



Meeting Minutes
September 11, 2025
12:00 pm – 12:45 pm
Location: Zoom

Commission Members Present:

Secretary Shenna Bellows (Chair), Bernard Fishman, Greg Peirce (for Governor Mills), Christian Cotz, Kate McBrien, Abbe Levin, Peter Merrill, Jamie Rice, Allison Maxwell (for Lori Fisher)

Commission Members Absent:

Earle Shettleworth, Julia Gray, Libby Bischof, Kirk Mohny

Staff in Attendance:

Sarah Hansen, Kate McBrien

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Frank Rodriguez, Kimberly Smith, Marie Yarborough, Steve Warren, Dan Glover, Cecil Gardner, Judy Weisman, Charlene Fox Clemons

Overview of the Grant Proposal

Secretary Bellows summarized the background of the proposed grant program, noting that the idea originated from an earlier Commission discussion, credited to Bernard Fishman, which proposed supporting local and historical organizations in celebration of America's 250th anniversary. Although legislation for additional state funding was introduced, it was tabled due to budget constraints. The Maine Cultural Affairs Council identified about \$55,000 in remaining Bicentennial license plate revenue and the Maine State Archives identified an additional \$55,000 to move forward with a grants program.

Peter Merrill, representing the Cultural Affairs Council, described the proposal as an opportunity to continue the successful community grant model from Maine's Bicentennial, emphasizing accessibility for smaller organizations. Bernard Fishman, Christian Cotz, and Alison Maxell each supported it, highlighting the program's ability to reach communities across the state.

Program Details

Sarah presented the grant application, which offers awards of up to \$10,000 per project with no matching funds required. Eligible entities include tribal, state, county, and municipal governments; nonprofit cultural organizations; and agencies that follow the Maine State Archives' records retention schedules. Ineligible applicants are individuals, for-profit organizations, and political or advocacy groups. Funded activities may include research, oral histories, exhibits, signage, preservation projects, public programming, and living history events. Grant reports are due by January 30, 2027.

Discussion

Richard LaBelle suggested a few corrections and ideas, including tribal entities and counties as eligible applicants, clarifying the "geographic diversity" language, and adjusting the résumé requirement also to accept a brief statement of qualifications for smaller, volunteer-based applicants. Members agreed to these updates. The discussion then considered whether to reorder the list of eligible activities. The consensus was to keep the list as it is, since it was not intended to indicate priorities.

Motion and Vote

Secretary Bellows moved to approve the Semiquincentennial Community Grant Program using the version circulated on September 10, 2025, with the following amendments: inclusion of tribal entities and counties as eligible organizations, and the option to submit a résumé or statement of qualifications. Christian Cotz seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously among those present, with one abstention by Greg Pierce.

Public Comment

Frank Rodriguez of the Machiasport Historical Society expressed appreciation for the program and shared details about a bell-ringing event scheduled for September 17 at Burnham Tavern to commemorate the signing of the U.S. Constitution. Kim Smith from the Presque Isle Historical Society thanked the Commission, noting that the application was clear and easy to complete. Daniel Glover inquired about the number of grants to be awarded and was informed that the total available pool was \$100,000, with awards of up to \$10,000 each. Marie Yarborough of Acadia National Park also expressed gratitude, emphasizing the impact the grants will have on small historical societies across the state.

Adjournment

Secretary Bellows expressed appreciation to the Cultural Affairs Council, the Maine State Archives, and the Commission members for their effort and teamwork. The meeting adjourned at 12:45 p.m.