



LETTER FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

Greetings!

Since the start of 2026, we have been reflecting on the past year and the work we have accomplished together. At our fall retreat, the MAHDC Board of Directors reviewed not only our programs, but also the unanticipated challenges facing historic preservation across the United States. These challenges stem from unexpected shifts in the application of preservation guidelines and long-established practices, as well as changes in the level of support for long-standing heritage programs.

In Maryland, we are fortunate to benefit from a strong preservation ethos supported by clear policies and guidelines. Our statewide framework includes dedicated institutions such as the Maryland Department of Planning, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT), along with its affiliates—Jefferson Patterson Park, the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture (MCAAHC), the Banneker-Douglass-Tubman Museum, the network of National Heritage Areas Programs, and our well-developed system of Certified Local Governments and Historic Preservation/District Commissions.

To guide the protection and conservation of Maryland's cultural and natural heritage, MHT released its long-term strategic plan, *Heritage 2031*, in 2024. MAHDC was pleased to contribute to its development and is now updating its own long-term plan to align with and support Heritage

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REFLECTIONS ON MAIN STREET CONFERENCES Then and Now

By Ruth Davis-Rogers, Cumberland CLG Staff

Attending the 2025 Main Street Now Conference in Philadelphia was a chance to learn, connect, and recharge with like-minded leaders from across the country committed to revitalizing their communities. What began as the National Main Street Center has grown into Main Street America, and these conferences have become essential for those leading preservation-based economic development efforts nationwide.



Cumberland Main Street 2025 attendees. Photographer: Ruth Davis-Rogers

For me, it was also a moment of reflection. My career began in Kansas, leading a Small Cities Demonstration Program—an early pilot of the National Trust designed for towns under 5,000. I attended my first Main Street Conference, then called the National Town Meeting, in 1989 in Austin, Texas. Since then, the evolution has been striking, both in the diversity of participants and the depth of the programming.

Originally, Main Street conferences focused heavily on educational basics, educating communities about the "Four Points" of the Main Street Approach. Over time, these points have evolved and become more sophisticated and data-driven. For example:

Economic Vitality has expanded beyond simple business recruitment to supporting a resilient, diverse economy.

Design now considers not just making individual buildings pretty, but the overall experience and function of the district.

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**ABOUT THE MARYLAND
ASSOCIATION OF HISTORIC DISTRICT
COMMISSIONS**

Since 1979, the mission of the Maryland Association of Historic District Commissions (MAHDC) has been to provide advocacy, training and program support for historic district/preservation commissions and local governments across the state.

MAHDC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and sponsorships are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law (Please contact your tax professional about this).

For additional information, please contact:
Leslie L. Gottert, Executive Director
director@mahdc.org

Thank you for your support!

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Letter from the Board President

2031 wherever possible. Central to this effort is our mission to provide training, guidance, and support to members of Historic Preservation and Historic District Commissions across Maryland.

We look forward to collaborating with our preservation partners in the coming year and welcome your thoughts on how MAHDC can best serve you and your community as you continue your efforts to steward Maryland's built and natural heritage resources.

Thank you for your continued support!

Frederick C. Stachura, J.D.
MAHDC Board President

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Reflections: Then and Now

Promotion has grown from simple advertising techniques into integrated branding strategies that foster a unified downtown identity.

Organization has become more adaptive, evolving from strict committee structures to more flexible, results-focused models.

After four decades of work, the results speak for themselves. Many communities and commercial corridors are still relevant because of the Main Street program. I've personally observed this program helping countless communities find their new identity, breathe new life into historic buildings, and weather economic cycles. It's not easy and it takes commitment from communities, but it does produce results. This conference was a powerful reminder of that enduring impact and why this program continues to matter. ■

DO YOU KNOW THE NATIONAL TRUST'S MAIN STREET AMERICA PROGRAM?

Here is a link to a recent article about the program by Erin Barnes, about what she has learned during her first two years as Main Street President and CEO: <https://rb.gy/njldz>



Erin Barnes has spent her first two years at Main Street America traveling to communities across the network.
Photo courtesy of Erin Barnes



Photo courtesy of Downtown Sykesville Connection

BREAKING NEWS!!

Sykesville has been recognized as one of the top three 2026 Great American Main Streets!

<https://tinyurl.com/2ear5dwv>

The Downtown Sykesville Connection Announced as 2026 GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET AWARD SEMIFINALIST

..... By Kevin Rubenstein, Town Planner of Sykesville

Each year, a national jury of industry professionals and local leaders review the applications of standout Main Street programs seeking the Great American Main Street Award (GAMSA), Main Street America’s award for excellence in fostering preservation-based revitalization efforts through the Main Street Approach™.

Receiving the Great American Main Street Award is a significant achievement in the Main Street Movement. Since the award’s establishment in 1995, only 115 of over 2000 Main Street programs have been acknowledged as GAMSA-winning communities.

Many Main Street programs create multi-year plans to develop a strong application based on outcomes that have made meaningful impacts in their local communities. Organizations are familiar with the selection criteria — strength of the Main Street program in spurring community transformation, commitment to historic preservation, innovative programming, implementation of cross-sector partnerships, community outreach and stakeholder engagement, and ensuring their downtown districts are for everyone — and build towards this opportunity to be recognized.

After careful consideration and deliberation, eight organizations have been selected as semifinalists for this prestigious award, and we are one of them! ■



Photo courtesy of Downtown Sykesville Connection

A LINK TO THE FULL POST FROM THE DOWNTOWN SYKESVILLE CONNECTION CAN BE FOUND HERE:

<https://www.downtownsykesville.com/2025/10/04/22264/the-downtown-sykesville-connection-announced-as-2026-great-american-main-street-award-semifinalist/>

CONTRACTOR PROFILE: T. David Bell, FAIA, LEED AP, of BELL Architects

..... By Chris Berger

Since its founding in 1999, Washington, D.C.-based BELL Architects has tackled a number of challenging historic preservation projects in the region.

In recent years, the firm served as lead architect for the replacement of the copper roof on the United States Naval Academy Chapel. The reinforced concrete dome on the Annapolis landmark had leaked since it was constructed in 1908, and the Navy's piecemeal repairs over the years always failed. "We took a more scientific approach and said, 'Let's analyze it and figure out what the real cause is and address that before we go too far,'" said T. David Bell, the firm's founder and principal. BELL's team included surveyors who rappelled the dome to document the infiltration troublespots and conservators who tested deteriorated materials in laboratories. Laser scans and thermal images also were completed to collect data and inform the design solution.

The new roof on the dome closely matches the building's original ornamental copper with the addition of a few minor elements such as copper-clad skylights. "We thought it was important to have natural light in the main sanctuary, but we didn't think it was appropriate to have water coming into it so we came up with some very detailed copper solutions to get that to be watertight and fit with the character of the dome," he said. The firm received the 2023 Award for Religious Architecture: Restoration from the Partners for Sacred Places, among other recognitions, for its efforts.

In one of its most unique projects, BELL Architects redesigned the interpretation of the ice well at Gadsby's Tavern in Alexandria, Virginia. The 18th-century well is a rare surviving example of its kind in an urban setting. It initially had been exposed for public view in the 1970s and was overdue for a refresh to address safety and stormwater management issues. "We opened it up and introduced passive ventilation so when you stand at the glass you can actually feel the coolness—especially in summer," Bell said. "And we created a stone amphitheater to give the folks the idea of an eroded stone due to water over time." Stone inscriptions tastefully and sufficiently explain the history of the site above where visitors can peer into the subterranean space.

BELL Architect's preservation ethos extends to its designs for new construction. "We don't want to create a building that everyone hates and is hard to tear down," Bell said. "The idea is that even before 50 years old people want to consider it worthy of preservation and designation." ■



Naval Academy Dome. *Photographer: Anice Hoachlander/Courtesy of BELL Architects*



Gadsby's Tavern Ice Well. *Photographer: Anice Hoachlander/Courtesy of BELL Architects*



Closeup of Gadsby's Tavern Ice Well. *Photographer: Anice Hoachlander/Courtesy of BELL Architects*

For more information on



visit their website at

<https://www.bellarchitects.com>

Maryland-based Company Leads Restoration of DISTRICT'S HISTORICAL CALL BOXES

By Malik E. Wilson, III



22nd Street & Decatur Street NW
BEFORE RESTORATION
Photographer: Mark Rudden



22nd Street & Decatur Street NW
AFTER RESTORATION
Photographer: Mark Rudden

The restored Call Boxes seen throughout Washington, D.C. today are not only remnants of the reliable networks of fire and police services set up across the District in the mid-1800s, but also beautiful additions to the streetscape. Since the 1860s, hundreds of these call boxes were an integral part of civic safety. Connected by long underground cables, the cables formed a telegraph network that alerted firemen and policemen. But by the 1970s, new technologies had made the police and fire boxes obsolete. The boxes were abandoned and fell into disrepair.

Today, efforts to rehabilitate these boxes can be seen all over Washington, DC. Maryland-based Chevy Chase Exteriors, a leader in restoration-focused preservation, was contracted to lead the Sheridan-Kalorama Call Box Restoration Project. The project, organized by Betty Kotcher and Holly Sukenik, successfully restored 16 historic call boxes in the Kalorama neighborhood to their original design. Each call box was sandblasted to its bare metal, treated with a cold galvanizing compound, and covered by two coats of industrial epoxy. Once dried, the boxes were hand-finished with 23 karat gold leaf and sealed to protect them from the elements.

Now restored, one gets a sense not only of the utility of the call boxes but also of their beauty. The pride of urban connection, the infrastructure of safety, and the pleasant functionality of the call box system are seen in their original glory. ■

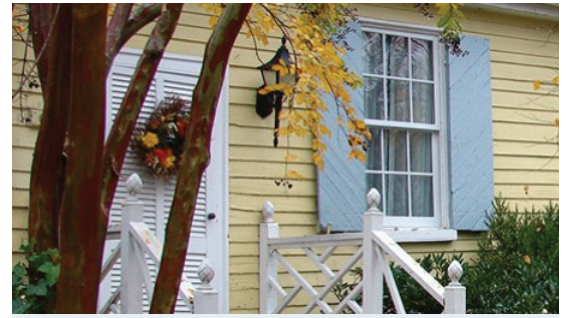


22nd Street & Decatur Street NW
BEFORE RESTORATION
Photographer: Mark Rudden



22nd Street & Decatur Street NW
AFTER RESTORATION
Photographer: Mark Rudden

MAHDC NEWS



THANKS TO RETIRING MAHDC DIRECTORS

The MAHDC Board of Directors would like to express its gratitude to the following directors who retired in 2025 for their dedicated service:



GAVER NICHOLS

a practicing architect, who contributed his talents in the area of fundraising during his tenure as a director.



SHEILA BASHIRI

past Vice-president, who recently retired as Preservation Planner with the City of Rockville and plans to move out-of-state.



TABITHA GOLD

past Graduate Student Member and then director, who has increased responsibilities with the National Park Service.

We thank them for their years of service to MAHDC and wish them well in their future efforts in the preservation field.

MAHDC depends on the support of our members, dedicated commissioners and individuals who understand that preservation, at its most vibrant and compelling, takes place locally.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS INCLUDE:

- Access to MAHDC training programs at the discounted membership rates.
- Subscription to MAHDC's new semi-annual e-newsletter.
- Participation in a professional network of historic preservation commissioners, preservation professionals and grassroots activists.

PLEASE JOIN US!

For information about MAHDC membership, please contact Leslie Gottert, Executive Director, at director@mahdc.org.

OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE!

MAHDC is expanding its Executive Board and seeking several dynamic new Directors to carry forward its mission in 2026 and beyond.

If you are interested in serving in this capacity, please contact Leslie Gottert, Executive Director at director@mahdc.org for information about the board member responsibilities.

Thank you!