

April 5, 2011

The Honorable
Alderman _____
Annapolis City Council
160 Duke of Gloucester Street
Annapolis MD 21401

Dear Alderman _____,

THANK YOU for your past support of our local heritage area, Four Rivers: The Heritage Area of Annapolis, London Town and South County. Between 2003 and 2009, your support of Four Rivers stood at \$35,000 each year; in 2010, the support was cut back to \$33,250. This year, Four Rivers' funding was cut to \$0. I understand that you are creating a budget for the next fiscal year, which must be a challenging process during this very difficult time. I am writing to let you know that your decision last year NOT TO FUND the Four Rivers Heritage Area has threatened the organization's ability to continue, and to ask you to restore City of Annapolis funding to the previous year's level.

You may not have been part of the process back in July 2001 when the City Council adopted the Four Rivers Management Plan as part of the Annapolis Comprehensive Plan. As required by the authorizing legislation (H.B. 1), the Four Rivers Heritage Area program was also approved and authorized by the County government and the town of Highland Beach. The State calls for local jurisdictions to commit to co-fund the program in order to receive State grants in our area. Without this matching funding, ten years of ever-increasing funding of local tourism initiatives would cease and the State funds would go to other heritage areas.

While the budget grows exceedingly tight, funding the programs that help to support and *grow* our economy becomes more and more critical. Maryland's Heritage Areas Program has been building tourism and small businesses and is currently *the most successful program of its kind in the country*. In fact, it has the model for other state programs seeking to build a strong economic base in heritage tourism. Heritage tourism is a "green" industry that will never be outsourced overseas or even outside of the state.

MHAA leverages funds through matching grants. And the track record demonstrates an ROI that averages \$4.61 statewide (and much more in some regions.) These state and local revenues go directly to our communities. Almost all tourism businesses (96%) are mostly small businesses. But these businesses are among the largest private sector employers in the state. "Heritage tourists" skew to the very top of the tourism demographic: they travel in groups, *stay longer* and *spend more* than other visitors. And they do all this while enjoying the very things our residents also treasure most about Maryland.

We are creating an economy rooted in the very things that Maryland is so proud of; our history, cultural heritage and natural resources. We work at building this economy with your help, and the help of the State of Maryland. When you look at the economic benefit/financial return that the Four Rivers Heritage Area has achieved in its first nine years, the City's return on investment is remarkable compared to its contribution and represents funds that would not otherwise come to the City. So again, thank you for funding our program in the past, and please fund the Four Rivers Heritage Area at a viable level for Fiscal Year 2012 so that we can continue this critical effort for the future of Annapolis and Anne Arundel County.

Thank you!