



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.

Town of Stuart is seeking an evaluation of this district to document the history of this area of town and to complement the Stuart Uptown Historic District, which was listed on the NRHP in 2002. The Town is also seeking district designation in order to make historic tax credits available to property owners as part of the effort to revitalize the historic downtown commercial and industrial area.

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 \_\_\_\_\_ No X

1. General Information

District name(s): Stuart Downtown Historic District [307-5005]

Main Streets and/or Routes: Commerce Street, Main Street South, Patrick Avenue

City or Town: Town of Stuart

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

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: 8.17

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban \_\_\_\_\_ Suburban \_\_\_\_\_ Town X Village \_\_\_\_\_ Hamlet \_\_\_\_\_ Rural \_\_\_\_\_

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

The proposed Stuart Downtown Historic District in Patrick County encompasses an approximate 8.17-acre area at the southern end of town along the Mayo River and the railroad bed of the former Danville & Western Railway. Situated downhill from the earlier courthouse area of Stuart (Stuart Uptown Historic District, NRHP 2002) and separated by a wooded area known as "Pine Hill," the topography of the district slopes down towards Commerce Street and the river. The area to the west of the proposed district is largely wooded, while the character of the area to the south is generally industrial. To the east of the district is a farmers market and a handful of residences. Triangular in shape, the district is formed by the convergence of South Main Street (which connects to the courthouse and uptown area), Patrick Avenue (Route 8) and Commerce Street. The open area at the intersection of the three streets forming the district, which historically served as the depot yard, remains undeveloped today and serves as a parking lot. Although the railroad tracks, turntable, and depot no longer exist, the late-19th to mid-20th century commercial and industrial buildings along Main Street, Patrick Avenue, and Commerce Street stand today as evidence of this once thriving commercial and industrial area known as downtown Stuart.

### 3. Architectural/Physical Description

Architectural Style(s): Commercial Style

If any individual properties within the district were designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: N/A

If any builders or developers are known, please list here: N/A

Date(s) of construction (can be approximate): ca. 1890- ca. 1965

Are there any known threats to this district? N/A

#### **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.*

The proposed Stuart Downtown Historic District encompasses the commercial and industrial buildings associated with the development of the downtown area around the railroad from the late-19<sup>th</sup> century through the mid-1960s. The commercial blocks along South Main Street and Patrick Avenue are primarily comprised of one- and two-story buildings of brick construction dating from the early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with flat roofs and minimal detailing. Exceptions to this include the two bank buildings, the First National Bank (403 Patrick Avenue) and the People's Bank of Patrick County (340 Patrick Avenue). Both of these ca. 1920 brick bank buildings feature corner pilasters that extend above the roof line and large central arches that are typical of the vault-style of bank designs. The wood storefronts of both of these buildings are intact behind an aluminum-and-plate-glass curtain wall.

The earliest extant buildings are located along the east side of Patrick Avenue. Both the Clark Brothers' Store and Staples' Store were constructed in the 1890s. Originally constructed of wood with weatherboard siding and a gable roof, they have since been combined into one building (409 Patrick Avenue) with the construction of an infill building and a new brick-veneer façade in the 1930s. The Clark Brothers' Store originally featured a decorative parapet with bracketed cornice. Other notable buildings include the early-20<sup>th</sup> century Powell Hardware (later Patrick County Hardware, 410 Patrick Avenue) at the corner of Patrick Avenue and South Main Street. This three-story brick building retains its corbelled cornice and sign band as well as the 2/2 wood sash windows. The one-story frame building at 304-306 Patrick Avenue, which housed a barbershop and small commercial space, is a good example of a small-scale commercial building of frame construction dating to the early-20<sup>th</sup> century. This building survives in excellent condition, retaining its original wood storefront, doors, and windows.

Post-World War II development of downtown Stuart represents the continuing industrial and commercial vitality of the area after the removal of the railroad in the 1940s. The two industrial buildings in the district are located on Commerce Street. The Stuart Cannery was constructed ca. 1945 on the site of the railroad bed and depot. This concrete block building with bow-truss roof and large loading bays reflects its period of construction and its industrial function. Constructed ca. \_\_\_\_, the Pannill Knitting Mill is a large industrial building that features a bow-truss roof and historic freight openings. In 1947, the Start Theater was constructed at 318 Patrick Avenue. This one-story brick building retains its recessed storefront and ticket window, terra-cotta parapet, and marquee. Construction continued into the 1960s with the mixed-use building at 324-336 Patrick Avenue, which features three separate aluminum-frame storefronts on the first floor. On the second story, apartment units are characterized by a decorative metal balcony and historic wood doors and windows.

Although the railroad that originally gave rise to the downtown commercial and industrial district no longer exists, its impact on the development of Stuart is still evident. The "depot yard" at the intersection of Commerce Street, Patrick Avenue, and Main Street remains an open space and the stonework along the creek embankment where the railroad crossed is still evident. Several fires over the years have destroyed a number of frame buildings in the downtown section, including the Sheppard Hotel, Ashby's Store and Ashby's Hotel as well as the Pendleton Grocery and Sheppard's Store on Commerce Street. For the most part, these buildings have been replaced with infill buildings constructed in the early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and are of brick or brick veneer. These buildings retain the streetscape in this concentrated commercial area. Of the approximately 18 historic buildings in the district, approximately 15 retain relatively good integrity on the exterior in terms of original storefront configurations, materials, and windows on the upper stories.

*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 Stuart Downtown Historic district encompasses the commercial and industrial buildings associated with the development of the downtown area around the railroad from the late-19<sup>th</sup> century through the mid-1960s. The proposed Stuart Downtown Historic District is an excellent example of a Piedmont town in Virginia where the original development centered around a courthouse located on a hill and a separate downtown developed later around the railroad, which is typically located downhill in the flatter lands along a river. The triangular-shaped downtown district is formed by the convergence of South Main Street (from the uptown courthouse area), Patrick Avenue (Route 8) and Commerce Street. The topography of the district slopes downhill towards the river with Commerce Street extending eastward along the former railroad bed. The open area at the intersection of these roads, now used as a parking lot, originally served as the "depot yard" where wagons of local agricultural products and lumber camped out while waiting to make shipments by rail.

With the exception of the Stuart Cannery (located on the site of the depot) and the Pannill Knitting Mill on Commerce Street, the district is comprised of three solid blocks of commercial buildings located along South Main Street and Patrick Avenue. The historic functions of the buildings in the district included department stores, furniture stores, two banks, hardware and building supply stores, warehouses, hotels, a funeral home, an automobile dealership, a gasoline station, a movie theater, restaurants, a barber shop, and a grocery store in addition to the cannery and the knitting mill. Although many of the specific uses of these buildings have changed over time, they continue to function as commercial and industrial buildings.

#### **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 downtown area of Stuart represents the second wave of commercial and industrial development of Stuart with the arrival of the Danville & Western Railway in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century. The proposed Stuart Downtown Historic District is located south and downhill from the earlier Stuart Uptown Historic District (NRHP 2002) surrounding the Patrick County Courthouse (NRHP 1974) and lies adjacent to the former railroad and the Mayo River. Late-19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century commercial and industrial buildings - including two banks, a movie theater, a cannery, and a knitting mill - create a cohesive district within the triangular area created by the convergence of South Main Street, Patrick

Avenue (Route 8), and Commerce Street. The proposed Stuart Downtown Historic District is an excellent example of a Piedmont town where the original development centered around a courthouse located on a hill and a separate downtown developed later around the railroad, which is typically located downhill near a river. The proposed Stuart Downtown Historic District is eligible for National Register listing under Criteria A and C with significance at the local level in the areas of architecture and community development, commerce, and industry. The period of significance for the district begins in 1884, when the Danville & Western Railway was constructed in Stuart and spurred the development of the downtown area, and ends in the early 1960s with the construction of the Beasley Department Store (302 Patrick Avenue) and a grocery store at 402 Patrick Avenue. Of the approximately 18 buildings within the proposed district, 17 are historic with 15 of these retaining their integrity.

The town of Stuart, originally known as Taylorsville, was established in 1792 after the formation of Patrick County from Patrick-Henry County in 1791. For nearly a century, the village of Taylorsville continued to develop as a county seat with businesses centering around the activities of the court. By the 1850s, the village consisted of approximately 50 structures and the Danville and Wytheville Turnpike, which followed the course of present-day Patrick Avenue (Route 8), was established.<sup>1</sup>

The surrounding county was rich in minerals, timber, tobacco, and other agricultural products; however, there was no direct or easy access to the markets of the eastern seaboard. It was not until the establishment of the railroad that the Southern Piedmont area would be connected to the larger markets.

Construction of the railroad in the region began prior to the Civil War with the establishment of the Richmond and Danville Railroad in 1848 and the completion of the tracks to Danville in 1856. It was not until after the war, however, that the railroad would reach Taylorsville and Patrick County. The Danville and New River Railroad was chartered in 1873 with the line completed to Martinsville in nearby Henry County in 1881. In 1883, citizens of Patrick County approved a bond of \$150,000 to extend the line to the county.<sup>2</sup> After great debate over the location of the new line, the tracks of the Danville and New River Railroad were laid along the Mayo River south of the courthouse and near Williams' Mill. The first train pulled into Taylorsville on July 29, 1884 with great ceremony.<sup>3</sup> Railroad and political dignitaries were welcomed by large crowds gathered at the tracks with a "Welcome" sign.<sup>4</sup> Taylorsville served as the western terminus of the line and a turntable was constructed where men manually turned around the engines.

With the arrival of the railroad, the village of Taylorsville grew and was incorporated into the town of Stuart in 1884. The population increased 25% from 300 in 1884 to 371 in 1900. Although many of the businesses continued to operate in close association with the courthouse activities, the 1900 census reflects the influence of the railroad with the appearance of four railroad employees, eight salesmen, one insurance agent, a mining engineer, and a timber dealer. The listing of five teachers, three hotels, two druggists, and two bartenders also indicate the overall growth of the town. More significantly, however, the construction of the railroad prompted commercial and industrial development around the depot and led to the distinction of "uptown" and "downtown" Stuart. This development pattern with the original courthouse village situated at the crest of a hill and an industrial and commercial area later developing adjacent to the railroad, located downhill on more level land along a river, was typical of many Piedmont Virginia towns. "Uptown" Stuart continued to serve as the center of the town with the courthouse, churches, school, attorneys' offices, banks, hotels and stores located there. The downtown area, referred to as "The Depot," developed as a separate commercial and industrial district. Although separated topographically by a wooded area known as "Pine Hill", the uptown and downtown areas were closely related and inter-dependent. With the arrival of the railroad, the telegraph also came to Stuart and provided the first means of communication other than mail to points beyond the rural county. The role of the downtown area as the center of communication continued with the first telephone line in town running in 1895 between the railroad depot and the Hotel Perkins in the uptown area.<sup>5</sup>

The land along the river and the railroad near the depot, which would eventually become known as downtown Stuart, was owned by Judge Andrew M. Lybrook. Lybrook and Colonel Abram Staples, who also owned land in the area, had successfully advocated for the line to be located along the river rather than closer to the courthouse. Initially referred to as “The Depot,” this area developed slowly over the first twenty years.<sup>6</sup> Soon after the arrival of the railroad, William H. Clark built a large grist mill in 1885 along the river near the depot. Later known as George’s Mill, the George family operated the mill into the early 1950s before it was demolished in the 1980s for a flood-control project. George’s Mill was the largest mill in the county producing flour and corn meal as well as feed for livestock.<sup>7</sup> A storehouse (built by Judge Lybrook prior to 1886) and a box factory were other early businesses to develop around the new depot. By the late 1890s, the area included the Riverside Hotel, a barroom, The Clark Bros. Hardware Store, and a second storehouse known as Rangeley and McIntosh.<sup>8</sup> The depot yard – a section of Patrick Avenue, Commerce Street and Main Street that remains an open parking lot today – served as a gathering place for farmers throughout the county who brought their goods in by wagon to ship out on the railroad.<sup>9</sup>

Following the purchase of the railroad line in 1891 by the Richmond and Danville Railroad, the name was changed to the Danville & Western Railway Company, also known as “the Dick & Willie.” The company made the strategic decision in 1899 to improve the line from narrow gauge to standard gauge to increase its efficiency and competitiveness. The track improvements were completed in 1903 amid great fanfare with a parade led by Governor Andrew Jackson Montague of Danville followed by a large barbeque in the depot yard and a ball uptown at the Hotel Perkins. A reunion of Confederate veterans was also part of the festivities.<sup>10</sup> That same year, the heirs of Judge Lybrook sold the remaining 156 acres of family land along both sides of the Mayo river near the depot to William H. Clark following the death of Judge Lybrook in 1899. Clark proceeded to subdivide this land into lots and sell them for development.<sup>11</sup> Between the subdivision of the land and the improvements to the railroad, the area of “the Depot” continued to develop as the commercial and industrial center known as downtown Stuart.

Between 1880 and 1940, the population of Stuart had increased 100% to 600. The majority of the buildings standing today in downtown Stuart were constructed during this period. Three hotels – the Riverside Hotel, Sheppard's Hotel, and Ashby's Hotel (all now demolished) – were built to provide lodging for people waiting to travel by train. General merchandise stores were established to sell the goods brought in by the trains as well as provide provisions to people throughout the county who came to downtown to make their shipments. Two of the earliest stores, Clark Brothers' and Staples' were established in the 1890s and later connected in the 1930s as a single building at 409 Patrick Avenue. Perhaps the largest was Ashby's Store (demolished) which was located further up Patrick Avenue. Andrew Powell built Powell's Hardware Store, later known as Patrick County Hardware, at 410 Patrick Avenue and Smith's Department Store was located at 304 Patrick Avenue in the early 1900s.<sup>12</sup> As evidence of the economic vitality of this area, two banks, the First National Bank and the Citizens Bank of Patrick County were established by the 1920s and erected impressive buildings that stand today at 403 and 340 Patrick Avenue. Other commercial businesses operating in downtown Stuart by the mid-1920s included, a theater, a funeral home, several hardware stores, two gasoline stations, an automobile dealership, and a number of stores selling merchandise such as clothing, furniture, and groceries.

A number of industries were located along the river and Commerce Street, which followed the railroad tracks. In addition to George’s Gristmill, built in 1885 on the river across Main Street (demolished in the 1980s as part of a flood control project) a band mill operated across the river and a chair factory was located along Commerce Street. In 1916, *The Enterprise* reported two tobacco warehouses in the area.<sup>13</sup> The Stuart Lumber Company was established in 1922 just east of the downtown area on Commerce Street and later operated in a new location as a division of International Paper. A cotton mill operated briefly in this area during the 1930s. In 1941, George Crystal established the Stuart Cannery, originally operating in the old railroad depot building before

constructing the current building on the site in 1945 following the demolition of the depot.<sup>14</sup> The Stuart Cannery, which canned tomatoes, apples, blackberries and other local fruits and vegetables, employed several dozen workers during season and shipped its products throughout the nation.<sup>15</sup> More significantly, the cannery provided one of the first employment opportunities for women outside of the household.<sup>16</sup>

The end of an era came with the decision in 1942 to discontinue service on the Danville and Western line into Stuart. The tracks were removed by the railroad company and the steel was used in the war effort. Soon afterward, the depot was demolished. In spite of the removal of the railroad that spurred its initial development, Downtown Stuart continued to thrive as a center for commerce and industry following World War II into the early 1960s. The Stuart Cannery built a new building in 1945 on the site of the former depot where it continued production until 1960.<sup>17</sup> The United Elastic Company constructed a plant in 1945 directly across the river from the downtown area. With expansions in 1948, 1951 and 1954, it served as the largest employer in the county and it continues to operate today.<sup>18</sup> Soon after World War II, local businessmen invested in the opening of the Pannill Knitting Mill at 101 Commerce Street as a satellite plant for the Martinsville-based textile company.<sup>19</sup> Other new commercial enterprises in downtown Stuart included the Star Theater at 318 Patrick Avenue, which was built and operated by Richard Beasley from 1947 to 1961 and the Beasley Department Store, which opened at 302 Patrick Avenue in the early 1950s.<sup>20</sup> As a sign of the times, a convenience store was built at 402 Patrick Avenue in the early 1960s.<sup>21</sup>

Although several fires over the years have destroyed buildings in the area, new commercial buildings typically replaced them - serving as evidence of the continued vitality of the downtown area of Stuart. The buildings that remain represent a wide range of functions – including banks, hardware and building supply stores, department stores, a theater, a funeral home, a cannery, a knitting mill, a furniture store, an automobile dealership, a convenience store and restaurants – that comprise the full complement of a thriving commercial and industrial district. The construction types and stylistic detailing of these buildings, which range from utilitarian industrial buildings and simple, commercial style to the more elaborate facades of the two bank buildings with their classical pilasters and entablatures reflect their functions as well as the period in which they were built. As a whole, the architecture of Downtown Stuart represents the continued role the area has played as the commercial and industrial center of the town and the surrounding county from its beginnings in 1884, with the arrival of the railroad, through the early 1960s.

## **Bibliography**

Beasley, Tom. Telephone interview. June 25, 2020.

Clark, Fulton. Telephone interview. July 9, 2020.

Goad, Dean. Telephone interview. July 8, 2020.

Hopkins, Larry. "Looking Back on Southside: When the railroad came to Stuart," *Martinsville Bulletin*. August 10, 2017. Accessed June 15, 2020 at [https://www.martinsvillebulletin.com/news/looking-back-on-southside-when-the-railroad-came-to-stuart/article\\_00139006-f57e-5ea7-9653-28bc9021e601.html](https://www.martinsvillebulletin.com/news/looking-back-on-southside-when-the-railroad-came-to-stuart/article_00139006-f57e-5ea7-9653-28bc9021e601.html).

Hopkins, Larry. Telephone interview. June 24, 2020.

Patrick County Historical Society. *The History of Patrick County*. Stuart, VA: Patrick County Historical Society, 1999.

Sanborn Insurance Company, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Town of Chase City, Mecklenburg County, VA: 1902, 1907, 1913, 1914, 1921, 1928, 1942. New York, NY: Sanborn Insurance Company.

**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:  Terry Tilley/ Town Manager   
organization:  Town of Stuart   
street & number:  100 Patrick Avenue   
city or town:  Stuart  state:  VA  zip code:  24171   
e-mail:  tilley@va.net  telephone:  (276) 694-3811

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:  Terry Tilley   
Daytime Telephone:  (276) 694-3811

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

name/title:  Kate Kronau/Preservation Associate; Alison Blanton/Architectural Historian   
organization:  Hill Studio   
street & number:  120 Campbell Avenue SW   
city or town:  Roanoke  state:  VA  zip code:  24011   
e-mail:  kkronau@hillstudio.com/ ablanton@hillstudio.com  telephone:  (540) 342-5263

**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.

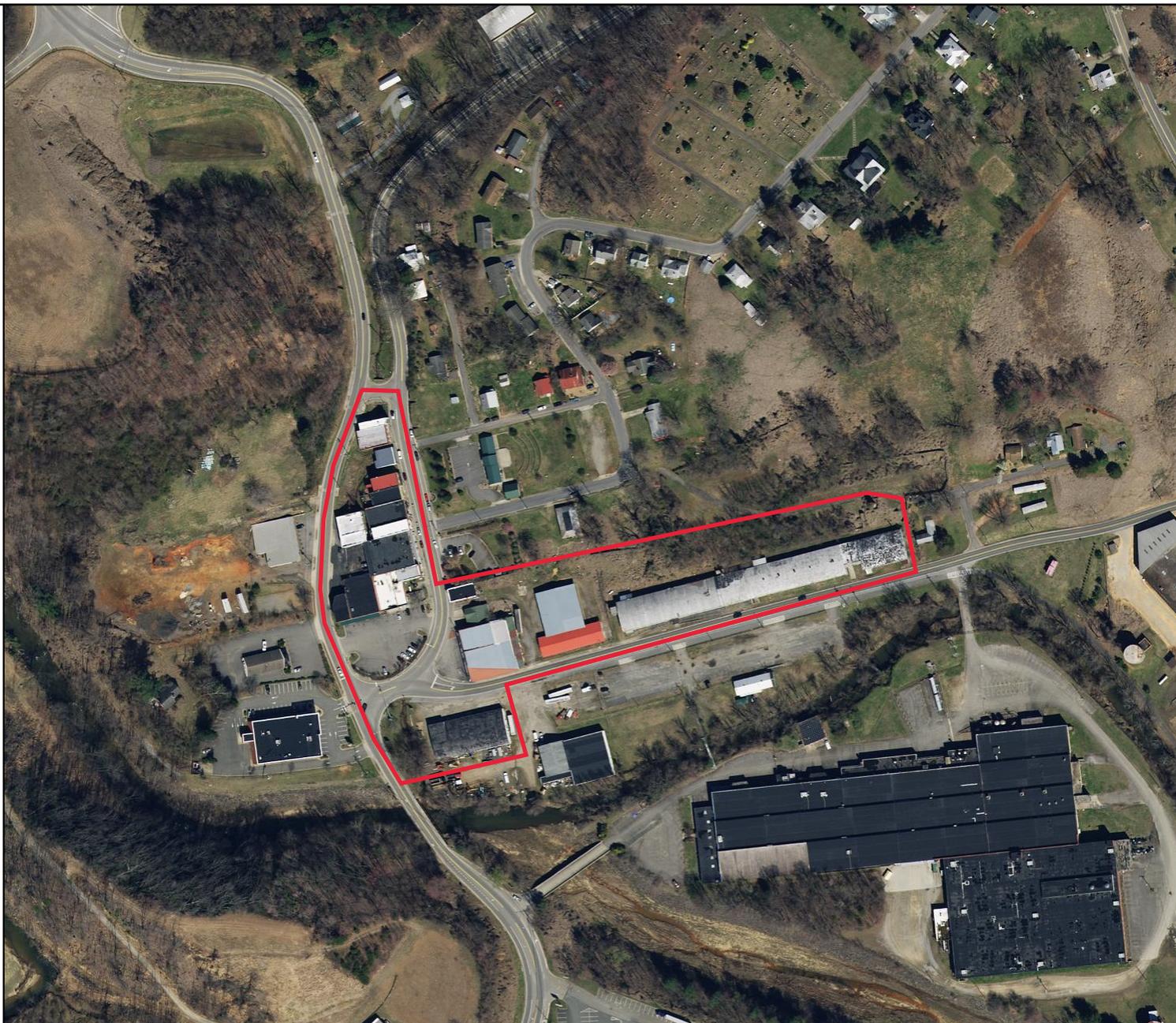
name/title:  Terry Tilley/ Town Manager   
locality:  Town of Stuart   
street & number:  100 Patrick Avenue   
city or town:  Stuart  state:  VA  zip code:  24171   
telephone:  (276) 694-3811

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- <sup>1</sup> Patrick County Historical Society, *The History of Patrick County*, p. 358.
- <sup>2</sup> Patrick County Historical Society, p. 277
- <sup>3</sup> Larry Hopkins, "Looking Back on Southside: When the railroad came to Stuart," August 10, 2017.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> Patrick County Historical Society, 364.
- <sup>6</sup> Hopkins, "Looking Back on Southside: When the railroad came to Stuart."
- <sup>7</sup> Patrick County Historical Society, 363.
- <sup>8</sup> Hopkins, "Looking Back on Southside: When the railroad came to Stuart."
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> Patrick County Historical Society, p. 363.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> Patrick County Historical Society, p. 367. Should this be *ibid* & page #? Since same as above?
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> Fulton Clark, telephone interview, July 9, 2020.
- <sup>17</sup> Patrick County Historical Society, 367.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> Clark, telephone interview.
- <sup>20</sup> Tom Beasley, telephone interview, June 25, 2020.
- <sup>21</sup> Dean Goad, telephone interview, July 8, 2020.

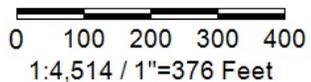


**Legend**

 Stuart Downtown  
Historic District PIF  
(307-5005)



Feet

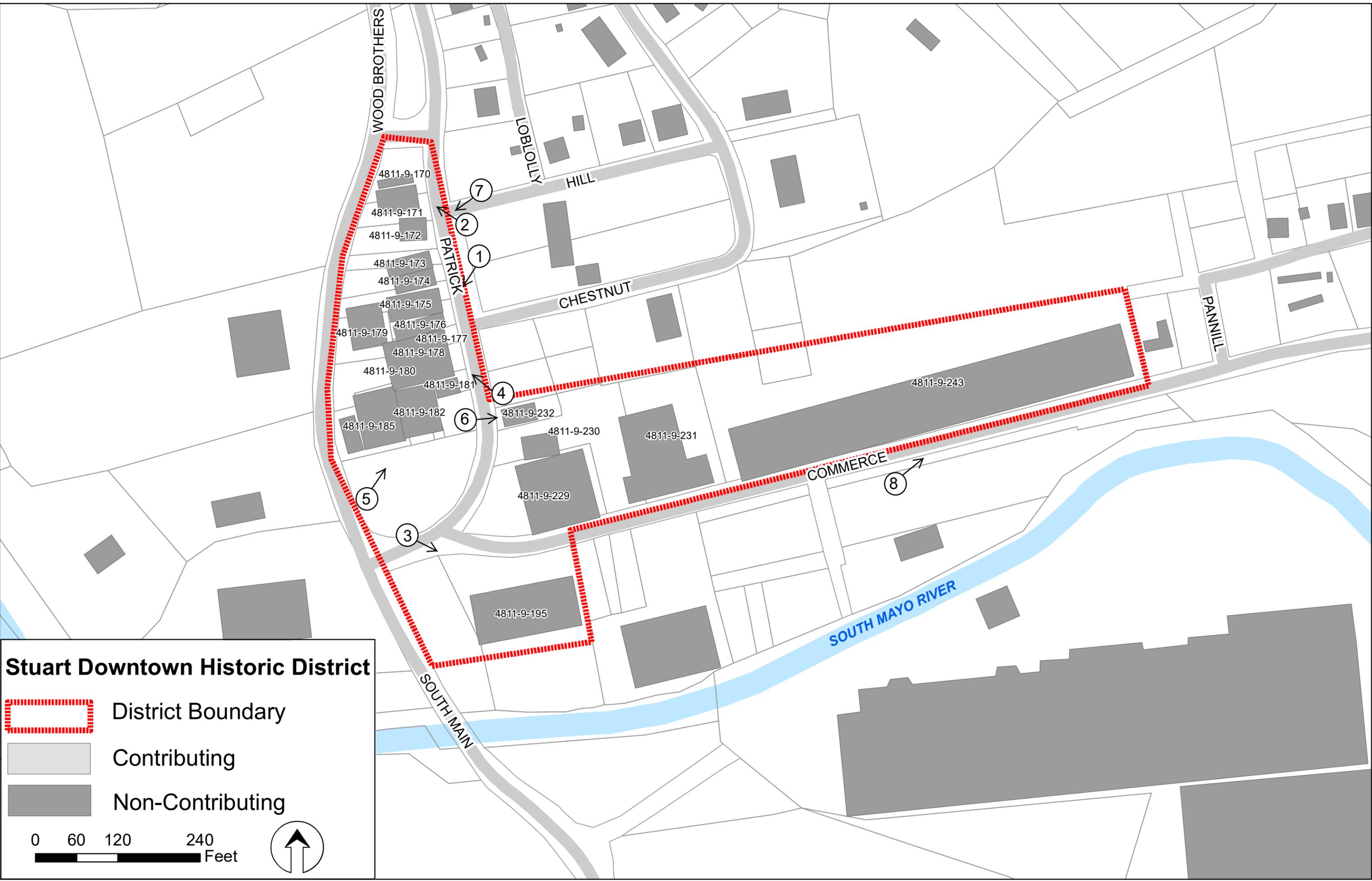


**Title: Stuart Downtown Historic District**

**Date: 6/19/2020**

*DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.*

*Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.*



**Stuart Downtown Historic District**

-  District Boundary
-  Contributing
-  Non-Contributing

