

HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

Will Glasco // Preservation Virginia // wglasco@preservationvirginia.org
Max Hokit // American Battlefield Trust // mhokit@battlefields.org

WHY IT MATTERS

Across Virginia, historic places tell the story of more than four centuries of American history. Indigenous sites such as Werowocomoco, Revolutionary War and Civil War battlefields, Rosenwald schools, Civil Rights sites, and countless other landmarks connect Virginians and visitors alike to the people and events that shaped the Commonwealth and the nation. These places are not only reminders of the past but also valuable educational resources, community assets, and economic drivers.

Despite decades of preservation successes, many of these irreplaceable resources face growing challenges. Large-scale development projects are placing increasing pressure on cultural landscapes. Rising property values, climate-related threats such as flooding and sea-level rise, and chronic maintenance needs further endanger sites across the Commonwealth. Historic places associated with Black, Indigenous, and other historically underrepresented communities often face the greatest risks, reflecting generations of unequal recognition and investment.¹

The 250th anniversary of many Virginia sites, which will be celebrated over the next five years, is prompting renewed interest in Virginia's commitment to preserving its history among individuals and organizations alike. This renewed interest provides an opportunity to attract needed funding opportunities.

Preservation is both a responsibility and a sound economic investment. Heritage tourism contributes more than \$7 billion annually to Virginia's economy, supporting jobs, local businesses, and communities throughout the state.² By strengthening preservation programs and protecting significant historic resources today, Virginia can ensure that future generations inherit the places that define our shared heritage while maximizing the educational, cultural, and economic benefits.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

LAND PRESERVATION TAX CREDIT

This program enables eligible landowners to receive an income tax credit up to 40% of the value of their donated land or conservation easement, up to \$20,000 a year, and carry the credit over for up to 10 years.³ This incentive is critical to land conservation in the current development climate.

VIRGINIA BATTLEFIELDS PRESERVATION FUND (VBPF)

VBPF preserves battlefield land from the American Revolution, War of 1812, and American Civil War, including sites associated with African American military service and the Medal of Honor. According

to data from the American Battlefield Trust (ABT), VBPF attracts significant federal and private matching funds, yielding a 6:1 return on state dollars on ABT projects. At least 12,000 acres have been protected.

VIRGINIA LAND CONSERVATION FUND (VLCF)

Currently funded at \$16 million annually, VLCF provides funding for the protection of lands in five categories, including historic areas. More than 156,000 acres have been permanently protected using VLCF funds.⁴

HISTORIC REHABILITATION TAX CREDIT (HRTC)

The HRTC has revitalized thousands of properties statewide by incentivizing the rehabilitation of older buildings by individuals and organizations. It generated \$6.8 billion in private investment between 1997 and 2020, benefiting communities large and small.⁵ Currently, property owners can claim 25% of eligible rehabilitation costs, and credits can be carried forward up to 10 years.⁶

BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND PEOPLE OF COLOR (BIPOC) FUND

The Virginia BIPOC Historic Preservation Fund is a program designed to address gaps in preservation by supporting underrepresented historic sites and stories. Early interest in this new program has demonstrated the tremendous need.

OPPORTUNITIES

STRONG FUNDING

Funding across key preservation programs is the single most powerful tool available to lawmakers to improve conservation of historic and cultural sites. Demand for tools such as the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund, Land Preservation Tax Credit, and the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation consistently exceeds available resources, indicating strong public and private interest in conservation outcomes. Reliable and consistent funding would allow these programs to address a greater share of at-risk historic landscapes, particularly in areas experiencing rapid growth or infrastructure expansion. Strengthening financial capacity would also incentivize partners to act quickly when significant properties become available.

PROTECTION FROM DEVELOPMENT

Pressures from large-scale development projects continue to reshape land use patterns across the Commonwealth. Tools that encourage early identification and review of sensitive resources can further reduce the likelihood of unintended loss.

REFRESH PROGRAMS FOR NEW REALITY

Virginia's preservation programs may benefit from

HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

Will Glasco // Preservation Virginia // wglasco@preservationvirginia.org
Max Hokit // American Battlefield Trust // mhokit@battlefields.org

periodic updates to reflect current conditions and emerging challenges. Climate impacts, shifting development patterns, and evolving community priorities suggest the need for ongoing programmatic refinement. Thanks to the General Assembly, many of these programs are also funded at a significantly higher level than they were at their inception. However, there is no generalized grant program for preservation of Virginia's built environment, and considering the rich history of the Commonwealth, there is significant need. Adjustments that improve flexibility, streamline access to funding, and better support agency staff responsible for these programs can help ensure that existing programs remain effective in a changing landscape while continuing to serve the Commonwealth's long-term preservation goals.

TOP TAKEAWAYS

Virginia is home to significant historic and cultural resources that are a major contributor to the Commonwealth's finances.

Existing programs provide a solid foundation for preservation of these sites. However, development threats and new opportunities, such as the 250th of many Virginia historic sites, call on us to be even more proactive in their protection.

Strong funding and tweaks to program language would allow non-government partners to take on more projects to protect these resources.

ENDNOTES

1. *2015-2020 Fiscal Impact Study of Virginia's HRTC Program*. (2023, October). VCU Center for Public Policy. https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/HRTC-Final-Report_12.18.23.pdf
2. Accordino, J., & Fasulo, F. (2017). *The economic impact of heritage tourism in Virginia*. Center for Urban and Regional Analysis, L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, Virginia Commonwealth University. https://preservationvirginia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/HeritageTourism_FINALE_02-16-17secured.pdf
3. *Land preservation tax credit*. (n.d.). Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/land-conservation/lp-taxcredit>
4. *Virginia Land Conservation Foundation*. (n.d.). Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/land-conservation/vlcf>
5. *Preserving African American Places*. (2020, October). National Trust for Historic Preservation. https://cdn.savingplaces.org/2023/08/10/13/57/18/226/AACHAF_EquityStudyReport_lo-res.pdf
6. *Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits*. (n.d.). Virginia Department of Historic Resources. <https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/programs/tax-credits/>

Healing Field of Honor in Winchester, VA
Photo by Kester Garcia

