

## Position Statement Regarding the Patowomeck Indian Tribe of Virginia

As the premier organization for researching, documenting, and interpreting Stafford County history, the Stafford County Historical Society (SCHS) prioritizes the stories of all eras, peoples, and places in Stafford County. Additionally, the SCHS recognizes the importance of including marginalized and often omitted stories and individuals as it seeks to discover and share an inclusive and comprehensive history of Stafford County, Virginia. The purpose of this Position Statement is to outline the SCHS's position regarding the current efforts by those identifying as the Patowomeck Indian Tribe of Virginia (PITV) to receive Federal tribal recognition.

### **Background**

The SCHS has a long record of recognizing and celebrating Stafford's Native American history including the original Patowomeck Tribe that disappeared from the records in the 17th century. The PITV was created in the mid-1990s and in 1997 the SCHS provided this group with a letter supporting their efforts to attain Virginia recognition without research. The Virginia General Assembly granted recognition to the PITV in 2010, despite the fact that the Virginia Council on Indians (VCI) had twice turned them down because of inadequate documentation related to their descent from the Patowomecks and proof of tribal continuity. The PITV is now seeking federal recognition via a bill in the House of Representatives introduced by Rep. Abigail Spanberger (D-Va.) and co-sponsored by Rep. Jen A. Kiggans (R-Va.), Rep. Jennifer Wexton (D-Va.), Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Va.) and Rep. Morgan Griffith (R-Va.).

### **SCHS Standards**

The Stafford County Historical Society uses generally approved historical research methods to gather and evaluate evidence from primary and secondary sources to interpret historical events accurately.

### **SCHS Research and Conclusion**

To understand the statements made in the bill introduced on the PITV's behalf, the SCHS has completed our own extensive research on the history of Native Peoples in Stafford County, utilizing primary and secondary resources. Copies of our research can be viewed on the Discover Stafford website (<https://discoverstafford.org/artifact/other/patawomeck-indian-tribe/>). After a review of all available scholarship and original documents, we cannot find any evidence to support the PITV's claims. We believe that appropriating an identity that cannot be proven undermines and devalues the work that had to be done by prior groups in order to receive this same recognition. Due to the group's Virginia recognition, we also believe that there have already been negative consequences to the historic record on both the county and state levels that would be compounded should the federal petition be successful.

Nevertheless, we do understand that historical interpretations are, by necessity, subject to challenge and over time an interpretation may be questioned, found inadequate, refined, or even completely overturned by a new, more convincing explanation. SCHS remains open to any new scholarship on this, and all Stafford County related topics, that may come to light in the future and will review our position as warranted.