



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Purpose of Evaluation

Please use the following space to explain briefly why you are seeking an evaluation of this property.

An architectural survey of Charlottesville’s Little High neighborhood has resulted in the recommendation of a potential Little High Neighborhood Historic District. The City of Charlottesville, Department of Neighborhood Development Services, undertook the survey (2018-2019) in support of the City’s Historic Preservation goals, as stated in the 2013 Comprehensive Plan. Among these goals is the completion of systematic inventory and evaluation of all historic resources in the City; compilation of context narratives that provide the historical and architectural basis for evaluating significance and integrity; and effective protection of the City’s significant historic resources. The City seeks a determination of the district’s potential for listing in the NRHP, based on the recommendation presented below.

N.B. The Little High Neighborhood Architectural Survey project, completed as part of the 2018-2019 Certified Local Government Sub-grant Program, included an area extending from E. Market Street on the south, Meade Avenue on the east, E. High Street on the north, and 9th Street NE on the west. A total of 265 properties was recorded during the survey.

Are you interested in applying for State and/or Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits? Yes  X  No    
Are you interested in receiving more information about DHR’s easement program? Yes  X  No

1. General Information

District name(s):  Little High Neighborhood Historic District   
DHR ID Number:  104-5361

Main Streets and/or Routes:  E. Market Street, E. High Street, E. Jefferson Street, Little High Street, and 9<sup>th</sup> Street NE

City or Town:  Charlottesville

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located:  Charlottesville

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage:  29

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban  X  Suburban   Town   Village   Hamlet   Rural

Briefly describe the district’s overall setting, including any notable landscape features:

The proposed Little High Neighborhood Historic District is located east of downtown Charlottesville and is generally bounded by E. Market Street on the south, 12<sup>th</sup> Street NE on the east, E. High Street on the north, and 9<sup>th</sup> Street NE on the west. The NRHP-listed Charlottesville and Albemarle County Courthouse Historic District (104-0072) and the Martha Jefferson Historic District (104-5144) border the Little High area on the west and north sides, respectively.

The neighborhood’s gridded street network is laid atop the hilly terrain, which slopes south and eastward towards the Rivanna River. Houses in the neighborhood maintain consistent setbacks along the streets with landscaped front yards, fenced back yards, and mature trees throughout. Although primarily a residential neighborhood, commercial development has encroached on the south, west, and north sides of the neighborhood; some dwellings in those areas have been converted for commercial use, but retain their domestic character. The proposed district boundaries have been drawn to encompass the largest concentration of historic resources that relate to the historical development of the neighborhood.

### 3. Architectural/Physical Description

Architectural Style(s): Colonial; Early Republic: Early Classical Revival (Jeffersonian Classicism); Late Victorian; Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals: Colonial Revival; Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Movements: Bungalow; Other: Vernacular (American Foursquare)

If any individual properties within the district were designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: The Farm/John A.G. Davis House (NRHP-listed, 104-0002)

If any builders or developers are known, please list here: Thomas R. Blackburn (carpenter); William B. Phillips (mason and builder); Malcom F. Crawford (builder); Nelson Byrd Landscape Architects

Date(s) of construction (can be approximate): ca. 1826

Are there any known threats to this district? Developmental pressures

#### **Narrative Description:**

In the space below, briefly describe the general characteristics of the entire historic district, such as building patterns, types, features, and the general architectural quality of the proposed district. Include prominent materials and noteworthy building details within the district, as well as typical updates, additions, remodelings, or other alterations that characterize the district.

In 1725, the area encompassed by the Little High neighborhood was part of a 19,000-acre land patent granted to Nicholas Meriwether. By 1762, when Charlottesville was established as the county seat of Albemarle, Nicholas Lewis, Meriwether's grandson, owned the 1,020 acres adjoining the east side of the new city. Although substantial acreage was sold from the farm by subsequent owners over the years, the property retained its rural appearance and land use into the late 1940s. The Little High neighborhood has, thus, developed differently than Charlottesville's other suburban neighborhoods in that it was not sold off as one large parcel for subdivision (such as the 550-acre Belmont estate). Rather, because of the historical large-acreage ownership, the area developed in small increments around The Farm, which remains an anchor property within this urban residential neighborhood.

In 1860, the westernmost section of the Little High neighborhood (north of E. Market Street and west of 9 1/2 Street NE) was included in the boundaries of the City of Charlottesville. In 1873, during Thomas Farish's ownership, the area west of present-day Farm Lane was annexed into the city. In 1916, the city annexed a large area surrounding the downtown core, including the remainder of The Farm property.

Some subdivision occurred in the Little High area by 1880, and an 1890 map made by the Charlottesville Land Company depicts the streets already in place. At the time, East Jefferson and Little High streets extended into the neighborhood as far as present-day 11<sup>th</sup> Street NE; the area east of 11<sup>th</sup> Street was platted into large acreage parcels, which would be further subdivided in the 1910s and 1920s. The 1890 map also illustrates the city's other large estates of Belmont, located south of the C&O Railroad tracks and subdivided in 1891 by the Belmont Land Company and the Charlottesville Land Corporation; Locust Grove to the northwest, which became the Marth Jefferson neighborhood developed by the Locust Grove Investment Company in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; and James D. Goodman's "Hors de Ville" estate, which was purchased during the early 1900s and platted into small subdivisions by several investors including L.W. Graves of the nearby Charlottesville Lumber Co. Each of these estates had at one time been a part of Nicholas Meriwether's 19,000-acre land patent of 1735.

Another factor influencing the neighborhood's development was the presence of the Albemarle Female Institute (104-0001), which was established in 1857. The school, later known as the Rawling's Institute and then

St. Anne's Episcopal School, was one of several private schools established during the mid-nineteenth century. This large institution, no longer extant, owned the entire block edged by E. Jefferson Street on the south, Little High Street on the north and 10<sup>th</sup> Street NE and 11<sup>th</sup> Street NE on the west and east, respectively. The school, which fronted on E. Jefferson Street, moved to a new site on the west side of the city, and the former school building was converted into apartments. The school was demolished in 1972 and the site is now occupied by the Jefferson Medical Building (1011 E. Jefferson Street).

The oldest building in the district is the Lewis Cook's House (104-0004) (309 12<sup>th</sup> Street NE), which stands northeast of the Davis manor house. The one-and-a-half-story, gable-roofed vernacular building is of brick construction and features a large buttressed chimney on the south end. Brick "modillions" extend along the cornice. Constructed ca. 1770, the house has been modified by an addition on the north end, the construction of dormers, and installation of French doors on the east elevation. The building, however, retains its historical feel and association and is notable as one of the city's few surviving eighteenth-century resources.

The Gilmer House (901 E. Jefferson Street) is an example of an evolved nineteenth-century brick dwelling (104-0238). Initially a one-and-a-half-story dwelling constructed around 1806, the house has been enlarged several times to its current appearance as a two-story, five-bay-wide dwelling with Colonial Revival-style details. The two-story, gable-roofed portico (1907) is centrally located on the south elevation and features rotund non-stylistic columns on the first level, Tuscan columns on the second level, and classical details on the trim and balustrade. The exterior walls are laid in Flemish bond, as well as in American bond patterns. The metal-clad, side-facing gable roof holds interior brick chimneys on both ends.

The prominent manor house built for John A.G. Davis in 1826 (1201 E. Jefferson Street), stands at the eastern edge of the proposed historic district on the property historically known as The Farm (104-0002). The fine Jeffersonian style brick dwelling is laid in a Flemish bond pattern and exhibits numerous distinctive elements including a Tuscan columned portico, Chippendale style railings, triple-sash windows, and an elegant entrance bay that features an elliptical fanlight, fluted pilasters and architrave surround, sidelights, and paneled double-leaf entrance doors. The house is covered by a slate-clad hipped roof with tall brick chimneys on the side slopes. The design was the collaborative work of William B. Phillips (mason and builder), Malcolm F. Crawford (builder), and Thomas R. Blackburn (carpenter)—all of whom were among Thomas Jefferson's workmen at the University of Virginia. Although Georgian in plan, the building exhibits both Federal and Greek Revival-style detailing. The property left the Lewis family's ownership in 1848, and after a century of successive ownerships, the house was converted into a nursing home in 1949. The house was later divided into apartments, and in the 1980s was abandoned and condemned by the city. The present owners restored the house to its former prominence in the 1990s and, with Nelson Byrd Landscape Architects, developed an appropriate site plan. With this restoration, the building and its site once again reflect the property's prominent historical status in the neighborhood.

The houses built in the Little High neighborhood during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were substantial structures and would likely have housed professionals who worked in the downtown area, merchants, and perhaps railroad or lumber mill executives. The dwellings are two to two-and-a-half-stories in height and mostly of frame construction, although several brick examples are present, and at least one house constructed of rusticated concrete block. Porches are present on the front and rear elevations. The majority of the district resources date from about 1890 through 1920 and exhibit late Victorian character in their form and details. During the 1920s, bungalow houses and smaller cottage-type houses were constructed in the Little High Area and in the 1940s Colonial Revival-style and vernacular dwellings were built.

Constructed around 1925, the house at 1107 E. Jefferson Street is an example of a vernacular dwelling that exhibits influence of the earlier Queen Anne style in its asymmetrical façade with Colonial Revival style and Victorian-era detailing. The large, two-story frame dwelling stands on a brick foundation, is clad with weatherboards, and is covered by a metal-clad hipped roof with cross-gables on the sides and a slightly projecting cross gable at the front with a three-sided bay on the first floor level. The double-leaf entrance door is detailed with a two-light, rectangular transom and is accessed by the one-story, full-width, hip-roofed porch with turned wooden supports and cut brackets. Details on the house include a wooden frieze board, slender

corner boards, and gable end returns. A screened-in rear porch also is present. This house is representative of several examples in the neighborhood.

An example of an early 1920s bungalow with Craftsman style details stands at 932 E. Jefferson Street. This one-and-a-half-story, stucco-clad dwelling is covered by a broad, metal-clad, side-facing gable roof with deep overhanging side eaves that feature wooden knee braces. The wide, front-gable porch extends across the full façade and is supported by battered wooden columns set on stucco-clad piers. The side-bay entrance door is detailed with a multi-light transom and sidelights. Brackets are present on the front gable, as are projecting and rounded false rafter ends above the porch beam

Typical alterations noted during the field survey of Little High architectural resources include replacement of original windows and the installation of synthetic siding (vinyl, aluminum, or asbestos shingle), but many resources retain original materials and stylistic elements. Porch details, eave brackets, and trim details are intact on late Victorian and bungalow examples, and brick dwellings retain good integrity with regard to workmanship, as well. Additions have been made to some resources, but these tend to be located at the rear of the building and do not impact the primary elevation of the house. Most additions are sympathetic in scale and materials, and some are executed in a contemporary manner. Although alterations and additions have occurred over the years, the resources in the Little High neighborhood retain a high level of overall historic integrity and retain the ability to convey both the historical appearance and the historical character of the neighborhood.

Discuss the district's general setting and/or streetscapes, including current property uses (and historic uses if different), such as industrial, residential, commercial, religious, etc. For rural historic districts, please include a description of land uses.

The Little High Neighborhood Historic District is a densely developed residential neighborhood. Commercial development has occurred along the edges of the district, and some residential resources have been converted for commercial use (generally, professional offices). There are no religious resources located in the district, but educational resources are located just outside of the district boundaries. The neighborhood's streets are laid in a generally orthogonal gridded pattern that traverses the steep hills to the south and east. Architectural resources maintain a consistent setback from the street sidewalks with grassy, open front lawns and fenced back yards. Few alleyways are present in the district. Yards are manicured with mature trees and shrubs planted around the building foundations. Non-contributing elements, all of which are commercial in use and character, violate the scale and setback of the historic resources. Although many are executed in brick, the buildings are not sympathetic in style, scale, or appearance to the contributing resources.

The Lewis Farm property is an exception in the neighborhood in its relationship to the street and to other resources. This property occupies a 1.3-acre parcel that remains wooded. The house is sited towards the center of the parcel, back from the street, and is accessed by a long, gravel-surfaced driveway. As noted, this property retained a sizable acreage until 1948, when the surrounding 16 acres were sold for residential development.

The proposed district boundaries exclude the late 20th c. commercial development along the edges of the neighborhood, especially along 9th Street NE and E. Market Street, as well as the late 20th century residential development on the east side of the neighborhood.

#### 4. District's History and Significance

In the space below, briefly describe the history of the district, such as when it was established, how it developed over time, and significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.) Normally, only information contained on this form is forwarded to the State Review Board.

If the district is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

*(The following narrative and historical description is indebted to previous research and writings completed by Michael J. Bednar, FALA, Professor Emeritus of Architecture at the University of Virginia.)*

##### *Brief description of ownership history*

In 1735, Nicholas Meriwether patented 19,000-acres in Albemarle County. By 1762, when the county seat of Charlottesville was created, Meriwether's property, then owned by his grandson Nicholas Lewis, stood on the east edge of the new city. Known as "The Farm," the 1,020-acre property was the earliest cleared plantation west of the Rivanna River. Lewis is known to have constructed a house on the property and the Lewis Cook's House (12<sup>th</sup> Street NE) is one of the few eighteenth century buildings still standing in Charlottesville. In 1825, John A.G. Davis purchased 68.75 acres of Lewis's Farm and built his Jeffersonian-inspired brick dwelling (E. Jefferson Street). Davis was a lawyer and would later become a University of Virginia law professor. Davis maintained the property as a farm until his untimely death in 1840; his widow and sons continued to operate the estate until 1848 when they sold the property to William P. Farish, who gave the property to his son, Thomas, and Thomas's wife, Julia. Following the Civil War, Farish sold off parcels of The Farm to pay debts and his heirs continued to do so into the 1890s. Most notably, the Farish heirs sold a 200-acre parcel to the Charlottesville Land Company that extended from present-day Meade Avenue to the Rivanna River. Although the company intended to develop a neighborhood on the land, aptly named "The Farm," an economic depression stymied the plans and the company sold off most of its holdings in large blocks.

In 1909, George R.B. Michie, president of the People's Bank and founder of the Michie Publishing Company, purchased the farm property, which by that time had been reduced to 37 acres. Michie continued the agricultural use of the land and aerial photographs from the early twentieth century show his open fields and orchard in cultivation. Michie also sold off a portion of the property, between Little High and E. High Street (Free Bridge Road) that the Meriwether Lewis Corporation platted and developed for residential use. In 1948, Michie's widow sold another 16 acres surrounding the manor house site to MBG Corporation; by the early 1950s, numerous one- and one-and-a-half-story Minimal Traditional and Colonial Revival style dwellings were built in that area.

##### *Significance and Integrity*

The Little High Neighborhood Historic District is recommended eligible on a local level under Criterion A in the areas of Community Planning and Development as an example of a residential area that developed primarily during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and that retained areas of rural land use into the mid-twentieth century. The development of the area is directly tied to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ownership of the large-acreage parcel known as the Lewis Farm. The Lewis Farm, which was part of Nicholas Meriwether's 1735 land patent of 19,000 acres extending from Moore's Creek in the south to Meadow Creek in the north, remained one of downtown Charlottesville's large-acreage properties into the twentieth century. The proposed district also is recommended eligible under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a collection of nineteenth and early-twentieth-century dwellings that reflect nationally popular architectural styles, as well as vernacular forms. The district also includes notable individual architectural resources, including the Davis manor house built in 1826 on The Farm. The brick Jeffersonian-style dwelling is individually listed in the NRHP and is recognized as an important example of the work of William Phillips, Malcolm Crawford, and Thomas Blackburn, who had helped to build Jefferson's buildings at the University of Virginia. The Lewis Cook's House (ca. 1770), while a vernacular and utilitarian type structure, also is a significant resource as one of few surviving eighteenth century buildings located in the city. The district resources are united by physical development, and exhibit visual cohesiveness in setback, scale, materials, and interrelationship of buildings.

The identified period of significance for the historic district is ca.1770 to 1948, which extends from the approximate date of construction of the Lewis Cook's House (309 12<sup>th</sup> Street NE) to the date that the remaining "rural" land of The Farm was sold to MGB Developers, subdivided, and subsequently developed. The latter area extends north and east of the historic district and comprises residential development from the 1950s and later decades. Although connected to the older sections of the neighborhood by an extension of the street grid, the late-twentieth-century area exhibits a much different architectural character that consists mainly of one-story, frame and concrete block dwellings executed in a Minimal Traditional forms with limited applied architectural detail. For these reasons, the proposed historic district boundaries exclude that area.

The few contemporary buildings located in the proposed Little High Neighborhood Historic District generally house medical or professional offices. Of the 86 properties located within the proposed district, only 7 are considered to be non-contributing since they were built after the identified period of significance.

### **Sources**

Bednar, Michael J.

2014 "John A.G. Davis House at 'The Farm'," in *Magazine of Albemarle County History*, Vol. 72:29-79.

Bluestone, Daniel and Steven G. Meeks

2012 "Paul Goodloe McIntire's Rivanna: The Unexecuted Plans for a River City," in *Magazine of Albemarle County History*, Vol. 70:62-85.

City of Charlottesville, Planning Commission

1948 Minutes of A Meeting Held on December 17.

1949 Minutes of a Meeting Held on February 15.

Clover, Cecile Wendover and F.T. Hebllich, Jr.

1995 *Holsinger's Charlottesville: A Collection of Photographs by Rufus W. Holsinger*.

Green, Bryan Clark

2006 *In Jefferson's Shadow: The Architecture of Thomas R. Blackburn*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.

Lay, K. Edward

2000 *The Architecture of Jefferson Country: Charlottesville and Albemarle County, Virginia*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.

Moore, John Hammond

1976 *Albemarle: Jefferson's County, 1727-1976*. Charlottesville, VA: Albemarle County Historical Society.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company

1907-1950 "City of Charlottesville." Accessed online via the Library of Virginia, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/sanborn.aspx>.

**5. Property Ownership** (Check as many categories as apply):

Private:  X  Public\Local  X  Public\State   Public\Federal

**6. Applicant/Sponsor** (Individual and/or organization sponsoring preparation of the PIF, with contact information. For more than one sponsor, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title:  Jeff Werner, AICP/Historic Preservation and Design Planner   
organization:  City of Charlottesville, Department of Neighborhood Development Services   
street & number:  P.O. Box 911/600 E. Market Street   
city or town:  Charlottesville  state:  VA  zip code:  22902   
e-mail:  wernerjb@charlottesville.org  telephone:  434/970-3130

Applicant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**•• Signature required for processing all applications. ••**

In the event of organization sponsorship, you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person:  Jeff Werner   
Daytime Telephone:  434/970-3130

**Applicant Information** (Individual completing form if other than applicant/sponsor listed above)

name/title:  Debra A. McClane, Architectural Historian   
organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number:  4711 Devonshire Road   
city or town:  Richmond  state:  VA  zip code:  23225   
e-mail:  dmcclane1@verizon.net  telephone:  804/233-3890

**7. Notification**

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for DHR to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator, City Manager, and/or Town Manager.

name/title:  Tarron Richardson, City Manager   
locality:  City of Charlottesville   
street & number:  P.O. Box 911/600 E. Market Street   
city or town:  Charlottesville  state:  VA  zip code:  22902   
telephone:  434/970-3130