




WHY RICHMOND NEEDS A CULTURAL HERITAGE STEWARDSHIP PLAN!

Historic Richmond
April 2025



What IS a Cultural Heritage Stewardship Plan (CHSP)?

- The CHSP is a proposed amendment to the Richmond300 Master Plan.
- If passed, it will be Richmond's first city-wide comprehensive plan or process for identifying, evaluating, and protecting valuable historic and cultural community assets.
- This plan will:
 - Help us identify the places and ideas we as a community think are worth saving
 - Provide tools to protect and engage with those resources as our City continues to grow and change over time.



The graphic features a light blue background. At the top left, there are four stylized hands in green, orange, yellow, and purple. To the right of the hands, the text reads "City of Richmond Cultural Heritage Stewardship Plan" in bold black font, with the subtitle "Identifying, Recognizing, and Safeguarding Richmond's Cultural and Historic Assets" below it. The main image shows a row of four colorful historic houses (green, blue, yellow, and red) with white porches. Below this, there are two smaller images: one showing a group of people in traditional attire at a festival, and another showing people working on a wooden crate.

December 2024



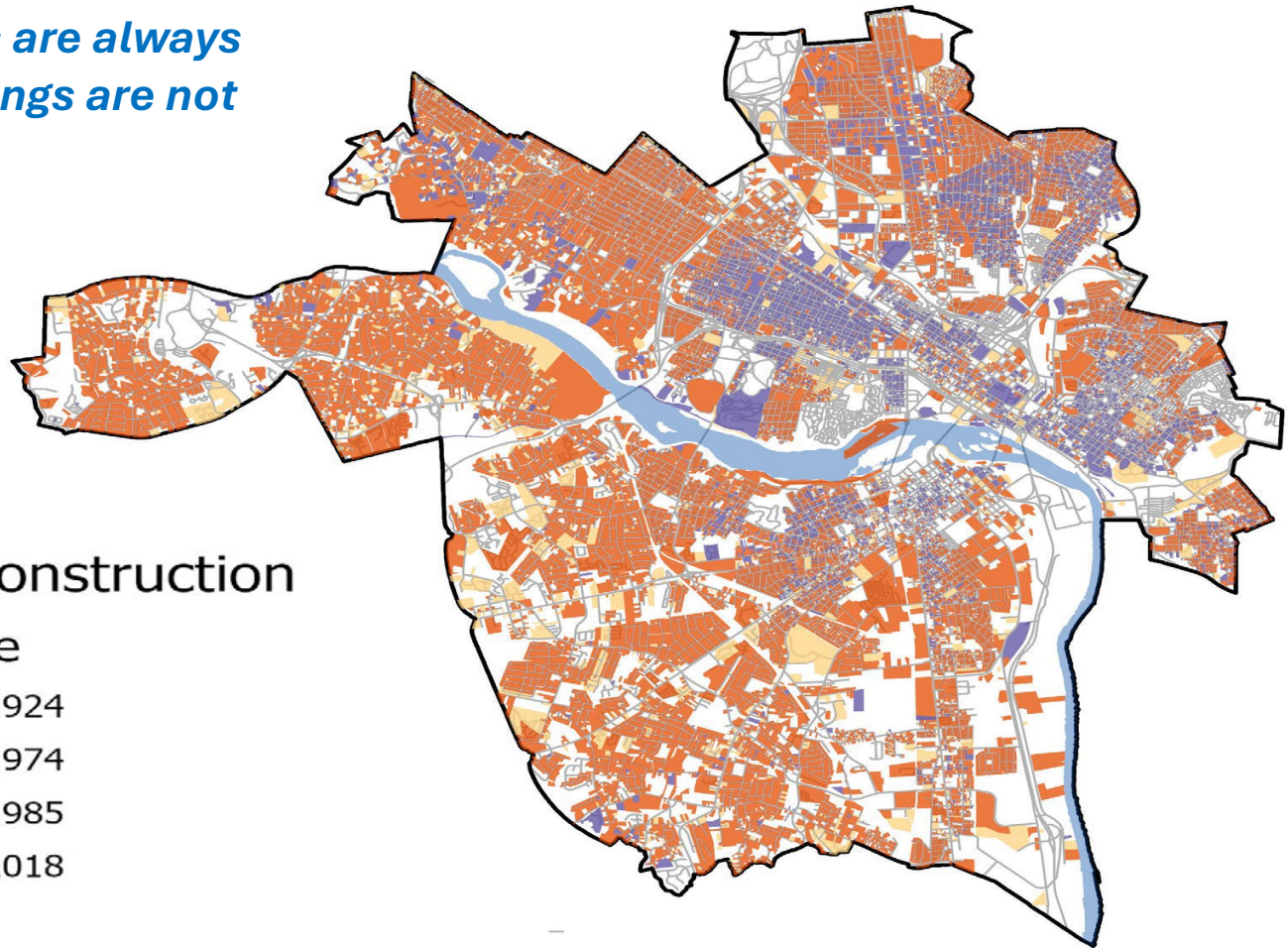
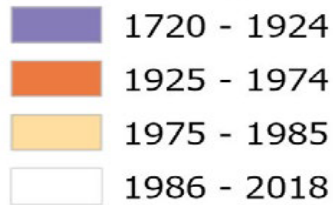
Tangible Resources

Tangible resources are part of the physical, built environment. Things you can see and touch, like buildings, monuments, and cemeteries. While preservation goes beyond architecture, our distinctive historic structures and the landscape they inhabit provide context and help us to tell the story of who we are as a community.

Historic buildings are always old, but old buildings are not always historic.

Year of Construction

Date Range

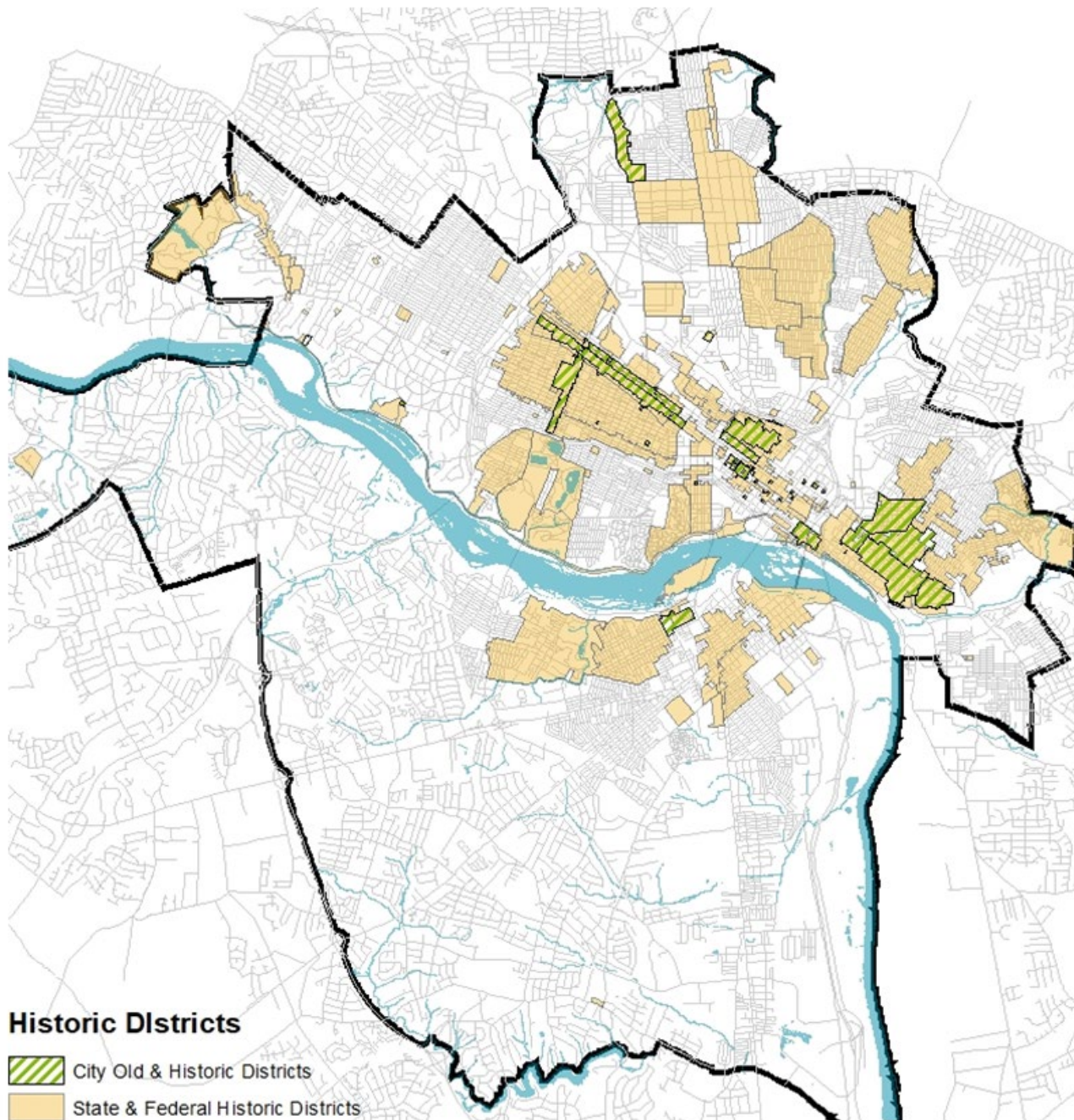


The City of Richmond includes approximately 68,000 buildings, of which 23% are over 100 years old, and 81% are at least 50 years old (old enough to potentially qualify as “historic”). Per the National Park Service, buildings of this age should be evaluated for their significance, but *less than half* of these 55,000 structures have been documented and recorded in the official state database.

What Does “Historic” Mean?

There are three different levels of historic designations

- National (National Register of Historic Places)
- State (Virginia Landmarks Register)
- Local (City Old and Historic Districts)



National/State Register

- Recognize a property's significance in history, architecture, archaeology, or engineering (it's not enough to just be old!)
- Offer limited protections from potentially harmful federal- or state-funded activities (Section 106)
- Help qualified historic properties receive preservation benefits/incentives including tax credits, grants, and easements
- Listing in the Register can be a useful tool when making an argument that a particular building or site should be saved but does not come with any intrinsic protections

Federal/State designation does NOT:

- ***protect the building from demolition***
- ***require an owner to restore/renovate the property***
- ***restrict an owner's use of the property***
- ***have any direct effect on property values***

City Old and Historic Districts

- COHDs are a type of “Zoning Overlay”
- The Commission of Architectural Review (CAR) must approve any changes to a property that are *visible from the public right of way*. CAR also oversees the creation of new COHD’s, a bottom-up process that starts with a nomination from the community and involves several stages of review and public comment
- CAR guidelines apply to infill as well, focusing on design, scale, and compatibility with the existing historical fabric to preserve the character of individual neighborhoods

COHDs are currently the only regulatory protections available to historic properties in the City of Richmond.



Disaster Planning

Surveying and recognizing our historic resources is the first step to protecting them. Historic structures are subject to risks, including natural ones like fires and floods! The Cultural Heritage Stewardship Plan calls for planning, so these dangers don't catch us unawares.



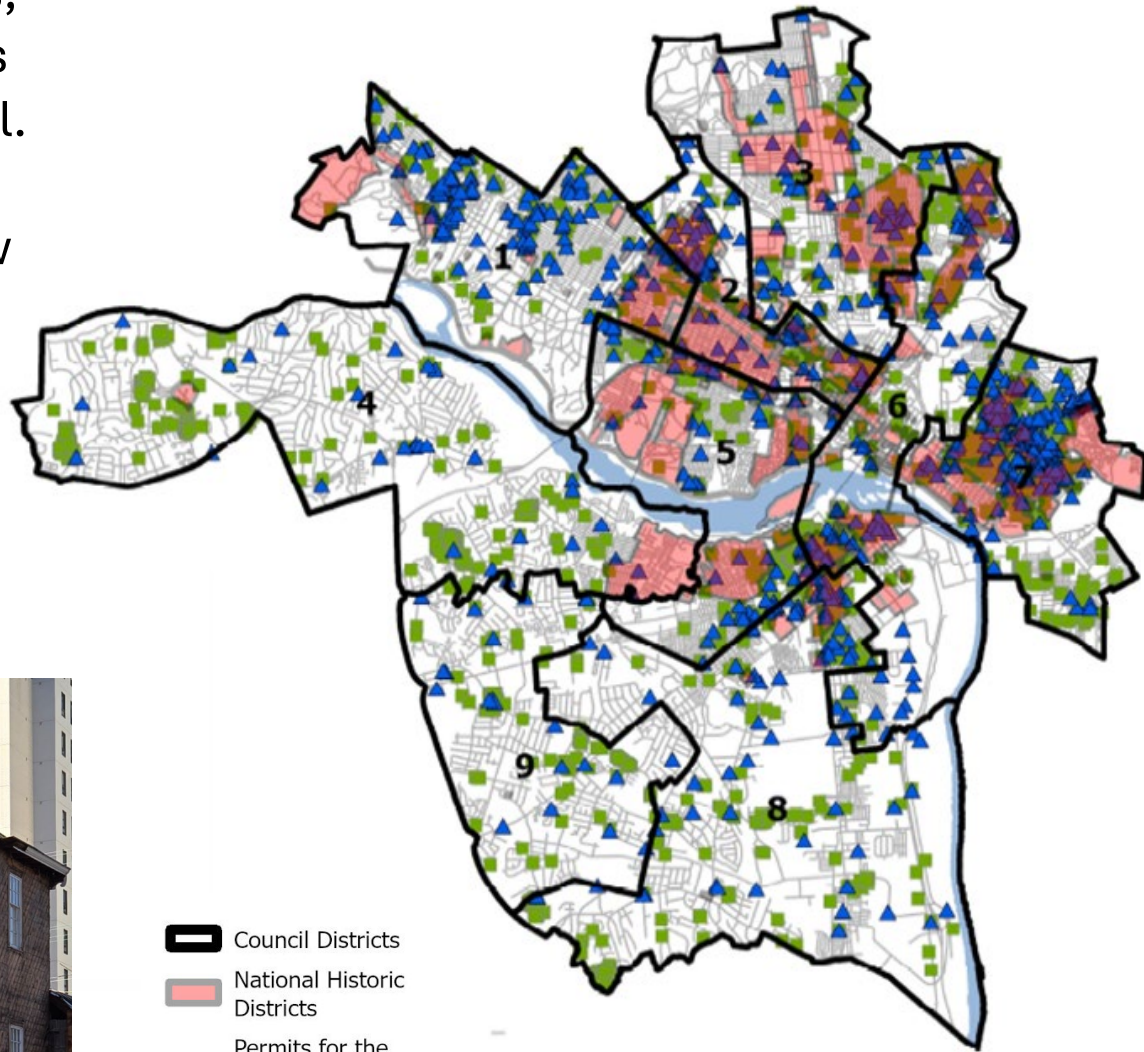
Fox Elementary School: This beloved 1911 school building was severely damaged by fire in 2022. It is currently being rebuilt.



Shockoe: Although the floodwall, constructed in 1995, has been a game changer for the City of Richmond, floodways and floodplains still impact existing structures as well as future development.

In addition to natural disasters, Richmond's cultural resources face man-made threats as well.

This plan provides needed new tools to protect important cultural resources as the City grows and changes so that preservation and progress can move forward hand in hand.



-  Council Districts
-  National Historic Districts
-  Permits for the Complete Demolition of an Existing Building (2014-2024)
-  Permits for the Construction of a New Building (2014-2024)

What do we need?

To address these issues, the CHSP calls for:

- A city-wide survey, to identify and recognize historic and cultural resources
- A demolition-review process, to build in transparency and opportunity for community engagement **BEFORE** something irreplaceable is torn down
- Financial incentives to promote adaptive reuse
- Develop zoning districts and tools that support, protect, and enhance neighborhood character

These changes benefit everyone, from the community whose history is being recognized to the property owners and developers investing in these communities, who avoid costly last-minute surprises.

The Risk is Real

COHDs are currently the only regulatory protections available, and they are a one-size-fits-all solution. This means that a large portion of historic structures in Richmond are currently unprotected!



Historic Places of Worship (1201 Decatur St):

There are many historic churches and places of worship like this one in Manchester that are currently unrecognized and unprotected.



The Old Federal Reserve Bank Building/Supreme Court Building: Originally the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, the State Supreme Court moved in in the 1970s. With a new Courts building on Main Street in the planning stage, this 1919 building's future is uncertain. It is currently unrecognized and unprotected.



Frederick Douglass Court: This notable streetcar suburb was designed and built by African Americans in the 1920s-40s for a well-to-do Black clientele. It was declared eligible for listing on the NRHP last year but is currently unprotected.

Recent Losses

These recently demolished structures could have been rehabbed for beneficial uses, such as housing, neighborhood, commercial or civic amenities.



Daniel Call House, 211 W Grace St:

Parts of this historic house may have dated to the 1790s. It was not listed on historic registers and had no protections. When demolished in December 2024, it became clear that demolition was unnecessary. Future plans not announced.



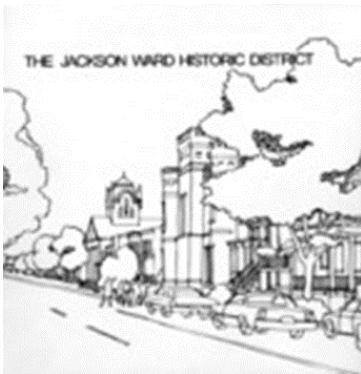
Fulton Gas Works and Fulton Neighborhood: The 19th century Fulton Gas Works gasometer was disassembled in December 2021, while the remaining buildings were demolished. Future plans not announced. The Historic Fulton neighborhood was demolished in an urban renewal effort in the 1970s.



Union Cottage: Constructed in 1885 as a Confederate Veterans Home with funds contributed by Union veterans, this charming Victorian was relocated in 1936. It was demolished in 2018, after numerous rehabilitation projects were deemed financially unfeasible.

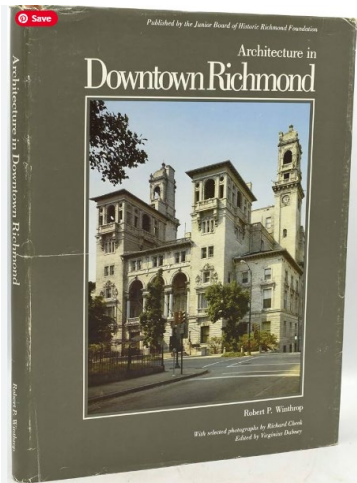
Neighborhoods Under Threat

Demolitions are slowly chipping away at Richmond's historic neighborhoods, even the ones with some form of protection already in place. These neighborhoods were surveyed because we KNEW there were valuable historic resources there, and they've still lost over a quarter of their buildings over the last 40 years.



The Jackson Ward Historic District:

This architectural survey of Jackson Ward was published by the Richmond Dept. of Planning and Community Development in 1978. Of the 735 buildings included, 197 (27%) have since been demolished.



Architecture of Downtown Richmond:

Historic Richmond published this architectural survey of Downtown Richmond in 1982. Of the 648 buildings included, 167 (26%) have since been demolished, with 2 additional demolition permits currently outstanding.

Richmond's Downtown Core

- Vacant, Distressed, or Planned Demolition
- Demolished
- Announced Projects

Not all of these buildings have historical/architectural value, but collectively they represent a huge loss to our once vibrant downtown—beautiful, usable structures replaced by costly new construction, or worse, NOT replaced—leaving a gravel pit or surface parking in its wake.



Demolitions of State-Owned Historic Structures:

The Commonwealth of Virginia owns vast swathes of property in Downtown Richmond. The City of Richmond generally has no voice in state building plans.



Fig. 4-21 Zincke Building



Clockwise from left: **Murphy Hotel** – Demolished 2013, replaced with low rise parking deck; **Zincke Building** – Demolished 2017, replaced with surface parking; **Aluminum Building** – The first major use of aluminum in an entirely prefabricated building in the country. Demolished 2019, replaced with surface parking.



Pocahontas Building West Tower, 900 E Main St: This state-owned, NRHP-listed c. 1923 limestone skyscraper was previously slated for rehab for a new Courts Building, but the state now plans to demolish.

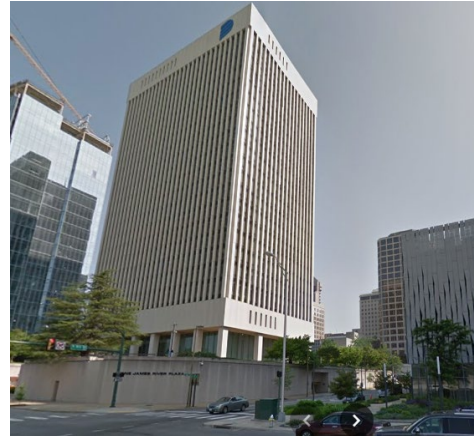
Death Row: Demolition Imminent

Pocahontas Building East Tower, 900 E Main St: This state-owned, NRHP-listed c. 1968 midcentury office tower is slated for demolition for a new State Courts Building.

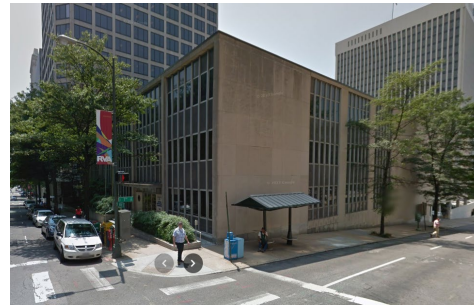


Demolitions of Substantive Steel Buildings

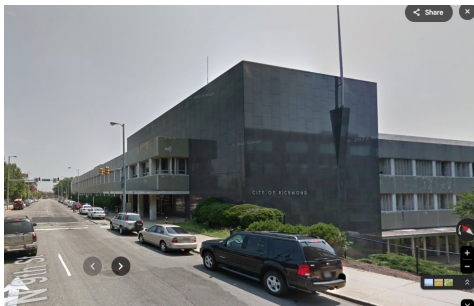
All demolished in the last few years, each of these buildings leaves a gaping hole in our cityscape. A demo review process could prevent this by requiring replacement projects to be fully funded and designed before demolition occurs.



VEPCO Building, 701 E Cary St:
The site of this 1978 office tower, demolished in 2021, is currently vacant. (A similarly sized office building is being rehabbed into roughly 300 housing units.)
Future plans not announced.



VEC Building, 703 E Main St:
This state-owned c. 1961 low rise mid-century office building was demolished in 2024.
Future plans not announced.



Public Safety Building, 500 N 10th St:
Demolition of this City-owned c. 1954 building is underway.
Future plans not announced.



West Hospital, 1200 E Broad St:

Recent reports mark this 1941 Art Deco former hospital building for demolition. This architecturally distinctive historic building has been declared eligible for listing and is suitable for a tax credit adaptive reuse for housing.

What's the Alternative?

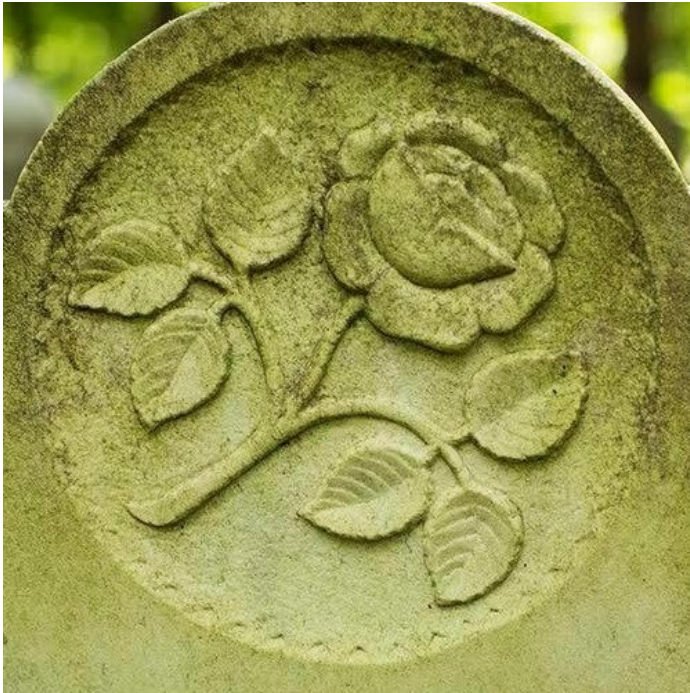
Adaptive reuse of existing historic structures is good for the local economy, good for the environment, and good for our communities!

The financial incentives included in this plan will encourage adaptive reuse by making it easier for developers to finance and complete such projects, and will assist smaller property owners to maintain their historic homes and businesses. Tools like a revised tax abatement program could help long term residents manage rising property values, helping the neighborhood to stay in the neighborhood.

Intangible Resources

What makes Richmond special goes beyond its buildings. Preservation also includes the protection and safeguarding of *intangible resources*. These are things without a physical form— for example, oral histories, cultural traditions, or resources that have been lost or destroyed over time. Richmond-specific examples include...





Oral Histories

The professionalization of the field of oral histories in recent decades has legitimized oral histories as a reliable source, recognizing the historical record that has been collected and safeguarded by communities over time. Some examples of local groups engaged in this valuable effort include The Descendant's Council and the Friends of East End. The CHSP recognizes the important work these groups are doing and calls on the City to help them expand their programs through financial and organizational support.

Cultural Traditions

Richmond is home to many vibrant communities, each with their own unique cultural traditions. These types of cultural resources are often associated with specific neighborhoods or community buildings. This plan supports the work already being done in our communities to protect and share these cultural resources by identifying and recognizing them, funding tools of engagement and education like a historic marker program and wayfinding signage, and creating new tools to protect them, like cultural heritage districts.



Lost Resources

Many historic and cultural resources have been lost to time, due to neglect, development pressure, or as a result of systemic discrimination. In these cases, where the tangible resources are already gone, initiatives like historic marker programs are crucial to preserving and engaging with the past.

The Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground was erased from the map of Richmond over the course of decades, before it was rediscovered and recognized in recent years. Survey work since this marker was installed has revealed that the site was not as damaged as initially thought.



Richmond needs a CHSP because:

- The story of Richmond is told through its built environment— but a huge portion of that history is currently unrecognized and unprotected.
- Equally important are our intangible resources – our people, our culture, and our traditions. These also require protection and support as communities move and change.
- The combination of logistical support, regulatory protections and financial incentives laid out in the Cultural Heritage Stewardship Plan are necessary to help direct investment and development in a manner that retains what makes the City special as we continue to grow.