PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) 107-5172-0016

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

We are seeking formal recognition of the school’s historic significance so that the citizens of Covington and elsewhere can be made aware.

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

1. General Property Information
Property name: Jeter-Watson School, formerly Watson School
Property address: 515 E. Pine St
City or Town: City of Covington
Zip code: 24426

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

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):
Building x Site _____ Structure _____ Object _____

2. Physical Aspects
Acreage: 2.9

Setting (choose only one of the following):
Urban _____ Suburban _____ Town x Village _____ Hamlet _____ Rural _____

Briefly describe the property’s overall setting, including any notable landscape features:
The former school, now Jeter-Watson (community) Center, includes the ballfields/courts/playground at the east end of the property, south of E. Pine St. A one-story linear ancillary building sited along S. Mercer Ave., off the southwest corner of the school building, was originally associated with the school, but is not part of the community center and is no longer on the same tax parcel. The narrow S. Schley Ave. leads to small parking lots behind the school and the ancillary building. In front of the school are low stone retaining walls and concrete walkways.
3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): Modernist

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here:

If the builder is known, please list here:

Date of construction (can be approximate): 1939; 1960s

Narrative Description:

The school is blocky, angular, flat-roofed brick and concrete masonry building with a modernist design that was slightly ahead of its time. Many, if not most other new school buildings of the time in Virginia continued to be Colonial or classical inspired. The principal entrance of the building, on the Pine Street (north) side, is centered on the facade but draws little attention, lacking any formality or frontispiece seen in classically designed school facades. Nearly void of ornament, the neat and plain design emphasizes horizontality with its low-height, sprawling massing and multiple, individual corbeled brick stringcourses above and below the extensive banks of original wooden 12-over-12 sash windows on both the front and rear (north and south) elevations of the original main block. The first brick courses beneath the stringcourses are made up exclusively of brick headers, but the primary brick bond is comprised of one Flemish course to every five stretcher courses. Running below the first-story banks of windows is a projecting, continuous stone water table that serves as the sill for all of the windows. The second-story windows have individual brick sills.

The interior of the school is exceedingly well preserved. Within the front entrance is a small lobby with terrazzo floor and tiled walls, both of which continue up a flight of steps and into the building’s main, double-loaded corridor. At the ground-floor entrance level, entered from the lobby, is the curtain-walled administrative office, lighted by attractive white-glass globe lamps dangling from the ceiling. Most of the classrooms are largely undisturbed, with chalkboards, unpainted wooden cabinetry, and cloak closets. The former library, on the first floor near the office, is found in an excellent state of perseveration. It is occupied by the school’s alumni association (which began in 1961) and is filled with school memorabilia (see site visit photos). Within nearly all the rooms is unusual early-period window hardware called the “EasySet Metal Window Ventilator” made by the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company (a May, 2022 web search for the device produced no results). The ventilator for a single window comprises two triangular pieces mounted at each end of the window’s interior sill, which hold a separate four-light wooden sash that was manually slid, diagonally, down into place, where it blocked both rain and heavy, paper-rustling wind from rushing into the room when the window was open. Most, if not all of the classrooms retain their window ventilators.

In addition to an exterior cornerstone inscribed with the year 1939, a bronze plaque in the first-floor corridor reads:

Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works
Franklin D. Roosevelt
President of the United States
Harold L. Ickes
Administrator of Public Works
Watson School
1939
4. Property’s History and Significance

The Jeter-Watson Center comprises the Watson School, a city school built for African-American students in 1939 with funding from the Great Depression-era Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works. The mid-section of the present building is the original school building, identified by its three banks of wooden 12-over-12 sash windows on each story of the front elevation and multiple corbeled brick courses between and about the window banks. In the 1960s the building was appended with an additional classroom wing to the west and gymnasium to the east. Following integration in the fall of 1966, Watson Elementary School/High School was renamed Jeter-Watson Intermediate School. Currently in-use as a city-owned recreation/community center and YMCA, the former school exhibits a high level of integrity to the historic period, and based on its historical association with Covington’s African American community and their long struggle to attain equal rights and education, its unusual story involving federal New Deal agency funding for construction, and its distinctive, modernist architectural design, is recommended eligible at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Education and Black Ethnic History, and Criterion C for Architecture.


Prior to 1882, school for [African American] children in our area was carried on in a private home complete with a pot-bellied stove on a hill in Wrightsville. Mrs. Nancy Reynolds and Mr. W. G Watson were teachers. The school was then (1882) moved to what is now 306 South Lexington Avenue, Covington, Virginia. It was the Pollard residence for many years. Mr. Watson was teacher and there were twelve (12) students who were proud of their three straight benches and one table for the teacher.

After this first year; the continuation of the school in Covington was doubtful because the school board sent Mr. Watson to teach at Longdale, Virginia, and Mrs. Reynolds rented her house. Salvation came, however, when Mrs. Reynolds permitted an old carpenter shop to be cleaned for school use, and the school board appointed a Mr. Ben Bradley to teach. Mr. Watson returned to teach the third year, and the school was moved to what was called "The Old Samaritan Hall.

The fourth year found many children in school. The school board had built a two-room school on Lexington Street between the homes of Mrs. Ola Cobbs and Mrs. Julia Matthews. A new teacher, Mr. A. F. Loman was added. In later years, Mrs. Clara Wright came to teach in the same room with Mr. Loman. These three teachers and two room[s] lasted until the school was moved to Marion and Fourth Streets, the present site of the Old Watson High School Building. The present school plant, having eleven class rooms, an office, two laboratories, a store room, and a central heating plant was built in 1939, under the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works.

Mr. Thomas L. Babney and Mr. Linwood T. Binford followed Mr. Watson as administrators of the school in 1932 and 1933 respectively. Mr. Caleb G Brown came to the school in 1941. After having taught one year, he was appointed principal. Miss Ernestine Thompson (Cashwell) succeeded Mrs. Dorothy James Tracy as secretary to the principal in 1950. A mixed faculty of fifteen served 405 students from Bath County, Alleghany County, Clifton Forge, Millsboro and Covington.
Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)
name/title: Krystal Onaitis, City Manager
organization: City of Covington
street & number: 333 W. Locust Street
city or town: Covington state: VA zip code: 24426
e-mail: konaitis@covington.va.us telephone: 540-965-6300 extension 7
Legal Owner’s Signature: [Signature] Date: 5/25/22
**Signature required for processing all applications.**

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.
Contact person: n/a
Daytime Telephone: 

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)
name/title: Mike Pulice
organization: VA Dept. of Historic Resources, Western Regional Office
street & number: 962 Kime Ln
city or town: Salem state: VA zip code: 24153
e-mail: michael.pulice@dhr.virginia.gov telephone: 540-387-5443

6. 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 City Manager
name/title: Krystal Onaitis, City Manager
locality: City of Covington
street & number: 333 W. Locust Street
city or town: Covington state: VA zip code: 24426
telephone: 540-965-6300 extension 7
Jeter-Watson Center
515 E. Pine
WILLIAM C. WALKER FIELD
HOME OF THE
WATSON HORNETS

In honor of our beloved coach, teacher and mentor (1936 – 1966)

Dedicated on July 1, 2006

Watson High School Alumni Association
"Fabulous 50's/ Fantastic 60's"
FEDERAL EMERGENCY ADMINISTRATION OF PUBLIC WORKS

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

HAROLD L. ICKES
ADMINISTRATOR OF PUBLIC WORKS

WATSON SCHOOL
1939
WATSON SCHOOL BAND TO APPEAR ON MAY DAY

By William Martin

The Watson School Band, which has made three appearances will appear in the May Day Festival, May 16, 1956 at Watson School.

The members of the Band are Lester Stewart, Maurice Tucker, Clifford Rose, Charles Smith, Matthew Menefee, William Revelle, Arthur Liggins, Rudolph Quarrells, Lawrence Sampson, Forrest Irving, Gerald Rogers, Matona White, Vincent Martin, William Martin, and Eugene Parker.

The Band is under the direction of Mr. James B. McCormick.

JEFFERSON STUDENT COUNCIL PRESENTS ASSEMBLY PROGRAM

By Yvonne Jordan

A skit entitled "The Student Council in Action" was presented by the Jefferson Student Council as an assembly program at Watson School, Friday, April 6.

The welcome was extended by Carrie Archer, president of the Watson Student Council. Participants were Matthew Barrere, Harry Natt, Carrie Rogers, Mary Wallace, Joyce Thurston, Sylvia Jones and Beulah Wash-Arion. Also present were Marcela Lucy and Mrs. C. L. Banks, editor.

LOOK IT UP QUESTIONS

1. (A) What is the world's highest timber—yet some of it is 15 feet in diameter?
   (B) From what country does most of it come?
2. Where are the two U.S. mints located?
3. How many women have served in the Presidential Cabinet?
   Name them.
4. What six bills (penny) have buildings on the opposite side of Congress?
WRIGHTSVILLE GARDEN CLUB

Members of the Wrightsville Community Garden Club posed for a photograph in the 1940's at the Wrightsville Baptist Church. Front from left: Celestine Wilson McClinton, Mrs. White, Beatrice Wilson, Maggie Wilson, Mary Turner, Mary Wilson, Gertrude Jeter. Back: Beatrice Dawson, Sadie Coleman, Zella Murphy, Catherine Carroll, Hattie Jeter, Lura James, Ardell White, Ida Harris, Norma Murphy. Norma still resides in Wrightsville.

(Photograph courtesy Shirley Burks)

WRIGHTSVILLE BAPTIST

One of the older churches is Wrightsville Baptist Church which was organized in 1904. Services were first held outdoors and later in a hall owned by the Rev. G. W. White who became the leader and served for two years.

Organizers of the first church were G. W. and Eliza White, George and Mary Owens, B. H. and Mary Anderson, George and Sally Carter, Annie Diggs and the Rev. W. D. Scott. In 1906 a church was built on land donated by Archie and Mary Wright. Upon completion of the church, the Rev. W. W. Nelson became pastor and served for 18 years. Under his leadership a second church was built and the Willing Workers, the oldest club in the church, was organized. To help finance the building, a Queen's Rally was held. The senior choir was organized about 1907 and the community and church grew under the Rev. Nelson.

Some of the other pastors include the Rev. J. D. Smith, the Rev. E. C. Woodfolk, the Rev. C. L. Brown, the Rev. L. S. Jones, the Rev. B. G. Williams, William Freeman, the Rev. Dr. William Whaley, Leonard, the Rev. A. A. Winn, the Rev. Harold G. Preston.

Other mainstays in the church life of the community are Pine Street Baptist Church and First Baptist Church on Pine Street Avenue. The James Harrison is pastor of Pine Street Baptist in which many years was lead by the Rev. Dr. Henry Townes. The Rev. M. F. Robinson served First Baptist for many years.

St. John's Methodist Church is no longer in use as a church but is now a storage building. It was such a well-built and beautiful structure.

Community Garden

The Community Garden Club stands on the 200 block of South Main Street, once the Church of the Good Shepherd. The original building was served asDescripcion...

er by St. John's Methodist Church and the Good Shepherd Church. This property, once owned by the church, is now used as a community garden. The garden is well-maintained and offers a variety of plants and produce.
Watson Alumni Marking 50-Year Milestone

By Shirley Hughes Burke
Alumni President, Under and History

Watson High School is again, it's class time!

The year is especially significant because we are cele-

50 years since the nation of Watson High was estab-

lished in 1966. Our theme for this year is, “Watson High... Solid As Gold 50 Years.”

The committee, front row from left, Regina Laws, Yvonne Williams, Pearl Miller, Jeanette Reynolds, Bernedea Miner and Margaret Burke. Back row, Linda Cook, Geraldine Allen, Augustine Penn, Ralph Fitzpatrick program was the story and Linda Venable. Not pictured: Donna and Aaron Weising and Ronald Holloway Sr. (Photo Courtesy Linda Cook)

2016 WATSON ALUMNI COMMITTEE — A reunion will be held Friday, July 1, through Sunday, July 3, marking the 50th anniversary of the integration of Watson High School, which took place in 1966. The theme for this occasion will be, “Watson High... Solid As Gold 50 Years.”

The committee, front row from left, Regina Laws, Yvonne Williams, Pearl Miller, Jeanette Reynolds, Bernedea Miner and Margaret Burke.

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WATSON SCHOOL — The “Colored Branch” of the Charles P. Jones Memorial Library in Covington was housed in the former Watson School on Marion Avenue where Hytower Park is located today. The school was built around 1916 for high school and elementary classes and was used for this purpose until 1939 when the Watson High School on Pine Street opened. From 1940 until about 1954 the building was a community center and a location for night classes for adults. The library was opened in the building in 1948 and moved in 1954 to Sixth Street. The first Watson School was then left vacant and was boarded up until it was torn down in the early 1960s. This photograph was taken when the building was being torn down.