



Meeting Minutes

August 13, 2025

3:00 pm – 4:30 pm

Location: SOS Temporary offices (17 Elkins Lane, Augusta, ME) and Zoom

Commission Members Present:

Secretary Shenna Bellows (Chair), Beth Lambert, Bernard Fishman, Kirk Mohny, Annina Breen (for Matthea Daughtry), Peter Merrill, Christian Cotz, Julia Gray, Alison Maxell (for Lori Fisher), Jamie Rice

Commission Members Absent:

Earle Shettleworth, Lori Fisher, Abbe Levin, Richard LaBelle, Gregory Pierce (for Governor Mills), Libby Bischof

Staff in Attendance:

Sarah Hansen, Kate McBrien

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Pat Claus, Bertie Williams, Cathy Moison, Frank Rodriguez, Marie Yarborough, Penelope Hamblin, Valerie Lamot, Lauren Webster, Dan Glover, Candis Joyce, Shavaun Rigler, Judy Weisman, Julie Potter-Dunlap

Welcome

Secretary of State Shenna Bellows opened the meeting and confirmed a quorum. Secretary Bellows welcomed the commissioners and guests, noted the presence of non-voting participants, and proceeded with the meeting.

Approval of June 11, 2025, Meeting Minutes

The minutes from the June 11th meeting were reviewed. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Kirk Mohny and seconded by Christian Cotz. With no discussion, objections, or abstentions, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Federal Updates

Sarah updated the Commission on federal activities following her participation in the America 250 State & Territory Convening in Washington, D.C. The gathering brought together approximately 100 representatives from state and territorial commissions. Sarah reported that America 250 and Task Force 250 are now mostly operating as a combined effort, despite America 250's original role as an independent and bipartisan body. America 250 has assumed nearly all of Task Force 250's initiatives, apart from America Prays. Few concrete details were provided on upcoming national programs, which has left many state coordinators, including Maine, seeking greater clarity about expectations and coordination.

Sarah discussed the initiative Our American Story, a traveling Airstream trailer that records interviews with members of the public on themes such as "What does freedom mean to you?" The trailer is scheduled to be in Portland on Thursday, June 20. Event details remain in development, and organizers have indicated they intend to conduct several in-depth interviews while in Maine, but details remain sparse.

Regarding funding, Sarah reported that no federal funding will be provided to state commissions. Corporate sponsors, such as Walmart, Coca-Cola, and Chrysler, among others, are supporting national-level activities only. America 250 emphasized that it is not a re-granting organization and that states should not expect direct financial support. Secretary Bellows reminded those in attendance and members of the public that the Maine Semiquincentennial Commission operates independently of the federal America 250 Commission. Maine participates in federal convenings to stay informed, but state programs and planning are developed separately to reflect Maine's history and communities.

Maine Atlas Project Update

Sarah Hansen updated the Commission on the Maine Atlas Project. She reported that 156 public nominations had been received as of the morning of the meeting, with the nomination process scheduled to close on Friday, August 15, 2025. Members were encouraged to share the call for nominations within their networks to help address gaps, particularly in the categories of historic figures and historic places. Sarah explained that the project's Request for Proposals (RFP) is with state procurement and has been assigned to staff, though no additional information is available at this time. A final social media push is being coordinated to encourage last-minute submissions. In response to a request from Commission members, Sarah confirmed she will prepare and share a current list of nominations so that members may review submissions and assist in identifying areas where additional representation may be needed.

On the Road for Democracy: A Mobile Learning Experience for Maine's Commemoration of America's 250th

Secretary Bellows introduced the initiative *On the Road for Democracy: A Mobile Civic Learning Experience for Maine's Commemoration of America 250*, developed in partnership with the Maine Department of Education. Beth Lambert, Maine Department of Education, presented the proposal. The program will launch on Constitution Day, September 17, 2025, at Madison Elementary School in Somerset County and will visit one school per month throughout the academic year, with an anticipated total of 8–9 schools in the first year. Students will participate in interactive, project-based civic learning, including learning stations on topics like the Declaration of Independence, voting and elections, the role of a free press, propaganda, and civic discourse. The day will conclude with a town meeting-style debate and mock election.

Local officials will be invited to attend and speak about their civic roles. Participating schools will receive preparatory materials, and professional development opportunities will be offered to educators. The Department confirmed the program is fully funded as part of its civic education work and will be adaptable for grades K–12, with elementary schools expected to be the primary participants. Beth Lambert further confirmed that Indigenous students will be represented and included in the program, recognizing their historical role during the period of American independence. The Department anticipates continuing the program beyond the Semiquincentennial year as an ongoing civic learning model. The Commission voted unanimously to endorse *On the Road for Democracy* as an official Maine Semiquincentennial experience and approved the use of the Commission's logo on program materials. The motion was made by Bernard Fishman and seconded by Christian Cotz.

Mock Election Update

Secretary Bellows provided an update on the Office of the Secretary of State's student mock election program. She explained that the program is traditionally conducted in even-numbered years when candidates appear on the ballot, with students reviewing candidate materials and casting mock votes. The program will expand to include referendum questions. Schools will receive ballots and instructional resources, allowing teachers to conduct the exercise in classrooms or across their schools. This initiative is designed to complement the "On the Road for Democracy" mobile civic learning program, developed by the Department of Education.

Secretary Bellows reviewed the evolution of the mock election program, which has included in-person summits at the State House, distribution of pre-recorded candidate videos, and fully virtual participation during the pandemic. In recent years, local clerks have partnered with schools to bring official polling booths and ballot boxes for mock voting. The 2025 program will incorporate these approaches while piloting the new referendum and America 250 components. The Commission discussed methods for presenting balanced perspectives on the historical question and noted the opportunity to broaden access by aligning resources with the Department of Education. Julia Gray moved that the Commission endorse the America 250 mock election initiative. Christian Cotz

seconded the motion. The Commission voted unanimously in favor, endorsing the program and approving co-branding with the Office of the Secretary of State.

Brand Use and Logo Use Discussion

Secretary Bellows introduced the discussion on brand and logo use, noting that local organizations planning America 250 commemorations may request permission to use the Commission's logo. She emphasized that this matter was separate from financial support, which would be considered later under grant program discussions. Sarah presented the proposed brand and logo use policy, which had been developed after reviewing practices in other states, consulting with the Office of the Attorney General, and receiving a unanimous recommendation from the Executive Committee. The proposal outlined authorized and prohibited uses, an application process, and a licensing agreement. During the discussion, commissioners raised several clarifications. It was recommended that the policy language specify timelines for application review, noting that requests may take up to two months if elevated to the full Commission. Submissions must be received at least one week before a scheduled meeting to be placed on the agenda. Members also suggested that the FAQ explicitly state that submissions are made via email, and that it should be reiterated in both the criteria and FAQ that social media use of the logo must follow the same restrictions as other uses and cannot imply endorsement of personal views or activities.

Commissioners further discussed how the application would be made available, confirming that a link to the application form will be posted on the Commission's website and promoted through social media. Members also supported the idea of adding an option for applicants to allow their events to be included on a public calendar, with Sarah Hansen noting that website updates to support this feature are being considered for the future. Kirk Mohny made a motion, and Christian Cotz seconded. The Commission voted unanimously to adopt the brand and logo use policy with the amendments discussed. The policy authorizes staff to review and approve requests consistent with the established criteria, with the option to elevate applications to the Executive Committee or the full Commission when appropriate. Staff will provide regular reports of approvals to the Commission.

Potential Grant Program Discussion

Secretary of State Shenna Bellows opened the discussion on the development of a potential grant program, inviting Peter, Chair of the Maine State Cultural Affairs Council (CAC), to outline the concept. Peter reported that the Commission currently has no dedicated funds, except for staff support. However, the CAC has approximately \$55,000 in unspent funds from the Maine State Bicentennial license plate fund that could be directed toward a joint grant initiative. He noted that the Maine State Archives may be able to contribute a comparable amount, bringing the total pool to roughly \$100,000. The grants would be designed to support projects consistent with the Commission's pillars of connecting, sharing, and learning, and would be coordinated with the missions of the CAC's member organizations: the Maine Historical Society, Maine Humanities Council,

Maine State Archives, Maine State Library, Maine State Museum, Maine Historic Preservation Commission, and the Maine Arts Commission. Both the CAC and the State Archives would need to secure internal approvals before funds could be released, with the CAC scheduled to meet in September to consider the proposal. Christian Cotz, representing the Archives, stated that draft grant guidelines could be prepared before the CAC's September meeting to allow a framework to be presented to the Commission in October. Questions were raised regarding the scope and timeline of the initiative. It was clarified that if approvals proceed as expected, the program could be announced by the end of 2025, with awards distributed in early 2026, following the necessary state procurement process to authorize regranting.

Commissioners noted that aligning the effort with the Commission would reinforce that the funding is specifically intended to support America 250 projects across Maine. Julia Gray expressed appreciation to both the CAC and the Archives for bringing resources to support semi-quincentennial activities, noting that the combination of funds and lessons learned from past commemorations would allow for a greater impact. Secretary Bellows asked for a general sense of the Commission's support. By informal straw poll, Commissioners expressed broad agreement and enthusiasm for moving forward. Draft criteria will be prepared by Peter, Christian, and Sarah Hansen for review by the CAC in September and returned to the Commission in a special meeting in September for consideration and endorsement.

Report on National Association of Secretaries of State Event

Secretary of State Shenna Bellows closed the meeting by sharing her recent experience at the National Association of Secretaries of State conference. She noted that she and State Archivist Jamie Ritter presented together on a panel discussing preparations for the America 250 commemoration. She highlighted that Tennessee's legislature has appropriated \$7 million to support America 250 activities and is distributing "Doc Boxes" to schools—sturdy kits resembling election supply boxes that contain historical props, such as tricorne hats, powder horns, tea, curriculum materials, and children's books. These boxes are designed to bring hands-on civic and historical learning into the classroom. Secretary Bellows also described Rhode Island's initiative to plant Liberty Trees in each of its 39 municipalities, drawing inspiration from the original Liberty Tree in Boston that served as a gathering point for colonial leaders. She suggested that similar tree-planting efforts could be explored in Maine, perhaps in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry during Arbor Day. She then presented on Maine's own preparations, including the mobile civic learning unit, the mock election initiative, the Commission's work toward developing a small grants program, and the "Two Lights for Tomorrow" event as a meaningful kickoff to Maine's commemoration. She emphasized the importance of active participation by secretaries of state in leading America 250 programming and encouraged her colleagues nationally to take an active role.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:29 pm. The next regularly schedule meeting will be Wednesday, October 8, 2025.