

Maryland Environmental Trust  
Board of Trustees Open Meeting Minutes  
September 11, 2023

**Trustees Present:**

Gary Burnett, Chair

Greg Bowen, Vice Chair

Mark Hoffman, Treasurer

Thomas (Toby) Lloyd

Megan Benjamin

Nathan Volke

Diana Conway

Susanne Richards

Hilary Bell (representing the Governor of Maryland who is an ex-officio trustee)

Megan D'Arcy

Tom Prevas

**Trustees Absent:**

Lori Lynch

Craig Highfield

Keith Colston

Megan D'Arcy

**Others Present:**

John Turgeon, Director, Maryland Environmental Trust (MET Staff)

Michelle Grafton (MET Staff)

Josette Markline (MET Staff)

Kelly Price (MET Staff)

Wendy Foster (MET Staff)

Cindy Hoffmann (MET Staff)

Justyn Pinkney (MET Staff)

Talley Kovacs, Assistant Attorney General (Office of Attorney General)

**I. Call to Order**

Chair Gary Burnett called the regular meeting of the MET Board of Trustees to order at 4:10 p.m.

## **II. Minutes of the May 1, 2023 Regular Meeting**

**Chair Bowen called for a motion to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of the Board of Trustees held on June 5, 2023. Vice Chair Bowen motioned to approve the minutes; Ms. Benjamin seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**

## **III. Chair's Report**

- A. A presentation was given by Ms. Rachel Marks, with the Maryland DNR's Chesapeake and Coastal Service. DNR has developed a large suite of geospatial data that allows for identification of conservation and restoration opportunities, as well as prioritization of opportunities based on relative value of existing or potential co-benefits. Together these datasets can be used to strategically guide natural resource planning and management activities to maximize return on investment by targeting and prioritizing projects with highest potential co-benefits. In the presentation Ms. Marks discussed the analysis of conservation and restoration opportunities, co-benefits, and climate resilience across Maryland Environmental Trust easements.
- B. Chair Burnett summarized MET's Advisory Council (MET Bylaws Art. IV)

**Chair Burnett called for a motion to approve Josh Hastings, Executive Director, Forever Maryland, and Sara Knebel, Chair, Forever Maryland, to be appointed to the MET Advisory Council and to serve on the Land Trust Outreach Committee. Vice Chair Bowen motioned to approve; Ms. Benjamin seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**

## **IV. Director's Report**

Mr. Turgeon summarized the Director's Report that was distributed to the Board prior to the meeting. Mr. Turgeon pointed out that MET's Managing for Results report was recently submitted to the DNR. He noted that the Director's Report includes some of the data that MET reported on. Namely the number of new conservation easements recorded in FY23, the number of acres conserved by those easements, as well as the number of easement interests monitored. He noted that it "was a very solid year" for MET in those categories, pointing out that eleven new easements were recorded, protecting 1,255 new acres. It was noted that this marks the fourth year in a row that MET has surpassed the annual protected acreage goal of 1,000. Mr. Turgeon stated that FY 23 was also a record year for the number of easement interests monitored. Over 900 monitoring visits were conducted on the 1,320 interests held by MET.

Mr. Turgeon discussed the KMB program and noted that the MOU was signed with the Chesapeake Bay Trust (CBT) for administering the grant program. He noted that the application period for the grants opened on September 1, 2023 and will close on November 15, 2023. MET will approve the grants at the February 2024 Board meeting and recipients will be awarded on March 20, 2024. Mr. Turgeon reviewed the grant funding for this year.

Mr. Turgeon informed the Board that the 30th annual Maryland Land Conservation Conference will be held on October 4-5, 2023. MET will be honored at the conference for its major role with the event throughout those years. The conference is being held at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Annapolis and he highly encourages Trustees to attend. For more information, please visit [https://forevermaryland.org/2023-mlcc\\_annapolis](https://forevermaryland.org/2023-mlcc_annapolis). Mr. Turgeon noted that Ann Carlson will be a presenter on the topic *Drafting Tomorrow's Conservation Easements to Change the Future*.

#### IV. **Committee Reports**

##### A. **Lands**

Ms. Benjamin reported that the committee met on August 30, 2023.

##### **Consent Agenda**

*Proposed new conservation easements to MET*

- a. Proposed grant of easement from Jo Bounds Reed, Trustee of the Reed Trust UDT dated March 10, 2008, on 35.942 acres in Wicomico County with Lower Shore Land Trust
- b. Proposed grant of easement from Douglas D. and Susan K. West on 106.66 acres in Kent County with Eastern Shore Land Conservancy.

**Ms. Benjamin moved for approval of the consent agenda as stated. Chair Burnett seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**

Mr. Turgeon stated that Ms. Carlson and Ms. Markline recently attended the annual Land Trust Alliance Rally. He reported that the easement program completed 2 new conservation easement projects so far in FY24 totaling approximately 620 acres. He also reported that staff received fifteen requests for amendments to conservation easements to include IRS Safe Harbor language. Eight such easement amendments were recorded by the required deadline of July 24, 2023.

Ms. Markline reported that an offer was made to a selected candidate for the long-term contractual position in the Stewardship Program. She noted that staff will soon be conducting interviews for two full-time Natural Resources Planner III positions. One position will be assigned to the Stewardship program and the other to the Easement program. Ms. Markline acknowledged her recent promotion to Stewardship Program Manager and thanked the Trustees for their support.

Ms. Markline gave a brief overview of the projects that the Stewardship team has been working on, She also discussed her presentation on MET's new field monitoring tool at the LTA Rally.

Mr. Pinkney introduced himself and mentioned that he is grateful for the opportunity to work at MET. Mr. Pinkney is with the Chesapeake Bay Trust - Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps., and will be working with the Stewardship team until August of 2024.

## **B. Governance**

Ms. Bell and Mr. Turgeon gave a brief overview of the Green Space Equity Advisory Board and the Advisory Committee to the Rural Legacy Board.

**Mr. Lloyd called for a motion to approve the recommendation of Keith Colston as MET's representative on the Green Space Equity Advisory Board. Ms. Conway made the motion; seconded by Chair Burnett. All voted in favor.**

Vice Chair Bowen excused himself from the meeting.

**Mr. Lloyd called for a motion to approve the recommendation of Greg Bowen as MET's representative for the Advisory Committee to the Rural Legacy Board. Ms. Benjamin moved the motion; Ms. Bell seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**

Mr. Bowen returned to the meeting, after the votes were taken.

Mr. Lloyd noted that the committee continues to pursue filling the vacant Board seats including ex-officio trustee designations.

## **C. Finance**

Mr. Hoffman referred to the financial statements distributed prior to the meeting. He specifically called attention to MET's FY23 budget of \$142,000.00 in private side funds. A total of just over \$117,000.00 was spent in FY23, well within the budget allowance, and stated that the remainder of the allowance will remain in the account to be reinvested for future use.

**Mr. Hoffman requested a motion to approve the above mentioned financial statements. Mr. Lloyd made motion to approve. The motion was seconded by Chair Burnett. All voted in favor.**

Mr. Hoffman referred to the budget Compilation Report issued by CliftonLarsonAllen LLP. The report was emailed to the Trustees prior to the meeting for review. Mr. Hoffman indicated that this report covers the years ending 2022 and 2021 and that it did not mention any matters of concern.

**Mr. Hoffman called for a motion to approve the Financial Compilation Report for years ended June 2022 and 2021. Ms. Benjamin motioned to approve; Chair Burnett seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**

Mr. Hoffman presented a draft letter, addressed to Governor Wes Moore from MET's board chair, advocating for support of the funding provisions named in the recently passed Maryland the Beautiful Act (SB470) legislation. The Finance Committee approved the letter, advising that it's important to have a written request from MET's Board of Trustees that expresses the need for the funding in SB470 so MET can implement the programs established by the bill.

**Mr. Hoffman requested a motion for approval to submit the proposed letter, upon making the minor changes discussed, advocating for including the funding outlined in the Maryland the Beautiful Act in the Administration's FY25 Budget. Vice Chair Bowen motioned to approve; Ms. Benjamin seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**

A discussion was held regarding the source of origin for the amount of money in the bill and provisions of the bill. It was suggested that the letter should state that the money being advocated for is new funding. The suggestion was agreed upon and will be noted in the final letter.

#### **D. Land Trust Outreach**

Mr. Bowen stated that a new Cooperative Agreement request was made by Verde Preservation, Inc. The LTOC Committee members, at their last meeting, discussed the agreement and came to the decision that further deliberation is needed in order to move forward with approving the request.

Mr. Bowen provided the Trustees with an update of ongoing projects that staff is working on. He stated that 42% of MET easement interests were monitored by local land trusts.

Mr. Bowen discussed the success of the Land Trust Roundtable event held on June 28, 2023. He stated that there were 58 representatives from 34 organizations in attendance. He shared that he has received a great amount of positive feedback about the event.

Mr. Bowen noted that Land Trust Assistance Program staff recently redesigned MET's traditional Land Marks newsletter.

## **VI. Other Business**

There was no new business discussed.

## **VII. Adjournment**

**Chair Burnett called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Vice Chair Bowen made the motion; Mr. Hoffman seconded. All voted in favor of adjourning the meeting.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:06 p.m.