Partnerships; Sustaining Regional Identity; and Organizational
- Based on information gathered through these discussions with the board, curated (finalized) six goals for FY 2024-2029 (page 9)
- Articulated a framework consisting of select objectives to successfully accomplish the goals and identify detailed actions steps (pages 12-19)

The process updated BBHA's vision in a new concise, clear and forward-looking statement:

Vision

- Maryland's Beach to Bay Heritage Area unifies, elevates and celebrates the collective stories of the lower eastern shore's heritage, cultural traditions and natural resources.

Mission

- Promote, preserve and protect the cultural heritage, historical linkages, and natural assets of Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore.

5-YEAR VISION & GOALS

- VISION** The Beach to Bay Heritage Area is a relevant, respected resource and catalyst; successfully sustaining, developing, and improving programs, partnerships and organizations dedicated to the lower eastern shore's heritage, environment and culture.
- Goal 1** Make Beaches, Bays and Water Ways synonymous with heritage and cultural tourism on Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore. Increase awareness, engagement and visitation to places, sites, and events that are intrinsically linked to our heritage.
- Goal 2** Seek common ground with our heritage 'ways.' Forge mutually beneficial partnerships with heritage organizations and businesses to elevate regional customs and culture beyond geographic boundaries.
- Goal 3** Develop or support initiatives that increase the body of heritage products and assets of Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore.
- Goal 4** Increase perception, awareness and engagement of BBHA's mission, programs, opportunities and impact with lower shore residents.
- Goal 5** Build and maintain a strong and sustainable organization rooted in best practices in non-profit and heritage area administration, fiscal management and board governance.
- Goal 6** Build organizational capacity of heritage area organizations by developing, supporting or promoting initiatives that strengthen their infrastructure.

PLANNING FRAMEWORK



HERITAGE AREA SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- Adaptive Reuse of Historic Buildings
- Ecotourism & Outdoor Recreation
- Growing Arts & Cultural Programs
- Paddle Sports & Surfing Culture
- Local Seafood & Crafted Specialties
- Growing Academic Communities

WEAKNESSES

- Community Volunteer Involvement
- Heritage Assets without Infrastructure
- Trail Maintenance & Upkeep
- Public Land Access
- Electric Vehicle Infrastructure

OPPORTUNITIES

- Linking Hike, Bike, Paddle Trails
- Value Added Assets Parks/Historic Sites
- Local Farm/Taste/Make Experiences
- New Residents, Homeowners & Retirees
- Digital Technologies
- Multi-Cultural Communities

THREATS

- Poor Land Use Planning
- Sea Level Rise & Habitat Loss
- Loss of Traditional Livelihoods
- Decline in Student Field Trips
- Historic Property Maintenance
- Aging Volunteer Base

GOAL 1: HERITAGE TOURISM

Make Beaches, Bays & Water Ways synonymous with heritage and cultural tourism on MD's Lower Eastern Shore. Increase awareness, engagement and visitation to places, sites, and events linked to our heritage.

- Objective 1 Expand “Beaches, Bays & Water Ways” marketing campaign launched in 2020 to increase awareness, engagement and support for the region’s heritage assets through a sustained, multi-channel marketing and communications campaign that informs and inspires visitation.
- Objective 2 Leverage the Federal Highway Administration’s designation of the Chesapeake Country All American Road by developing an interpretive plan to guide both the visitor experience and marketing of the route’s many assets.
- Objective 3 Forge linkages with emerging cultures and increase opportunities for engagements to include their traditions -- foodways, folkways and story ways – in heritage area programs and promotions.
- Objective 4 Communicate the Beach to Bay Heritage Area’s vision and goals to elevate awareness and support for the organization’s mission, role, and priorities by partners, members, government officials and non-profit/business leaders.
- Objective 5 Coordinate or support special events to drive awareness and visitation to heritage sites in conjunction with May’s National Museum Day.
- Objective 6 Elevate and adopt strategies aimed at preserving the region’s built environment; promote public awareness of the importance of recognizing and maintaining the historic and cultural significance of targeted locations and properties across the Lower Shore.

GOAL 2: BUILD PARTNERSHIPS

Seek common ground with our heritage 'ways.' Forge mutually beneficial partnerships with heritage organizations and businesses to elevate regional customs and culture beyond geographic boundaries.

- Objective 1 Elevate the region's outstanding water trails to position BBHA as an exceptional flatwater paddling destination and strengthen the economic, environmental and recreational benefits.
- Objective 2 Strengthen the safety, connectivity and amenities of the region's bike trails to position BBHA as a premier cycling destination for families, enthusiasts and athletes.
- Objective 3 Capitalize on the growing popularity of birding to elevate the region as an outstanding destination for wildlife enthusiasts.
- Objective 4 Forge a strategic partnership with the Nabb Research Center for History and Culture at Salisbury University to define mutually beneficial outcomes and strengthen the Center's role and relationship with BBHA initiatives.
- Objective 5 Leverage the groundwork laid by the National Folk Festival by presenting or sponsoring BBHA heritage traditions at future festivals to strengthen event-goers appreciation and understanding of regional customs, music and literature.
- Objective 6 Elevate and celebrate the region's fishing, farming and food traditions to foster appreciation and understanding of the connection between our natural resources, livelihoods, economy and recreation.

GOAL 3: DEVELOP HERITAGE PRODUCTS

Develop **and support heritage initiatives** that preserve, protect and promote the cultural, historic, and natural assets of Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore

- Objective 1 Launch a regional storytelling initiative -- "Beach to Bay Ways" -- to document, preserve and promote personal connections, family histories and place-based traditions to inspire awareness, appreciation and support for the lower shore's customs.
- Objective 2 Capitalize on the growing interest in and ownership of electric vehicles to develop, install and promote a network of public charging stations at non-profit heritage sites and destinations.
- Objective 3 Continue development of an African American interpretive plan to educate residents and visitors – in person and virtually – of the traditions, history and contributions of free and enslaved blacks in the region.
- Objective 4 Encourage development of self-guided and escorted tours of the region's downtown districts – architecture, art, culture and commerce -- to connect visitors to the people, places and stories that are unique to the BBHA.
- Objective 5. Develop, advocate, and support projects that offer regional participation and product development.
- Objective 6 Encourage preservation and protection of the lower shore's landscape, including public access to parks, forests, and trails to strengthen support, stewardship and sustainability.

GOAL 4: INCREASE AWARENESS

Increase perception, awareness and engagement of BBHA's mission, programs, opportunities, and impact with lower shore residents.

- Objective 1 Create linkages between the BBHA and community, special-interest, academic, stakeholder, and faith-based organizations to strengthen and sustain membership.
- Objective 2 Promote the heritage area's mission and programs to educate lower shore residents about their heritage through communications initiatives and programs.
- Objective 3 Define and demonstrate the value of BBHA membership for individuals and by identifying benefits or opportunities; report annually on fulfillment of those assets.
- Objective 4 Facilitate, organize and/or co-host an annual event to elevate public awareness and engage the community with heritage assets or themes.

GOAL 5: STRENGTHEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Build and maintain a strong and sustainable organization rooted in best practices in non-profit and heritage authority administration, fiscal management and board guidance.

- Objective 1 Build a highly engaged, proactive and diverse regional board with representation or leadership positions in organizations representing the heritage area's core historic, cultural, natural and academic assets.
- Objective 2 Strengthen and adopt minimum standards for board member participation In BBHA committees, programs and outreach to increase heritage area management and sustainability.
- Objective 3 Develop a paid and unpaid internship program to support BBHA's work in areas of research, outreach and interpretation.
- Objective 4 Convene a regular networking event each Spring at different heritage sites for the board, heritage influencers and government leaders to deepen connections, foster a collaborative culture and forge linkages for cooperative projects.
- Objective 5 Leverage board member expertise and involvement to increase BBHA's reach and relationship with diverse communities and industries in the tri-county region.

GOAL 6: BUILD CAPACITY

Build organizational capacity for heritage area organizations by developing, supporting or promoting program initiatives that strengthen the region's heritage infrastructure.

- Objective 1 Develop a volunteer recruitment and docent training program in partnership with an established national service initiative or capacity building organization to strategically support development of sustainable volunteer support for regional heritage organizations.
- Objective 2 Elevate the quality, predictability and consistency of the 'user experience' at heritage sites in the BBHA by defining and adopting uniform standards for management, interpretation and engagement.
- Objective 3 Serve as central repository for information on best practices, resources, and technical assistance for heritage. Expand technical support offered to BBHA members/partner organizations.
- Objective 4 Develop a proactive diversity, equity, inclusion and justice plan aligned with BBHA's vision and mission to strengthen representation of all communities – both historic and emerging – cultural roots.

PROSPECTIVE CALENDAR

As BBHA looks forward to developing and successfully executing a comprehensive action plan to achieve its stated goals, the board is cognitive that it must balance personnel and financial resources with the many significant event ideas generated during the planning process. The following annual framework will help guide direct coordination versus organizational support.

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| February | Optional: Networking Meet & Greet* | FY 2024-2028 |
| March | Bi-Annual Delmarva Heritage Area Summit | 2024, 2026, 2028 |
| March | Bi-Annual Museum Day (public awareness) | 2023, 2025, 2027 |
| April/May | Monthly Lunch & Learn: Topics vary | tbd |
| July | Optional: Networking Meet & Greet* | FY 2024-2028 |
| September | Maryland Folk Festival: Living Traditions 'Tent' | 2023-2028 |
| October | Annual Luncheon / Keynote Speaker | 2023-2028 |

**Hosted by Heritage Area Partner*