

# HISTORIC ST. MARY'S CITY

A MUSEUM OF HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY AT  
MARYLAND'S FIRST CAPITAL

## **Fiscal Year 2026 Capital Budget**

**TESTIMONY OF JOHN L. SEIDEL, PHD**  
**Executive Director/CEO**  
**Historic St. Mary's City Commission**

**Appropriations Committee**  
**Capital Budget - Budget Hearing**  
**Delegate Mark Chang, Chair**  
**February 17, 2025**

**Budget and Taxation Committee**  
**Capital Budget – Budget Hearing**  
**Senator Craig Zucker, Chair**  
**February 18, 2025**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the proposed FY 2026 Capital Budget of the Historic St. Mary's City Commission (HSMCC) and to offer the agency's response to the Legislative Capital Budget Analysis, with which we concur.

I have just completed my first year at the Historic St. Mary's City Commission (HSMCC) as its new Executive Director/CEO, and I couldn't be more pleased with our staff's achievements over the past year and with the prospects in front of us. This year's Capital Budget request for Historic St. Mary's City, one of the nation's premier outdoor museums of living history and archaeology, is critical to our preparations for the coming 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Maryland in 2034. It also will push us toward our goal of contributing to and diversifying the economy of Southern Maryland through heritage tourism.

The primary element in this year's proposed Capital Budget is design work (\$381,000) for the renovation of our existing Visitors Center into a new Education & Artisan Center. The new Education & Artisan Center is not just an enhancement but a necessity to sustain year-round programming, to expand our revenue base through workshops and special events, and to provide climate-controlled learning spaces for school groups and visitors. Without this investment, we risk losing potential economic benefits from tourism growth—a missed opportunity as we prepare for Maryland's 400th anniversary.

The renovation is made possible by the planned move of our Visitor Center functions into the new Maryland Heritage Interpretive Center (MHIC), which will serve as both a new Visitor

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Center and a state-of-the-art, interactive museum when it opens. Work on the MHIC is proceeding well, with completion of the building scheduled for early summer. That will be followed by the installation of an exciting array of exhibits, many being designed in collaboration with the Piscataway Conoy Tribe and the Piscataway Indian Nation, our Indigenous partners in this effort.

While not included in this year's budget, I want to draw your attention to an important capital project scheduled for initial funding in FY 2027. That is a dual-purpose building, half of which is designed for collections storage and the other half as a maintenance facility. Historic St. Mary's City has one of the longest running archaeological programs in the nation, with over 6.5 million artifacts currently in our care. We project that our current storage facility will reach capacity in 2028, and without additional climate-controlled storage, we risk the loss of irreplaceable materials. Additionally, continued museum accreditation through the American Alliance of Museums is at stake, making this an urgent priority for FY27. The maintenance portion of this dual-function building is needed to remedy the chronic underfunding and lack of attention to our Buildings & Grounds Department, which is responsible for all of the museum's maintenance and upkeep. One of my primary objectives as the new CEO has been to remedy this historical deficiency, reducing deferred maintenance and attendant costs, while ensuring a positive visitor experience through well-kept buildings and grounds. We welcome the opportunity to work with you now to secure the necessary funding for this project and prevent future backlogs in capital planning.

The Legislative Capital Budget Analysis correctly notes that in the past there has been a lag in encumbering capital funds for Site Improvements. We have made significant progress in moving these projects forward over the past year, with the completion of much-needed repairs to the Farthing's Ordinary parking lot (a \$1,481,532 project), ADA paths (\$561,839), and replacement of "ghost frame" buildings across the grounds (\$155,530). Other important projects are underway, having moved through approvals and design, including the Chapel exhibit slated to open in April (\$394,520), a new kitchen and restaurant scheduled to open this March in Farthing's ordinary (\$750,000), Farthing's bathrooms (\$278,000), the Brome Howard Slave Quarters renovation (\$264,876), and an ADA accessible pier on Chancellor's Point (\$503,177). We await approvals for some other significant projects, including \$1,350,000 for projects at Chancellor's Point and a newly available life tenancy residence.

While encouraged by this progress, we recognize the concerns about unencumbered funds and have taken specific steps to expedite approvals and disbursements. Over the past year, we have streamlined procurement, improved project tracking, and accelerated bid approvals, while working closely with our partners at the Department of Budget Management and Department of General Services. As a result, we anticipate significant movement on outstanding

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projects in the next fiscal year, ensuring that future appropriations will be utilized efficiently and effectively.

This continued progress, as well as additional capital projects slated for the next few years, are of growing importance as we approach the coming 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Maryland's founding, in 2034. We see this event as a catalyst for greater recognition of HSMCC and the surrounding region and, especially, for regional economic growth and a diversification of the economy via heritage tourism and ecotourism. Few people better appreciate the long glide-path for capital projects than the members of this Committee, so you know that nine years is a very short time in terms of capital planning. We hope to work closely with you as we move to realize the additional infrastructure work needed to maximize the impact of this "once in several generations" milestone. As I emphasized last year at this time, we owe it to the State and our varied constituents to capitalize on this rare opportunity and make the most of it. That will require additional investments of time and both state and private funding, but the opportunities and potential are profound. We are grateful to the General Assembly and the Moore-Miller Administration for their support of these efforts.

I am delighted with our recent progress at Historic St. Mary's City and continue to believe that this foundational site in Maryland's history is an extraordinary jewel in Maryland's network of historic sites, with remarkable opportunities for education and regional economic development. On behalf of my colleagues and the many thousands of Maryland citizens who enjoy these resources each year, I thank you for your continued support of our work. Our response to the Legislative Capital Budget Analysis follows.

(cont'd)

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## Historic St. Mary's City Commission Fiscal Year 2026 Capital Budget

### AGENCY RESPONSE TO DEPARTMENT OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES BUDGET ANALYSIS

**Appropriations Committee  
Capital Budget - Budget Hearing  
Delegate Mark Chang, Chair  
February 17, 2025**

**Budget and Taxation Committee  
Capital Budget – Budget Hearing  
Senator Craig Zucker, Chair  
February 18, 2024**

The Historic St. Mary's City Commission (HSMCC) concurs with the analysis and recommendations regarding its FY 2026 capital budget (DB01). The agency also offers the following comments, as requested by the analyst.

#### **GO Bond Recommended Actions**

1. Adopt the following narrative:

**Expenditures Report:** The budget committees request that the Historic St. Mary's City Commission (HSMCC) submit a report by December 1, 2025, detailing all projects within the Site Improvements program, including the priority of each project, the funds encumbered and expended for each project, and a status update for each project explaining any changes to timelines, design, or priority. The report should include a separate accounting and status of projects undertaken with general obligation bond funds, commission resources, and Department of General Services-managed funds through the State Facility Renewal Program.

<b>Information Request</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
Report on site improvements encumbrances and expenditures	HSMCC	December 1, 2025

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## **Agency Response**

HSMCC will submit a report on site improvement encumbrances and expenditures on December 1, 2025. In the interim, HSMCC will continue to closely track expenditures and work closely with partner agencies to bring these projects to timely completion.

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