

# PROTECTING HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From Chief Powhatan's capital, Werowocomoco, to Civil War battlefields to Rosenwald schools and sites related to the struggle for Civil Rights, Virginia's diverse array of historic and cultural resources tell the story of our Commonwealth and nation. Robust support for existing programs as well as exploration of broadening preservation tools available to protect these resources is critically important to ensure their benefit to current and future generations and supports key industries, including agriculture and tourism.

We recognize that certain historic resources preserve the memory of racial injustice, and we support efforts to relocate or recontextualize these resources as appropriate.

## CHALLENGE

Without state support for the programs and initiatives detailed below, many of these sites and associated stories they tell risk being lost.

### Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HRTC):

A catalytic community redevelopment and economic development tool for urban and rural communities who face challenges regularly. Studies by VCU's Center of Urban and Regional Analysis<sup>1</sup> and Baker Tilly,<sup>2</sup> found that construction and related activities associated with HRTC projects generate \$4.20 to \$5.30 of economic impact for every \$1.00 of tax credit.

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### Land Conservation:

The Virginia Land Conservation Fund (VLCF), the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund (VBPF) and Land Preservation Tax Credit are challenged

regularly. The VLCF funds a range of conservation projects in rural and urban areas. VBPF is targeted exclusively toward the preservation of historic battlefields. VBPF grants are often matched with federal dollars from the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program, resulting in the preservation of more than 600 acres in the last year alone.<sup>3</sup>

### African American and Virginia Indian Resources:

Recently, the General Assembly has made commendable and long overdue efforts to fund initiatives focused on places and stories of Virginia's African American and Indigenous communities including establishing the African American Cemeteries and Graves Fund (2020). More than \$5 million in funding was provided to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) to support a number of projects/positions aimed at surveying and funding places that tell a fuller and more inclusive story of Virginia's history (2021). Additionally, the Chickahominy Tribe received \$3.5 million to assist in the acquisition and restoration of tribal land.

## SOLUTION

The state has a tremendous opportunity to advance the preservation of Virginia's historic and cultural resources by providing enhanced support of the programs and initiatives noted above. Given the proven return on the Commonwealth's investment from the HRTC, and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we would encourage the state to consider temporarily increasing the percentage tax credit that can be claimed via the HRTC (a similar measure is under consideration at the federal level) in order to help with the state's economic recovery, and to give particular consideration to HRTC projects with the potential to benefit under-represented communities. On the land conservation front, fully funding both VLCF and VBPF is

of critical importance to helping save Virginia's battlefields and other historic sites before they are lost to development. With regard to African American and Virginia Indian resources, the recent emphasis that the General Assembly has placed on funding projects that seek to preserve the historic resources of minority communities and elevate under-told stories is encouraging. It is important for the state to continue these efforts to provide increased funding, recognition, and protection for these resources, such as gravesites, sites with United States Colored Troops (USCT) history, and historic communities across the Commonwealth.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit program to allow for at least a temporary increase in the percentage tax credit that can be claimed to help the state's economic recovery.

Allocate \$40 million and \$5 million for the Virginia Land Conservation Fund and the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund, respectively.

Continue to make adjustments to Virginia Land Conservation Fund which encourage the preservation of sites which highlight Virginia's culturally diverse history.

Continue to provide increased funding for the documentation, identification, and protection of African American and Virginia Indian historic resources.



Virginia has taken steps in recent years to identify, preserve, and recognize unmarked African American gravesites. This is an encouraging step towards better telling the stories of the Commonwealth's minority communities.

Image credit: Sandra Parks