



Meeting Minutes

June 11, 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), Julia Gray, Kirk Mohny, Bernard Fishman, Richard LaBelle, Abbe Levin, Christian Cotz, Libby Bischof, Lori Fisher, Peter Merrill

**Commission Members Absent:**

Beth Lambert, Greg Pierce (for Governor Mills), Earle Shettleworth

**Staff in Attendance:**

Sarah Hansen, Kate McBrien

**Members of the Public in Attendance:**

Bertie Williams, Frank Rodriguez, Marie Yarborough, Pat Claus, Peggy Konitzky, Daniel Glover, Taryn Kennedy, Kimberly Smith, Janice Teasenfitz

**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 April 9, 2025, Meeting Minutes**

The minutes from the April 9th 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.

**Legislative Update**

Secretary Bellows shared that Representative Randy Greenwood's bill to allocate \$250,000 for America 250-related activities received unanimous support from the State and Local Government Committee. Although the funding has not been included in the Governor's

budget, it is currently listed on the Appropriations Table. The commission was encouraged to reach out to legislators to advocate for the funding, which is considered necessary for grants, matching funds, and event support. Secretary Bellows announced her nomination of Christian Cotz as Maine's new State Archivist, with a confirmation hearing scheduled for Friday.

### **Event Updates**

Sarah discussed recent public engagement efforts, beginning with an appearance on Maine Calling on April 16, where a panel of contributors highlighted Maine's role in the upcoming Semiquincentennial and discussed ways the public could get involved. The radio segment offered a strong platform to build awareness and reach audiences beyond the Commission's usual circles. On April 16–17, Sarah attended the Governor's Conference on Tourism, where she hosted a table to introduce the Maine Atlas Project to a broader audience. The event also featured national cultural tourism expert Cheryl Hargrove, who expressed interest in the Maine Atlas and visited sites like the Winslow Homer Studio. Her feedback and engagement with Maine's historical storytelling were well-received and encouraging for future collaboration.

The Commission also reflected on the success of the "Two Lights for Tomorrow" commemorative event held statewide on April 18. In Augusta, a public reading of Paul Revere's Ride by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was held at Capitol Park, followed by a symbolic lantern lighting. Portland hosted a gathering at the Eastern Cemetery, attended by over 60 people, where community members read selections from the Longfellow poem as the Portland Observatory's lights were illuminated. Other towns, including Lincoln, Presque Isle, Hampden, Thomaston, and Machiasport, held their creative observances ranging from student reenactments of Paul Revere's ride to illuminating key landmarks and historic buildings. Commissioners shared that the events revealed strong local enthusiasm and a public appetite for history-focused community engagement.

The Commission discussed the idea of outreach to Maine's municipalities to learn more about upcoming iconic local celebrations and community events, so that we can amplify/share as a collective celebration of pride of place.

### **Federal Updates**

Sarah Hansen updated the Commission on recent changes within the national America250 organization. Since early 2025, the organization has experienced significant staff turnover, and it has pivoted away from its initial focus on storytelling and public history. The current priorities now include a national military parade and two flag-based initiatives: one aiming

to create the world's most significant American flag in Washington, D.C., and another involving a series of large flags traveling around the country. There is concern that these new national priorities shift focus away from community-centered, educational programming. The Commission agreed that Maine should continue to pursue its local goals.

### **The Spirit of America Event**

In response to a proposal led by Hawaii's Commission to hold a synchronized nationwide reading of the Declaration of Independence on July 8, 2026, the date it was first distributed publicly, the Commission voted unanimously to participate. A motion was made by Richard LaBelle and seconded by Abbe Levin, with no opposition or abstentions. The Commission discussed coordinating the event at historically significant sites in Maine, such as the Maine Historical Society and Hallowell, both of which house original versions of the Declaration of Independence.

### **Maine Atlas Project Updates**

Sarah provided an update on the Maine Atlas Project, stating that the Request for Proposals (RFP) had been drafted and was under review by the procurement specialist in the Secretary of State's office. Although the RFP is not expected to be released until after the end of the fiscal year, early public engagement efforts have already begun. A soft launch of the nomination process took place at the Governor's Conference on Tourism through a QR code, which allowed participants to submit nominations for consideration in the Maine Atlas. Since then, nominations have continued to be collected from communities across the state.

To expand outreach, a full episode of *Maine Calling* will be dedicated to the Maine Atlas Project on June 30 at 11:00 a.m. The episode will feature Sarah Hansen alongside Bill Green, and additional participants are expected. The segment will invite the public to share their ideas and further boost participation in the nomination process. The Commission was encouraged to spread awareness and promote submissions within their networks.

### **Brand/Logo Use Discussion**

Commissioner Richard LaBelle initiated a discussion questioning whether the Commission had formally provided financial sponsorship to the Dawnland Festival. Richard's inquiry initiated a discussion about the Commission's role in funding decisions. Kate responded that the State Archives serves as the Commission's administrative home and fiscal agent. Commission members discussed the importance of a process for Commission approval for financial sponsorship. Discussion centered around the

difference between brand use and sponsorship, and what processes were in place for approval vs. what needs to be expanded and updated, and how to keep the process as simple as possible for applicants. Labelle made a motion to place a moratorium on financial sponsorships until criteria for approval can be adopted by the Commission. A friendly amendment was made to the motion to excepting the Dawnland Festival of Arts & Ideas to the motion to place a moratorium on financial sponsorships until criteria for approval can be adopted by the Commission. The motion failed. The discussion concluded with consensus that Sarah would update brand use procedures and bring to the next Commission meeting for review after approval by the Executive Committee.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 4:28 PM. The next meeting is scheduled for August 13, 2025, from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.