

# HISTORIC ST. MARY'S CITY

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

## **Fiscal Year 2027 Capital Budget**

**TESTIMONY OF David O'Donnell**  
**Executive Director/CEO**  
**Historic St. Mary's City Commission**

**Appropriations Committee**  
**Capital Budget - Budget Hearing**  
**Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair**  
**February 23, 2026**

**Budget and Taxation Committee**  
**Capital Budget – Budget Hearing**  
**Senator Guy Guzzone**  
**February 24, 2026**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the proposed FY 2027 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.

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 trajectory in preparing 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 (\$420,000) for the renovation of our existing Visitors Center into a new Education & Artisan Center. This will provide a desperately needed venue for indoor educational programming and revenue-generating programs involving traditional artisans. The indoor space is becoming especially important as we witness an increasing number of "extreme weather" days each year, which reduces visitation to our predominantly outdoor museum. The renovation is made possible by the planned move of our Visitor Center functions into the new Maryland Heritage Interpretive

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Center (MHIC), which will serve as both a new Visitor Center and a state-of-the-art, interactive museum. Work on the MHIC is proceeding well, with completion of the building scheduled for this 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.

Although not in this year's budget, I want to draw your attention to an important capital project scheduled for initial funding in FY 2029. 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 research programs in the nation, with over 6.5 million artifacts currently in its collections. With ongoing excavations at the recently discovered 1634 St. Mary's Fort and at the Leonard Calvert House, this unparalleled research collection continues to grow. We project that our current climate-controlled storage facility will reach capacity in 2028, making this new project critical. Our continued museum accreditation through the American Alliance of Museums hangs in the balance, so timely completion of additional collections space will be important. 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 Executive Director 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.

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, ADA paths, and replacement of "ghost frame" buildings across the grounds. A newly renovated kitchen and restaurant scheduled to open this March in Farthing's Ordinary, Farthing's bathrooms, the Brome Howard Slave Quarters renovation, and an ADA accessible pier on Chancellor's Point. Despite this progress, we believe there is opportunity to improve the pace and are working closely with our partners at the Department of Budget Management and Department of General Services to identify ways to speed up approvals, design, and completion of the outstanding site improvement work. We track this progress closely and will be happy to report regularly on this progress.

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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 eight 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 HSMCC 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 educational 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.

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## Historic St. Mary's City Commission Fiscal Year 2027 Capital Budget

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

**Appropriations Committee  
Capital Budget - Budget Hearing  
Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair  
February 23, 2026**

**Budget and Taxation Committee  
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**Senator Guy Guzzone, Chair  
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The Historic St. Mary's City Commission (HSMCC) concurs with the analysis and recommendations regarding its FY 2027 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, 2026, 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.

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Information Request	Author	Due Date
Report on site improvements encumbrances and expenditures	HSMCC	December 1, 2026

## Agency Response

HSMCC will submit a report on site improvement encumbrances and expenditures on December 1, 2026. In the interim, HSMCC will continue to closely track expenditures and work closely with partner agencies to bring these projects to timely completion.

## Site Improvements

**Project Summary:** This program addresses problems related to aging and deficient infrastructure.

The fiscal 2027 capital budget includes GO bonds for three site improvement projects: (1) resurfacing the parking lot at the Godiah Spray Plantation Exhibit; (2) improvements to HSMCC's hiking trails and footbridges; and (3) new lighting for outdoor exhibits.

- **Project Description:** The Godiah Spray Plantation Exhibit offers historical education through a reconstruction of a typical seventeenth century tobacco farm. This project will regrade and repave the exhibit's parking lot and install stormwater management.
- **Need:** Poor stormwater drainage has caused surface degradation and large potholes in the parking lot. The drainage issue has also contributed to the erosion of some of the exhibit's pathways and green spaces.
- **Project Status and Schedule:** The project's month-long design process will begin in September 2026, with construction commencing in March 2027 and lasting three months. The entire project will utilize \$250,000 in GO bonds and will take less than a year to

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complete. There was \$150,000 initially authorized for this project in fiscal 2025, but the CIP does not reflect this prior funding. HSMCC should clarify the total funding allocated for this project and if the fiscal 2025 funding was reallocated to other priorities.

- **Project Description:** This project will restore 3.5 miles of hiking trails and five wooden footbridges throughout the southern end of HSMCC's property.
- **Need:** The trails have deteriorated over the years, as a large portion of them have not received regular maintenance due to being inaccessible to utility vehicles. The project will restore the condition of the trails and make them easier to maintain and more accessible.
- **Project Status and Schedule:** Updating HSMCC's trails will cost approximately \$2.0 million in GO bonds and will take roughly 2.5 years to complete. The fiscal 2027 capital budget provides \$375,000 to begin the six-month design phase of the project in October 2026. Construction will begin in September 2027, with estimated completion in March 2029. There was \$100,000 initially authorized for this project in fiscal 2025, but the CIP does not reflect this prior funding. HSMCC should clarify the total funding allocated for this project and if the fiscal 2025 funding was reallocated to other priorities.

## Agency Response

HSMCC transmitted the referenced project status report to the JCR in December 2025. Upon subsequent review, we determined that the submission contained an inadvertent reporting error. Specifically, during preparation of the report, projects associated with the \$1.0 million appropriation (MCCBL 2023–23161) were incorrectly included.

In addition, two projects, the Plantation Parking Lot and the Hiking Trails and Bridges, were incorporated into the December 1, 2025 SITE IMPROVEMENTS ENCUMBRANCES AND EXPENDITURES REPORT 2025 Joint Chairmen's report, p. 356). While these projects were proposed within the FY 2027 Capital Budget request, they were not included among the approved projects under the \$2.0 million appropriation (MCCBL 2024–24172). We regret the oversight and will ensure that future submissions

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strictly reflect only those projects formally authorized under the applicable appropriations.

## **Site Improvements Prior Authorized Projects**

After reporting \$6.1 million in unencumbered funds at the end of calendar 2024, HSMCC did not receive funds for fiscal 2026 site improvements. This pause in funds was intended to give HSMCC time to encumber funds and pull from its large balance. As requested by the 2025 Joint Chairmen's Report, HSMCC submitted a report at the end of calendar 2025 detailing encumbrances and expenditures for all site improvement projects. The agency's submission lists \$7.0 million in projects; \$3.9 million in expenditures; \$459,000 in outstanding encumbrances; and \$2.7 million in unencumbered funds, a decrease of \$3.4 million in unencumbered funds from the year prior. Of the \$2.7 million unencumbered balance, \$2.0 million reflects the entire fiscal 2025 authorization for the following site improvement projects:

- \$500,000 for the Chancellors Point Chase House;
- \$150,000 for the Period Split Rail and paling fences;
- \$25,000 for the Visitor Center Bridge;
- \$100,000 for the exterior renovation of HSMCC's administrative offices;
- \$70,000 to regrade and resurface the access roads to the museum's interpretive sites;
- \$100,000 for upgrades to hiking trails and bridges;
- \$150,000 for the Godiah Spray Plantation parking lot;
- \$600,000 for the Westerly House renovation;
- \$150,000 for Visitor Center outbuildings; and
- \$155,000 for signage at the museum's entrance.

Additionally, in December 2025, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) authorized the reallocation of funds from the fiscal 2025 Site Improvements authorization to fund two projects:

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- \$400,000 for the Pavilion at Chancellor's Point, which would demolish the Chase House to construct a timber-framed pavilion with an accessible bathroom to serve as a shelter and meeting place. This project represents a scaled-down modification of the Chancellor's Point Chase House renovation project that received authorizations of \$750,000 in fiscal 2024
- \$750,000 for infrastructure upgrades and renovations to the Branham House. The project would replace the roof, gutters, windows, doors, and HVAC system, refurbish the kitchen and bathroom, and create office space and lodging for visiting scholars.

Conversely, DBM rescinded the approval of \$600,000 for the restoration of the Westerly Complex, a residential property owned by HSMCC. The renovation was primarily to provide affordable housing for staff as well as to earn rental income, which is not an appropriate use of Site Improvements program funding intended to address infrastructure issues impacting visitors' experience at the museum.

After accounting for the rescission and reallocations, the full allocation of fiscal 2024 and 2025 authorizations by project is unclear. HSMCC should provide an updated accounting of fiscal 2024 and 2025 authorizations by project.

The Department of Legislative Services recommends the adoption of committee narrative requiring HSMCC to submit a report 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 GO bond funds as specified in the CIP, commission resources, and DGS-managed funds through the State Facility Renewal Program.

## **Agency Response**

HSMCC will adopt the committee narrative to submit a report on site improvement encumbrances and expenditures on December 1, 2026. In the interim, HSMCC will include 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

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should include a separate accounting and status of projects undertaken with GO bond funds as specified in the CIP, commission resources, and DGS-managed funds through the State Facility Renewal Program.

## Summary of Out-year State-owned Projects

- ***New Collections Storage and Maintenance Facility:*** This project will demolish two buildings and construct a new facility for HSMCC's Research and Collections department and its Facilities Maintenance department. The facility will include climate-controlled storage for museum collections, as well as general storage, offices, and vehicle maintenance space. The estimated cost of this project in the 2026 CIP is \$15.2 million in GO bonds, an increase of \$1.8 million from the 2025 CIP estimate. HSMCC should discuss its plan to address storage issues before the project is complete.

## Agency Response

If necessary, HSMCC will temporarily house collections in spaces within Anne Arundel Hall that were not intended for long-term collections storage. These include the building's library (the primary meeting space for the Department of Research and Collections), the Study Collection (the Department of Research and Collections' primary teaching space), and potentially employee offices. These measures will be taken to ensure that the collection remains within a climate-controlled environment with temperature and relative humidity monitoring in place; this is a requirement of HSMCC's Collections Management Policy, aligns with industry standards, and is necessary to maintain HSMCC's accreditation with the American Alliance of Museums.

In a worst case scenario in which the collection's growth outpaces both the progress of this capital project and HSMCC's ability to temporarily utilize non-standard collections storage spaces within Anne Arundel Hall, small portions of the collection could be loaned on a short-term basis to the Maryland Archaeological Conservation (MAC) Laboratory at Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum. HSMCC has discussed this potentiality with MAC Lab staff who agree a short-term solution could be reached if absolutely necessary.

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