



Meeting Minutes

April 8, 2026

2:00 pm - 3:30 pm

Location: Zoom

Commission Members Present:

Secretary Shenna Bellows (Chair), Bernard Fishman, Christian Cotz, Julia Gray, Kirk Mohny, Richard LaBelle, Peter Merrill, Amy Hausmann, Libby Bischof, Alison Maxell (for Lori Fisher)

Commission Members Absent:

Earle Shettleworth, Beth Lambert, Abbe Levin, Jamie Rice

Staff in Attendance:

Sarah Hansen, Kate McBrien

Members of the Public in Attendance:

Judy Weisman, Pat Claus, Kim Smith, Julie Potter-Dunlop, Frank Rodriguez, Marie Yarborough, Scott Craig, Michael Zwelling, Sarah Vander Schaff

Welcome

Secretary Bellows called the meeting to order and welcomed members and guests. A quorum was confirmed.

Review and approval of meeting minutes of February 11, 2026

Christian Cotz made a motion to approve the minutes, which Amy Hausman seconded. A minor typo (extra "e" in "Great") was noted and already corrected by Sarah. With no objections or abstentions, the motion passed unanimously by those present.

Maine Atlas Project Update

Sarah provided an update on the Maine Atlas (Meet Atlas) project, describing ongoing content development, image sourcing, and website construction. Sarah reported that

content writer Stephanie Bouchard has begun work; a productive meeting with Christian surfaced previously unknown video assets at the Maine State Archives; the Penobscot Marine Museum has also provided access to significant collections. Shenna invited commission members to volunteer for the subcommittee supporting the project before launch. Nearly 400 public nominations were received; results expected to go live in June

America 250 Time Capsule

Sarah recapped prior decisions and presented the current status of approved and rejected items for the America250 time capsule. The box dimensions are 6" x 5" x 2" (exterior). Items must be delivered to the Library of Congress by April 30. Sarah confirmed that a governor's letter and a poem by Poet Laureate Julia Bouwsma are approved. Rejected items included the Wabanaki bookmark, newsprint, magazine covers, and wet-strength paper. Approved materials include archival paper, a postcard-sized map, and an oyster shell/bone.

After discussion, the Commission voted unanimously to include both postcard maps (ultimate selection will be up to Christian, Libby, and Sarah), a fragment of bone from the endangered right whale (contingent on approval from NOAA and America250).

Great American State Fair

Sarah presented a detailed overview of the Great American State Fair, organized by Freedom 250 (a White House-affiliated group), to be held on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., June 25–July 5, 2026. She shared a screen with key details on expectations and costs. Sarah described the fair's structure — a 750 sq. ft. (25x30 ft.) partially enclosed pavilion, requiring at least 4 staff on-site at all times during operating hours (up to 13 hours/day). States are responsible for all costs: lodging, travel, food, exhibit creation, shipping, setup, and takedown. No Wi-Fi, no point-of-sale, no food giveaways. All content must be approved by Freedom 250. Estimated state costs range from \$250,000 to \$750,000. Operational plans were due April 20.

Greg reported that New England states had explored a coordinated response through the Big E agricultural fair in western Massachusetts, but the Big E declined. As of the meeting, no New England states had signed on. Maine's Office of Tourism estimated participation at approximately \$650,000. Greg indicated the state had effectively already signaled it would not participate.

Sarah confirmed no other New England states had formally said yes, though many were waiting to see if the fair materializes. Noted that states like Washington, Maryland, North Carolina, and Hawaii had declined due to cost. Shenna confirmed that on February 24, Sarah had formally inquired about federal funding and received a definitive written response that no federal funding is available.

Richard strongly opposed participation, citing the cost of D.C. hotels during July 4th, the lack of benefit to Maine residents, and the preference for directing any available funds to in-state projects. Made a motion to decline participation Libby seconded the motion. Noted from her academic expertise on World's Fairs that such events historically require 3 years of planning with dedicated committees. Described the Freedom 250 toolkit as 3 pages of AI-generated content with no substantive guidance. Emphasized the impossibility of producing quality content in 6 weeks.

Bernard expressed support for declining, noting the embarrassment of spending money on the fair when the Commission could not fully fund community grant requests. Greg added that content control, hotel availability, and overall feasibility of the fair itself remained serious concerns. The Commission ultimately passed a unanimous vote for Maine not to participate in the Great American State Fair. Sarah will formally notify Freedom 250, and will continue to monitor developments in the GASF to ensure that Maine is not misrepresented as a participant, etc.

Moments That Made Us Exhibit

Sarah introduced the "Moments That Made Us" downloadable, customizable, printable exhibit, developed originally by History Colorado and expanded by Western state partners, now available through the Maine Secretary of State's website. Maine is a facilitation partner. The exhibit is free, customizable via Canva templates, and available through a request form on the Secretary of State's website. Panels are 24" x 36". Sarah shared the exhibit on the Maine Archives and Museums listserv and received enthusiastic responses.

Upcoming Webinar

Announced that Liam Reardon will give a free online lecture on the Declaration of Independence on July 2nd at lunchtime, in partnership with the Maine Historical Society and Maine Humanities.

Maine Arts Commission Updates

Amy announced seven potluck dinners across Maine (Biddeford, Bethel, Bangor, St. Albans, Cobscook Institute, Van Buren, and Millinocket), running May through October/November, in partnership with Maine Humanities and Community Plate. Also announced a partnership with MOFGA and the Common Ground Fair (celebrating its 50th anniversary) to display all 50 commissioned Common Ground Fair posters at the State House starting late May, then moving to Waterville Creates in August ahead of the September fair in Unity.

Public Comment

During the Public Comment period Kim Smith shared that 24 events have already been hosted in Presque Isle, including Founders Week celebrations with 6 events in a single day — exhibits, presentations, a Betsy Ross reenactment, children's story hours, 18th-century games, candlelight tours, and the Northern Maine Regional Competition for Maine History Day.

Sarah Vander Schaff described a project piggybacking the 250th with the 50th anniversary of the Kennebunkport's historic district's entry into the National Register of Historic Places (designated in 1976). Custom garden flags are being distributed to district residents. Also described a July 5th dessert potluck with patriotic themes, featuring a Barbara Bush red, white, and blue cobbler recipe on White House stationery.

Pat Claus shared progress on a monument to Azubah Freeman Rider, a local Revolutionary War figure. An artist has created an illustration of her alerting the militia. Plans include a 7-foot granite monument (~\$30,000), a large fiberglass roadside sign on Route 15, and potentially a future bronze statue. The town manager and selectmen are fully supportive.

Frank Rodriguez described the Margareta Days Festival (June 19–20) returning to the Machias area, featuring reenactors and a Fife and Drum Corps from New Hampshire. A new "Margareta Trail" map will guide visitors to nearby Revolutionary War sites. Also reported that the Machias Historical Society has broken ground on approximately 20 acres for the future "Liberty Village" — a living history site depicting early 1800s colonial life, expected to develop over several years.

Adjournment

There being no further business in public session, the meeting was adjourned.