PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) ______009-5133_____

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 church and schools’ historic significance so that the citizens of Bedford County 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: ______Sharon Baptist Church and Sharon (public) School__________
Property address: ______16242 Big Island Hwy________________
Zip code: _____24526________

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: __ Bedford County ___

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

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: _ 2.2 _

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

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

The property is located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Big Island Highway (Rt. 122) and Peters Creek Road (Rt. 600) in northern Bedford County. The church is set back about 115 feet from Big Island Highway and 90 feet from Peters Creek Road. The former school, now a fellowship hall for the church, stands just 110 feet west-northwest of the church. Both buildings face south toward the highway. Between them is a relatively new fellowship hall with a footprint measuring approximately 78 feet by 40 feet. The church and the new building are fronted by a paved parking lot that wraps around to the east side of the church. The school is surrounded to the north, west and south by small expanses of flat, grassy lawn. The rear (north) boundary of the parcel is demarcated by Hunting Creek, a small tributary of the James River, which is reached about 1.6 miles to the east. The Town of Bedford is nearly 16 miles to the south and the City of Lynchburg about 16 miles to the southeast. Sharon Cemetery (not included in the evaluation) is located one-quarter mile north-northeast of the church, to the east of Peters Creek Road.
3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): Church: Gothic Revival; School: no discernable style

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):  School: built in 1918, closed 1959; Church built in 1934

Narrative Description:

Sharon School
The hip-roofed main block of the school, built in 1918, measures 48 x 20 feet. The front-gabled projecting front pavilion, containing the recessed front entrance flanked by bathrooms, extends about eight feet or so from the main block. A 1991 photo shows a deteriorated concrete foundation, weatherboarded exterior walls (now covered with vinyl siding), and a standing-seam metal roof (now asphalt shingles). The foundation has been repaired and painted. The window apertures boarded-over in 1991 have new sash windows with eight-over-eight-grid snap-on muntins. The wooden paneled front folding doors have been replaced with half-glazed folding doors. The interior features all new finishes including dry wall and carpets, as well as new doors, bathroom fixtures, and lighting, dating to 1999-2000. The east room—the larger of the two original rooms — has been partitioned to include a small church office.

Sharon Baptist Church
The church, built in 1934, is a one-story building with a full basement; neatly coursed, rusticated stone-faced concrete-block walls, gray to buff in color; a crenelated southeast-corner bell tower (bell intact) and a combination front-gable and rear-hip-roof that defies normal categorization. The roof is clad with presumably original pressed-tin shingles (copper or painted?). The building footprint measures roughly 62 feet by 42 feet. A granite date stone, at the southeast corner of the building reads SHARON BAPTIST CHURCH – 1867 – 1934 – C. J. JONES, PASTOR.

In the front is a winding, masonry handicap ramp with metal railings leading to the centered front entrance, which has metal and glass folding doors surmounted by a three-part stained glass window with wooden mullions. Above the window is a Sharon Baptist Church sign with black lettering on a white background. The formerly louvered vents at the top of the tower and front gable are now covered with perforated vinyl.

Along each side elevation are five symmetrically arranged windows and two windows flank the rear entrance. The window and door apertures, each spanned by robust stone lintels, have not been added or modified, but stained glass windows were installed in the early 1970s. [Timothy Otey, November 2021.] Around the same time the church interior was modernized almost entirely.
4. Property’s History and Significance

Sharon Church and School, built in 1934 and 1918, respectively, are both landmarks in the history of Bedford County's African American community. The school was built as a county school on land donated by the church. It served generations of students in grades 4-7 before closing in 1959. The church was built by a congregation dating back to the immediate post-Civil War period. Their previous church edifice was just a quarter mile north, at Sharon Cemetery. The church is still in-use as Sharon Missionary Baptist Church, and the school is maintained by the church as one of their two fellowship halls. The school's historic integrity was diminished somewhat during renovations in 1999, but the building retains its original massing and sufficient integrity to convey significance under Criterion A in the areas of Education and African American Ethnic History. The church is well-preserved and appears eligible under Criterion A in the area of African American Ethnic History and potentially Criterion C in the area of Architecture for its Gothic Revival design.

Historical Background

Sharon School

According to the local history book *Bedford Villages, Lost and Found*, “the first Sharon School for African American students was a log cabin built by Sam Otey and Ephraim Burton on Sharon Hill about 1869. Dan Turner was the first teacher. The building was destroyed by fire, but the school continued in the home of Mrs. Martha Otey. After Sharon Baptist Church moved [to its present location] they built a new frame building for the school children. In 1931 a school bus route was established by the county.” The book includes a list of the schools many teachers. [Bedford Villages, Lost and Found, Vol. 2, p. 141-143.]

In 1916, Sharon Baptist Church deeded property next to the church to the Bedford County School Board and in 1918 the extant school was constructed as a public school for African American children. The school was composed of a smaller room for grades 4-7, and a bigger room where other activities took place, with a stage where plays would be performed. The first two teachers were Ms. Sadie Reynolds and Mrs. Edna White. [Sharon Missionary Baptist Church, 150th Anniversary book, 2017, unpublished.]

In 1939, there were thirty-three schools and 47 teachers for African American students in Bedford County. Sharon School, was one of the seven two-room schools. The original cost of construction was $2,000, but after a 1938 appraisal it was valued at only 1,200. The site was recorded as 1.5 acres, which may or may not have included the church. The playground was judged to be “adequate”, and the school had been painted a few years prior, in 1935. [Bonner, Oscar Trent, “A Survey of Negro Education in Bedford County” Master’s Thesis, University of Virginia School of Education, June 1939.]

In 1950-51, there were 28 elementary schools in the county for African Americans, nine of which, including Sharon School, were two-room schools. Seventeen one-room schools still remained operational, and there was one three-room school and one four-room school. Of the 28 schools, only one had a flush toilet; the others, including Sharon School, which had an enrollment of 64 students in 1950, still relied on outdoor privies. As John E. Harrell writes in his 1951 master’s thesis, “The elementary school buildings for Negro children in Bedford County have come to the end of their usefulness. The majority were constructed more than twenty-five years ago; the purpose of education has changed; they are not adaptable to the type of program needed in elementary school; the renovation would cost nearly as much as new buildings...Most school plants, old or new, are entirely inadequate to meet the demands...” At the time, there were 1, 117 African American elementary students enrolled and only 43 elementary school teachers (an average 26 students per teacher) in Bedford County, but the numbers of students and teacher workloads were not equally distributed. One-third of the teachers were responsible for teaching half of the students. According to Harrell’s survey, Sharon School had the highest percentage (98%) of students transported to school of any school in the county, which was thought to have some impact on the school’s efficiency and the progress of its students. [Harrell, John Edmund, “A
In 1954, Paul Quarles was mentioned as being the principal of Sharon School in a local newspaper. [Bedford Democrat, March 25, 1954] Apparently, only men could serve as principals, but they also taught classes. The last of them at Sharon School, before it closed its doors in October, 1959, was Rev. John D. Beamer, Sr. With the school’s closing, its students were sent to Counter Ridge Elementary School in the small, nearby community of Sedalia (the former school is now known as the Sedalia Center). Sharon Baptist Church then petitioned the Bedford County School Board to revert the property back to the church, which was not allowed, so it was sold at auction for $600 to Mr. James Reynolds, who arranged for the church to take possession. For decades the old school building functioned as a fellowship hall for the church, but was left relatively unattended after the new fellowship hall was built between the church and school. In 1999, the church’s trustee ministry, under the direction of trustee Timothy Otey, began renovating the school building with a new roof, vinyl siding, front steps, electrical wiring, HVAC, new flooring, windows and doors, and new handicap accessible bathrooms were installed. The big room was partitioned to include a church office. [Sharon Missionary Baptist Church, 150th Anniversary book, 2017.]

**Sharon Baptist Church**

In 1951 church services were held the second and fourth Sundays of the month by Pastor C. J. Jones, who had been a pastor there for the previous 19 years. At the time, the church had around 300 members. [“Negro Church at Big Island Has an Outstanding Pastor,” Bedford Democrat, March 1, 1951, p. 9]

The following was excerpted from an unpublished book celebrating Sharon Baptist Church’s 150th anniversary in 2017:

Sharon Baptist Church was organized September 1867 under the leadership of Rev. H. H. Johnson of Boston, Massachusetts with a few members who had previously been allowed to worship once a month with Hunting Creek Baptist Church.

The first building was a small log cabin, built on the site where the church cemetery is now located [1/4-mile N-NE of the present church]. This land was purchased from Mr. Roland Turpin. [As of 2017] Sharon Baptist Church membership has had twenty-two (22) pastors since its inception.

During the administration of Rev. T. P. Johnson the land that our church now sits and was purchased and construction of a church was started. This building was completed under the administration of Rev. W. C. Brawn. In 1934, the present structure was completed under the administration of Rev. C. J. Jones.

In March 1959, Rev. E. R. Wilson accepted the call to pastor Sharon Baptist Church. Under his leadership regular worship service was increased to every Sunday. The Sharon School, which is adjacent to the church, was purchased for the sum of six hundred dollars.

In 1965, Rev. James B. Williams, a chaplain and officer in the U.S. Army, accepted the call to pastor Sharon Baptist Church. He served as pastor for two years. Rev. William Freeman served as pastor from 1968 to 1985. During his administration, new stained glass windows were installed, the kitchen was remodeled, a public address system installed, and the pulpit and chair stand were carpeted.
5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: _____ Public\Local  x  Public\State  _____ Public\Federal  _____

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: Timothy W. Otey  Trustee
organization: Sharon Missionary Baptist Church
street & number: 16242 Big Island Highway
city or town: Big Island  state: VA  zip code: 24526
e-mail: rbotey1@aol.com  telephone: 434-941-1118

Legal Owner’s Signature: Timothy W. Otey - Trustee  Date: 6-1-2022

**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: Timothy Otey
Daytime Telephone: 434-941-1118

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 County Administrator

name/title: Robert Hiss
locality: Bedford County
street & number: 122 East Main Street, Suite 202
city or town: Bedford, VA 24523
telephone: (540) 586-7601
SHARON BAPTIST
1867 CHURCH 1934
G. J. JONES. PASTOR