



Strategic Plan 2024 - 2028

Connecting the past to the present,
country to town, and people to nature.



Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway 2024-2028 Strategic Plan

Heritage Area Mission

The Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway:

- Encourages a greater understanding of the significant role that the Susquehanna River, the Upper Bay, and its people have played in our nation's history.
- Supports the development of the area's distinct regional identity as a tourist destination centered around its waterfront communities and vast natural resources.
- Supports quality of life, environmental stewardship, and social diversity in partnership with local, state, national, and corporate partners.

Heritage Area Five-Year Vision

Working with local and regional collaborators the Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway will increase public access to natural and cultural resources of the river and bay by fostering connections between tourists, residents, heritage attractions and riverfront communities. In addition, it will provide leadership, technical assistance, and advocacy to stimulate and expand recreational and economic opportunities that enhance the quality of life.

Impact Statement

Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway increases economic activity in the region by creating opportunities for small business development, job growth, and a stronger tax base by supporting activities associated with tourism.

Core Values

Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway believes in:

- Connecting people to the land, water, their histories, and each other.
- Promoting economic vitality.
- Providing access to nature, recreational opportunities, and enjoyment of the outdoors.
- Advocating for thriving and healthy communities.
- Balancing environmental stewardship with sustainable development.
- Preserving the Upper Bay, Susquehanna River, and larger Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- Encouraging constructive conversations toward equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility goals.
- Taking an active role in advancing social equity through the support of diverse programs, collections, narratives, and resources.

Introduction

The concept of a “greenway” along the shores of the Lower Susquehanna River and Upper Chesapeake Bay in Harford and Cecil Counties began in 1992. Working together, State agencies, local governments, and corporate partners proposed a community partnership to shape the Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway (LSHG). The initial effort centered around the development of a looping trail network, that would link the small communities along the river with the area’s numerous heritage resources and abundant recreational opportunities. The importance of telling the story of the Susquehanna River valley and the Upper Bay quickly emerged as a way to support economic development, encourage heritage tourism, and promote environmental stewardship.

With the passage of the House Bill 1, in 1996, the Maryland General Assembly established the Maryland Heritage Area Authority (MHAA), and shortly thereafter the Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway became a designated Heritage Area.

Since becoming a Heritage Area, the LSHG has worked at the grassroots level and beyond to continue the mission of the Greenway by sharing the stories of the area and linking these to national initiatives. Over \$27 million in grants have been acquired to support the efforts of our heritage partners, and this has resulted in the completion of numerous land and water-based projects. Ranging from efforts to protect, improve, or stabilize historic structures and museums to trail building, environmental stewardship, outdoor recreation, and educational exhibits and events each effort contributes to enhancing the heritage tourism experience. Development of the Heritage Area also provides for economic development in our three waterfront communities as the opportunities to experience the Lower Susquehanna River and the Upper Chesapeake Bay continue to improve and expand.

This LSHG Five-Year Strategic Plan (2024-2028) details the organization’s approach to continuing its support for telling the many stories of the region while linking them to broader efforts such as national trails and other regional initiatives. It serves as the foundation for strengthening the partnerships that are an integral part of the LSHG. It establishes the mission and vision for the next five years, building upon previous plans and accomplishments while identifying what the organization needs to achieve in this period to remain a thriving partner in the region’s quality of life.

The LSHG will also continue to manage a region-wide Project Spreadsheet which provides information on the efforts being undertaken by our partners as they relate to the overall LSHG mission and vision. Updates to the project list are undertaken annually.

LSHG Plan Development Process

Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway, Inc. initiated its work on the Five-Year Action Plan in April 2022 with the selection of a board-approved consultant and development process designed to meet MHAA requirements. After an official procurement process, Robert Forloney, a consultant with strong ties to multiple heritage areas, was selected to work with LSHG staff, board members and stakeholders.

Planning activities included a review of the heritage area's progress and changes against the original Management Plan, the legacy of its trail origins, and additional collateral materials such as reports, and consideration of priorities and progress related to and other relevant issues.

A robust stakeholder process was adopted to gather and prioritize input from LSHG staff and board members, close collaborators, key partners, various site representatives.

Visioning and interview sessions were conducted with the Executive Director in both large public sessions as well as intimate settings to provide more targeted conversation. These discussions focused on particular programmatic or operational aspects as well as broader visions for the organization and ways it could serve the community. Throughout the process, draft planning documents were reviewed with the LSHG Board of Directors with the final review and approval in July 2023.

Goals of the Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway (2024-2028)

Goal One - Encourage a greater understanding of the LSHG's historical, cultural, natural, and recreational attributes.

Objective 1: Support the telling of the heritage area story through attractions, programs, exhibits, and events that will appeal to an ever-growing audience.

Action Items:

1. Support the development of exhibits, interpretive panels, kiosks, displays and materials that are consistent with heritage resources.
2. Develop online trail stories about the LSHG's numerous historic and cultural resources.
3. Work with the Department of Natural Resources to develop and produce a water trail map for the Lower Susquehanna River.
4. Investigate the possibility of supporting Upper Bay regional recreational events, such as bringing the Susquehanna Sojourn to the Maryland portion of the river and working with MDTA to hold a bridge walk.

Objective 2: Support resource stewardship.

Action Items:

1. Ensure the continuation of the annual River Sweep event.
2. Continue promotion and participation in National Trail Day events.
3. Provide support for other related events and efforts.
4. Provide support for related educational opportunities.
5. Work with land trusts and other conservation organizations to preserve land within the Heritage Area.
6. Develop a trail guide to the natural resources of the LSHG area.

Objective 3: Continue to support the Greenway's infrastructure to help foster linkages among the Heritage Area's attractions.

Action Items:

1. Support wayfinding efforts to include improvements and future enhancements.
2. Improve EMS response along the trail network by coordinating the installation of GPS stations.
3. Continue to support the development of needed trail segments.
4. Continue to investigate possibilities for river crossings.
5. Support LSHG friend/partner organizations.
6. Enhance public access to water and recreational opportunities.

Objective 4: Utilize targeted marketing and outreach to attract new audiences.

Action Items:

1. Coordinate with partners, such as Great Wolf Lodge, to market the Heritage Area.

2. Work with partners to participate in special celebrations, such as Constellation Energy's 100th anniversary of the Conowingo Dam.
3. Together with the local DMOs, develop a marketing plan to enhance the LSHG.
4. Continue to utilize press releases to promote accomplishments and new features of the Greenway.

Objective 5: Develop new and educational on-line resources.

Action Items:

1. Undertake regular updates to the LSHG website to ensure that information is current and fresh.
2. Develop an inventory of "points of interest" in the Heritage Area.

Objective 6: Utilize technology to entice visitors to cultural sites and trails.

Action Items:

1. Develop virtual tour "teasers" of features and events within the Heritage Area.
2. Work to increase social media presence.

Goal Two - Continue to partner with non-profits, local businesses, and local, state, and federal agencies to improve the visitor experience, quality of life, and economic growth.

Objective 1: Provide leadership, technical assistance, and advocacy to local organizations.

Action Items:

1. Continue to provide administrative support and technical assistance for the MHAA grant program including mini grants.
2. Ensure that the partners 5-year capital and non-capital work program is updated annually.
3. Continue to conduct regional Greenway meetings for LSHG partners.
4. When appropriate assist our partners in identifying alternative funding sources.
5. Support local initiatives as appropriate.
6. Encourage constructive conversations about equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility goals.

Objective 2: Maintain an active role in the Maryland Heritage Areas Program.

Action Items:

1. Continue to advocate for state support of the MHAA program.
2. Work with other Heritage Areas to procure regional or state-wide events.
3. Work with neighboring Heritage Areas to promote an Upper Bay experience.
4. Continue to work with MHAA to identify and promote the many benefits of heritage tourism.
5. Continue to work to support local museum sustainability.

Objective 3: Continue to strengthen the LSHG relationships with county, municipal, and state government and staff and other local partners.

Action Items:

1. Hold regular meetings to update and network with local officials.
2. Work with local government officials to ensure that the LSHG is included in annual budgets.
3. Continue to provide input on local plans and development initiatives as requested.
4. Ensure that partners recognize the benefits that the Heritage Area provides.
5. Work with local communities to increase economic activity associated with tourism while helping to maintain their small-town quality of life.
6. Continue to work with corporate partners to enhance and expand the LSHG experience.
7. Continue to work with DNR, Susquehanna State Park, and other partners to maintain and expand trail and other recreational opportunities.
8. Work with Maryland and Federal agencies to increase the awareness of the Lower Susquehanna Scenic Byway and explore the potential to revisit National Scenic Byway status.

Goal Three - Enhance our regional identity.

Objective 1: Coordinate work efforts with adjoining state and national initiatives to promote our history, traditions, and unique natural environment.

Action Items:

1. Reinvigorate involvement in the Chesapeake Gateways program to ensure inclusion of the LSHG.
2. Continue to support and participate in national trail initiatives crossing the Heritage Area.
3. Be an active participant in the national Chesapeake Bay Recreation Area initiative.
4. Work with the Lower Susquehanna National Heritage Area in Pennsylvania to tell the stories of the Susquehanna that cross the Mason-Dixon line.

Objective 2: Partner with the National Park Service and other heritage areas to develop visitor experiences that reinforce a sense of regional identity.

Action Items:

1. Support the development of exhibits, events, programs, festivals, etc. that feature themes that promote a sense of regional identity.
2. Work with the National Park Service to ensure that venues within the HA are included in the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route celebration.
3. Develop a series of heritage blog posts that tell the LSHG's unique stories and where appropriate link to the stories of the Lower Susquehanna National Heritage Area in PA.

Goal Four - Maintain the LSHG's effectiveness in a sustainable manner.

Objective 1: Support and enhance the effectiveness of the Board of Directors.

Action Items:

1. Maintain regular engagement with the Board to ensure they remain active in all organizational requirements, activities, and opportunities.
2. Enhance/expand the Board of Directors membership to support diversity and equity.

Objective 2: Work to enhance the financial stability of the LSHG.

Action Items:

1. Remain compliant with financial and regulatory requirements.
2. Work with the Board of Directors to develop supplemental funding strategies.
3. Identify programming that could help generate revenue.

Objective 3: Identify long-term initiatives.

Action Items:

1. Institute discussions regarding the need for an update of the Management Plan.
2. Begin discussions about the possibility of expanding the LSHG's boundaries.
3. Continue to investigate the financial and legal responsibilities associated with land ownership, easements, and trail maintenance
4. Identify long-term goals for the organization.

Objective 4: Improve the ability of the LSHG to achieve major program objectives through capacity building.

Action Items:

1. Identify future staffing needs and a funding source to support these.
2. Establish procedures for using contractual resources when needed.