

**Critical Area Commission
Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays**

**January 14, 2026
Project Committee Minutes**

Committee Members in Attendance: *Roberson (Co-Chair), Bland, Bradford, Gost, Grant, R. Hance, Morgan, Palma, Patel, Roche*

Guests: Carmen Chalmers (WSSC), Dominique Calderin (Wiles Mensch/for WSSC), Imad Sheikh (Wiles Mensch/for WSSC), Alex Baldowski (USACE), Amanda Penafiel (MDTA), Angie Sowers (USACE), Christi Bishop (SMC), Gene Burroughs, Joe Bieberich (USACE), Marguerite Cardenuto, Maura Morris, McKenzie Fei, Stacy Clements, Wayne Hunt, Paul Nevenglosky

1. Welcome and Roll Call:

- Commissioner Roberson read the standard statement for virtual meetings, noting that the meeting was being streamed live to the public and that captioned minutes would be made available on the Commission's website.
- Dr. Nick Kelly opened the meeting with a roll call and noted there was a quorum. He also noted that the meeting was being recorded.

2. Approval of Minutes from December 3, 2025

- Motion to Approve: Commissioner Palma
- Second: Commissioner Rosa Hance
- Vote: All voted in favor of approving. The minutes were approved.

3. VOTE – APPROVAL REQUESTED: Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT)– Maryland Port Administration (MPA) – James Island Restoration
Presenter: Jamileh Soueidan. Recommend approval with conditions.

Ms. Soueidan presented for vote in accordance with the staff report, the contents of which are incorporated into and made part of the minutes. MDOT MPA requests approval to restore remote island habitat at James Island. This project is the larger of two island restoration projects associated with the Mid-Chesapeake Bay Island Ecosystem Restoration Project.

Discussion:

Commissioner Roche asked about the rationale for not restoring the original footprint. **Angie Sowers (USACE)** explained that James and Barren Islands were evaluated as a single system. The larger capacity was consolidated at James Island to minimize environmental impacts at Barren Island, particularly to protect submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) beds.

Chair Fisher asked about the composition of the shoreline (rock vs. living shoreline). USACE clarified that while southern exposures require armoring for containment, they are evaluating "engineering with nature" techniques such as lowered sills, tombolos, and reef structures for other sections to enhance habitat connectivity.

VOTE:

- **Motion to approve with condition:** Commissioner Palma
- **Second:** Commissioner Gost

- **Motion passed unanimously.**

4. INFORMATION ONLY – Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) – Anacostia Depot Reconfiguration

Presenter: Annie Sekerak

Ms. Sekerak presented for information only in accordance with the memo, the contents of which are incorporated into and made part of the minutes. WSSC is requesting preliminary feedback from the Project Committee regarding the proposed redevelopment of the Anacostia Depot properties in Hyattsville. The project entails the construction of a new administration building, storage building, guard booth, radio tower building, storage shed, and material bins. The project exceeds the thresholds for review under an existing Memorandum of Understanding between WSSC and the Critical Area Commission due to the overall limits of disturbance and potential proposed impacts to the 100-foot Buffer.

Suggested discussion items include the following:

- Potential design alternatives, if necessary, due to the given flood risk for the project and its location within the 100-year floodplain;
- Mitigation options to offset Buffer impacts and tree clearing; and
- Further explanation of stormwater management to offset development impacts.

Discussion:

Dominique Calderin (WSSC) detailed the stormwater plan, which includes six BMPs (bioretention and storm filters) and a green roof. The systems are designed with bypasses to function during flood events.

Chair Fisher and **Commissioner Hance** expressed concern regarding the extent of impervious surface. WSSC explained that the parking volume is necessary for emergency and utility vehicles and that they are relocating operations away from railroad tracks rather than expanding capacity significantly.

Commissioner Hance and **Science Advisor Claudia Jones** noted the inclusion of invasive species (e.g., *Nandina*/Heavenly Bamboo) in the landscape plan. The Commission strongly recommended that WSSC revise the plan to use native species exclusively, particularly for mitigation and within the buffer. WSSC agreed to this revision.

5. INFORMATION ONLY – St. Mary’s County – Elms Beach Park Development Improvements

Presenter: Michael Macon

Mr. Macon presented for information only in accordance with the memo, the contents of which are incorporated into and made part of the minutes. St. Mary’s County is requesting preliminary feedback from the Project Committee regarding proposed development improvements to Elms Beach, a waterfront access park located in Lexington Park. The county wishes to expand existing parking, construct new restrooms, renovate an existing pavilion, replace an existing playground, construct Americans with Disability Act (ADA) – compliant

boardwalks and walkways, build picnic pads, and construct stormwater management devices. Due to Buffer impacts, the project will require Conditional Approval under COMAR 27.02.06.

Suggested discussion items include:

- Potential design alternatives to reduce overall impacts, such as:
 - Relocating areas of lot coverage outside the Buffer;
 - Reducing canopy coverage cleared; and
 - Redesigning pathways to align with the Critical Area Commission's Public Pathways Guidance; and
- Offsite options that the County can provide to meet mitigation requirements, since onsite mitigation appears to be infeasible.

Discussion:

Commissioner Hance inquired about relocating the parking area outside the buffer. Specifically, she did not want the playground to be destroyed for the sake of the planned parking. She also suggested educational signage at new parking. Ms. Bishop commented that the playground is well beyond its lifespan and needs to be replaced despite how it may look.

Committee Chair Roberson asked about expanding the use of permeable pavers. **Wayne Hunt (Consultant – LSR)** explained that high water tables and poor soil infiltration limit the feasibility of permeable pavers at this site, as they require underdrains to prevent failure.

The County requested guidance on prioritizing impacts when a site is squeezed between the Buffer and FIDS habitat. Staff and Science Advisor Jones advised that there is no default preference; decisions must be site-specific based on the quality and connectivity of the respective habitats.

The Commission suggested exploring off-site mitigation opportunities at the adjacent Elms Environmental Education Center, though the County noted that distinct management and lease timelines make immediate coordination difficult.

Next Project Committee meeting will be held on February 25, 2026.