

PROTECTING HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From Chief Powhatan's capital, Werowocomoco, to American Revolution and Civil War battlefields, to Rosenwald schools and sites related to the struggle for Civil Rights, Virginia's unique and 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

State funding for the programs below is an irreplaceable tool in preserving Virginia's historic places and supporting heritage tourism.

Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HRTC)

A catalytic community redevelopment and economic development tool for urban and rural communities that face challenges regularly. Experience and studies¹ have demonstrated 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.

LAND CONSERVATION

The Virginia Land Conservation Fund (VLCF), the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund (VBPF), and the Land Preservation Tax Credit are the cornerstones of land conservation in Virginia. The VLCF funds a range of conservation projects in rural and urban areas. VBPF is targeted exclusively toward preserving 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 441 acres in the last year alone.³

AFRICAN AMERICAN AND VIRGINIA INDIAN RESOURCES

The creation of the Virginia Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Historic Preservation Fund by the General Assembly in 2021 will provide grants to protect land and sites which have historic significance for BIPOC communities. Initially proposed for \$10 million over the biennium budget, funding is currently at \$5 million for FY 2023/24.

DATACENTER DEVELOPMENT

A major concern of the preservation community is the ever-growing threat from the development of datacenters. These large industrial developments take up substantial pieces of open space and have all too often been approved in locations affecting sensitive historic sites. Preservation Virginia recently recognized datacenter developments as one of the most pressing threats to historic sites in the commonwealth.

SOLUTION

The state has tremendous opportunities to advance the preservation of Virginia's historic and cultural resources by enhancing our existing programs and initiatives. Given the proven return on the Commonwealth's investment from the HRTC, and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge the state to protect and maintain the HRTC 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.

This year's increase in funding to VLCF is an important step forward, but even more can be done. With regard to African American and Virginia Indian resources, the recent emphasis that the General Assembly has placed on elevating under-told stories is encouraging. In particular, the creation of the new Virginia Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Historic Preservation Fund offers opportunities for a more complete telling of Virginia history by preserving BIPOC sites that have been disproportionately marginalized in the past. Increased funding, recognition, and protection for these resources across the Commonwealth is essential.

On datacenters, we recognize localities' interest in these industrial developments. However, many local governments are jumping at these opportunities at the expense of their historic, cultural, agricultural, and scenic resources and without due respect to their own well-considered zoning policies and master plans.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Protect the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit program.

\$20 million per year for the Virginia Land Conservation Fund and \$5 million per year for the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund.

Adjust the Virginia Land Conservation Fund to be accessible for the preservation of sites which highlight Virginia's culturally diverse history.

\$5 million per year for the new Virginia BIPOC Historic Preservation Fund.

Develop a state policy which requires state approval of datacenter developments over a certain size or within a certain proximity to sensitive sites. (See BOOSTING SMART GROWTH, page 59)