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.

Multiple property owners are in the proposed historic district are hoping to complete rehabilitation tax credit projects.

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): _Newport News Downtown Historic District____________________
   DHR ID number: 121-5621
   Main Streets and/or Routes: _Warwick Boulevard, Huntington Avenue, Washington Avenue, West Avenue; 23rd Street to 36th Street___________________________________________
   City or Town: _Newport News_______________
   Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: _City of Newport News_

2. Physical Aspects
   Acreage: _208________________________________
   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:

Downtown Newport News is an urban environment with sidewalks throughout, overhead power lines, stoplights at many intersections, and limited vegetation. Other than vacant lots, there are two notable green spaces: Superblock Park, which incorporates four former city blocks into a large green space and narrow parking lot. The other large green space within the district is the Christopher Newport Park which is sited on the western edge of downtown abutting the river. The downtown also has numerous parking lots highlighting the locations of many previously demolished buildings. The downtown area is bounded by the James River to the west, harbor facilities to the south, Interstate 664 and railroad lines to the east, and the sprawling Huntington Ingalls/Newport News Shipbuilding facilities to the north.
3. Architectural/Physical Description
Architectural Style(s): Gothic Revival; Greek Revival; International; Brutalist; Colonial Revival; New Formalism; Romanesque; Richardsonian Romanesque; Byzantine; Twentieth Century Commercial Style

If any individual properties within the district were designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: Peebles and Ferguson; James Knox Taylor; Reuban Harrison Hunt; Charles M. Robinson

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

Date(s) of construction (can be approximate): 1893-1972

Are there any known threats to this district? Demolition, neglect

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 Newport News Downtown Historic District includes a surprising variety of architectural styles and building types. The fully redeveloped core at the southern end features large, multistory office buildings which invoke the International, Brutalist, and New Formalism styles. Typical for these styles, these buildings demonstrate strong vertical or horizontal design with limited decorative features. Scattered throughout the district as one moves north along West, Washington and Huntington Avenues are a number of older buildings (including many monumental churches) which exhibit a number of more traditional styles including Gothic, Greek, and Colonial Revival, Romanesque, and early-to-mid twentieth century Commercial Style. The far north end of the district has a few pockets of remaining pre-World War II housing as well as smaller one-and-two story commercial buildings. These buildings are interspersed with parking lots and garages. Exterior materials most commonly seen in the district are brick veneer, stone, concrete, glass, and vinyl siding on the smaller number of residential resources. Alterations seen most often are large, boxy additions to several churches as well as vinyl siding being added to most remaining dwellings. However, most resources retain a high level of integrity. Overall, the district has suffered from extensive demolition and later infill accompanied with numerous parking lots, but the result has also been a clearly identifiable mid-twentieth century downtown focused on government and commercial buildings. Outside this core is a district which retains a significant number of important architectural resources which offer a clear window into pre-World War II downtown Newport News.

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 Newport News Downtown Historic District is largely institutional with a mixture of large office buildings, prominent churches, and substantial multi-unit dwellings. At the edges to the west and north, and a few scattered elsewhere, are a limited number of single-family residential resources. The parcels for most resources are large, reflecting the size of the buildings, and are separated by streets with sidewalks and utility poles. Parking lots are interspersed throughout. The vast majority of properties are used for a similar purpose as they were historically: offices, churches, dwellings. There are a limited number of trees.
and shrubs scattered throughout downtown, as well as the central large Superblock Park and the Christopher Newport Park at the western boundary abutting the James River.

In addition to the eight properties already individually listed on the National Register, the majority of resources within the district are viewed as contributing, including the following. This list is not definitive, and represents an initial assessment. The addresses reflect current addressing in the Newport News GIS mapping system (maps.nnva.gov/viewer/) Multiple additional buildings will likely be added to the final list of contributing resources after a survey of the proposed district.

2700 Huntington Avenue
2815 Huntington Avenue
3100 Huntington Avenue
3200-02 Huntington Avenue
3305 Huntington Avenue (12983 Nettles Drive)
3508 Huntington Avenue

3501 Warwick Blvd

2400 Washington Avenue (City Hall complex)
2600 Washington Avenue
2700 Washington Avenue
2712 Washington Avenue
2800 Washington Avenue
3404 Washington Avenue
3506 Washington Avenue
3508 Washington Avenue
3512 Washington Avenue

2800 West Avenue
2904 West Avenue
3007 West Avenue
3015 West Avenue
2591 West Avenue (former Greek Orthodox Church)

101 25th Street (Post Office, aka Federal Building)
210 25th Street

90 28th Street
91 28th Street

85 29th Street, (St. James Terrace Apartments complex)
87 29th Street
119 29th Street
223 29th Street
228 29th Street

82 30th Street
87 30th Street
91 30th Street
99 30th Street

96 31st Street

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215 32nd Street
230 33rd Street
317-325 33rd Street
221 34th Street
332 34th Street
331 35th Street
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 Newport News Downtown Historic District is locally significant under Criterion A (Community Planning and Development) as an example of an evolved downtown heavily influenced by the mid-to-late twentieth century process of redevelopment. The Newport News downtown suffered a similar fate to the majority of historic downtowns in the twentieth century with a mass exodus of citizens and business to suburban corridors. Newport News experienced multiple waves of redevelopment which resulted in a loss of a majority of its early historic resources. However, the current downtown is an excellent example of urban renewal and has a notable collection of contributing mid-twentieth century resources which tell the story of the downtown’s transformation. Additionally, the district is locally significant under Criterion C (Architecture) for not only its more recent architect designed office buildings, but also a still impressive small collection of earlier late-nineteenth through mid-twentieth century historic resources. The Period of Significance for the district begins in 1893 with the earliest extant resource to the construction of the Newport Towers Apartment Building in 1972, which marks the end of the period of mid-twentieth century redevelopment for Newport News’ downtown district.

References to some form of the name “Newportes Newes(se)” first appear in the Virginia Company’s 1619 records, with the first official settler to the area being Daniel Gookin, Sr. on November 21, 1621. Initially the area of modern Newport News was part of the Kecoughtan division (later Elizabeth City). Eventually Virginia was divided into eight shires, including Warwick River Shire in 1634, renamed the County of Warwick in 1643, the location of modern City of Newport News. Tobacco was the main driver of the agricultural economy for much of the first century of Warwick County’s existence which led to later soil exhaustion and long-term agricultural decline. Other than the failed Warwicktown (established 1680 at the mouth of the Warwick River) there was little in the way of dense development in the area until after the Civil War. After the war the Census of 1790 revealed Warwick County to have the second smallest population of any Virginia County at 1,690, with 990 of those being slaves; by 1830 the population had fallen to 1,570. Additionally, the almost entirely agricultural economy consisted mostly of smaller farms, rather than large plantations, and continued like this until after the Civil War.1 On January 1, 1831 Parker West purchased the 265-acre Newport News farm, part of the original Gookin parcel, which would eventually be the site of the city. A rejuvenated agricultural, and overall more diversified economy, caused the population to rebound to 1,740 by 1860.2 After the war the economy and social system were decimated, along with the dissolution of slavery which had supported it for several centuries. A chaotic decade was followed by the readmission of Virginia to the Union in 1870.

Led by the efforts of Collis P. Huntington, the Old Dominion Land Company was established on October 19, 1880. This company, which was the primary driver of development for several decades, purchased 18,000 acres, and proposed a map for the eventual town of Newport News, which it then proceeded to develop at a frantic pace. By 1880 the county population had grown to 2,258. In 1882 the eastern terminus of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad opened at Newport News Point and led to a complete

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transformation of the economy and establishment of the city. The combination of the new town and the railroad terminus led to the rapid development of a modern port with deep-water wharves, huge piers, and a massive grain elevator. These were followed by the Hotel Warwick in April of 1883 and a population of approximately 1,000, which exploded to 12,000 by 1891. Coal had become the leading product of the ports and fueled the shipping industry. While it started small with the Chesapeake Dry Dock & Construction Company (soon changed to Newport News shipbuilding in 1900) in 1886, the shipbuilding industry would eventually be a vital part of the Newport News economy surpassing all others with both commercial and naval contracts. In anticipation of the 1907 Jamestown Exposition, ferry service was established between Newport News and Norfolk.3

With the incredible growth of industry and the population, Newport News established its first city water system in 1891 by damming the Warwick River, but many of the streets remained dirt for horses until after World War I, and housing was substandard. The owners of the Old Dominion Land Company created the Newport News Light and Water Company in 1889 to fund the water system and a substantial building program of new brick houses to attract workers. This The General Assembly initiated a popular referendum in 1888, approved by voters, which established Newport News as the Warwick County seat and thus host to the new courthouse. The number and variety of retail businesses, banks, and industrial companies grew steadily during this period. The 1881 weekly Newport News Commercial became a daily newspaper in 1894 and began an uninterrupted period of newspaper coverage for the city. The Commercial was eclipsed by the Daily Press by the turn of the century, and this paper has continued to serve the city to this day; multiple other newspapers emerged during the early twentieth century. This expansion of the press during the late nineteenth-century included three African American newspapers, led by the Star.4

The City of Newport News was officially incorporated on January 16, 1896 with voters choosing a mayor and fourteen councilmen, two from each ward. The city immediately created a formal budget for fire, police, health and street services, as well as a formal school system. Banking was established early in the new city with the creation of the First National Bank of Newport News in 1888. Telephone service followed in 1898 and the Newport News Street Railway Company in 1890, with the first electric street car service beginning in 1892. The establishment of the Citizens Railway Light and Power Company in 1900 ushered in the new era of regular power and electric light services; the company also listed ice production as one of its services. Clear evidence of the growing importance and prominence of the city was the 1904 construction of the large, elaborately designed Federal Building at the corner of West Avenue and twenty-fifth Street, which was built to house the Post Office, and continues to serve that purpose. Improvements to the city continued with the chartering of the Newport News General and Non-Sectarian Hospital in 1915, which was the precursor to the current Riverside Regional Medical Center. In 1898 Newport News was declared a Port of Embarkation for the first time in support of the Spanish-American War and, like later conflicts, the C & O Railway and its facilities were taken over by the national government to support the effort.5

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World War I affected the City of Newport News, and the Hampton Roads region, much more than most American cities. The Newport News Shipyard led by Homer L. Ferguson, who was CEO from 1915 to 1953, rapidly expanded its workforce to 12,500 by 1919, and included women for the first time. For the second time in its history Newport News was declared a Port of Embarkation by the U.S. Army. The army took control of the port from C & O and established multiple staging areas including four primary bases to support the Embarkation order: Morrison, Stuart, Hill, and Alexander. The expansion of the port and the warehousing capabilities of the city served it well in future years. The population of Newport News also boomed during this period from 26,246 in 1910 to 47,013 in 1920. The desperate need to house so many new residents and workers resulted in the establishment of Hilton Village near Camp Morrison, the first government built planned community. Additionally, one of the most notable resources within downtown Newport News, the Victory Arch, was initially constructed in 1919 to honor returning soldiers from World War I. The original wood frame arch was replaced in 1962 with the current granite arch which is fifty feet high and sits at the base of Twenty Fifth Street and now honors fallen soldiers from World War I, World War II and the Korean War.

In 1922 Newport News entered a depression as the boom economy of World War I severely contracted. This was coupled with the International Disarmament Conference which resulted in a pledge to halt all naval construction as well as the oversupply of commercial ships created by federally supported building programs during wartime. The shipyard workforce collapsed from 14,000 to 2,200 in short order. Sporadic passenger ship orders from around the world kept the shipyard afloat until the construction of warships resumed in 1927. The shipyard won the contract for the aircraft carrier Ranger in 1930 which began decades of a virtual monopoly on carrier construction. During the 1920s the city annexed the town of Kecoughtan to continue its expansion. Additionally, as previously discussed, the city changed to a manager form of government in 1920 with a mayor and a five-member council. The city and the Old Dominion Land Company worked together to build the Newport News Public Library building at the corner of West Avenue and Thirtieth Street in 1929; this Colonial Revival library continues to serve the city today. While most of the country suffered greatly during the Great Depression, a rebound in commercial and naval shipbuilding carried Newport News through the worst of it with only moderate retraction and full recovery by the late 1930s. It was also during the Great Depression that Newport News became more than an industrial town with the establishment of the 880-acre Mariner’s Museum in 1931 as well as what would become the War Memorial Museum of Virginia in 1936. In 1938 the Newport News Housing Authority was created to upgrade, rebuild, and expand the city’s poor housing stock.

From its official 1896 incorporation until 1940, the City of Newport News completed eight boundary expansions eventually encompassing most of the southern end of the peninsula south of the current James River Bridge, bounded to the east by the extensive railroad lines which ran parallel to the shipbuilding facilities. The boundary then ran east roughly along thirty-sixth street, south of the current Interstate 664. The end of the city in 1940 to the east was the former Village of Kecoughtan, specifically Pear Avenue,
and did not include the existing Greenlawn Cemetery. The current proposed historic district is found almost entirely within the original 1896 city boundary.

With the attack on Pearl Harbor the United States entered World War II and on June 16, 1942 the Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation (one of eight national ports of embarkation) was established with Newport News as its headquarters. As with World War I, many industrial sites were taken over by the federal government for the war effort. With all local, state, and federal funding sources taken into account, more than five billion dollars was spent on improvements to city services and infrastructure. Notable improvements included the new Whittaker Memorial Hospital and multiple expansions of Riverside Hospital. The shipyard employment peaked at 31,000 in 1943 as compared to the 1940 census recordation of 37,067 citizens for all of Newport News. Federal funding also supported housing for all of these additional workers and growing population with over 13,000 housing units built by 1945, including what may have been the nation’s largest World War I housing development with 5,200 prefab homes in Copeland Park and Newsome Park.

The post-World War II period brought challenges and change for Newport News. In 1946 buses replaced the trolley system, and by 1947 there wasn’t a single ship under construction at the shipyard. But commercial shipping and an expansion into turbine construction kept the shipyard afloat. One of its greatest commissions of the post-war period was the huge and incredibly fast SS United States, a 990-foot passenger liner. The Peninsula Industrial Committee (PIC) was created in 1945 in an attempt to prevent a post-war slump similar to the period after World War I. The PIC brought numerous businesses to Newport News culminating in the transformation of the Copeland-Newsome Park temporary war housing project into the 811-acre Copeland Industrial Park on the border with the City of Hampton. Camp Patrick Henry was transformed into a commercial airport which opened in 1949. By the 1950s ship building had also returned to being a reliable and leading engine of growth and employment. The 1950s also saw Newport News face a population crisis with the geographically constrained city in 1950 housing 42,358 residents. Attempts to merge with Hampton were rebuffed when Hampton merged with Elizabeth City and Phoebus in 1952. Warwick incorporated as an independent city the same year effectively blocking any expansion for Newport News.

Newport News attempted various methods to revitalize the city and counteract the limits of its size, as well as the downtown population decline faced by a majority of cities during this period. Investment and planning, including a massive renovation program for city housing, resulted in renewed downtown development and investment. At the same time the City of Warwick expanded so quickly that it could not keep up with expected services from residents, many of whom worked in Newport News. After several failed attempts, the citizens of both communities approved a plan of consolidation on July 16, 1957, adopting the name of Newport News for the entire newly expanded city. Mrs. Philip Hiden, widow of the former mayor, and Mrs. Homer L. Ferguson, widow of the former longtime CEO of the Newport News Shipyard, helped cut the ribbon opening the new city on July 1, 1958; the event was accompanied by a nineteen-gun salute at Huntington Park which was the northern line between the two former cities. The result was a city of sixty-four square miles (the largest in Virginia at the time) and a population behind only Richmond and Norfolk. As other cities in the region grew and consolidated, the bridge and tunnel system was greatly expanded creating a connected, if highly competitive Hampton Roads urban environment. As it had for most of the previous half century, the Newport News shipyard led the way in

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12 This was a period of consolidation for nearly all of the Hampton Roads area: the City of Virginia Beach was formed by the 1963 merger of the City of Virginia Beach and Princess Anne County; the City of Chesapeake was formed by the 1963 merger of the City of Newport News with Princess Anne County; and the City of Virginia Beach was formed by the 1963 merger of the City of Virginia Beach and Princess Anne County. The result was a city of sixty-four square miles (the largest in Virginia at the time) and a population behind only Richmond and Norfolk. As other cities in the region grew and consolidated, the bridge and tunnel system was greatly expanded creating a connected, if highly competitive Hampton Roads urban environment. As it had for most of the previous half century, the Newport News shipyard led the way in...
the continued success of the city’s economy with numerous commercial and military commissions. Additionally, the port expanded with more industrial piers and greater merchant ship capacity and draft depth. The population continued to grow, reaching 113,662 people in post-consolidation 1960, and the city added several skyscrapers in the 1960s to emerge as a modern, fully developed city.13

Unfortunately, Newport News eventually faced the same challenge of a declining downtown experienced by the majority of cities in the United States at that time. The new, consolidated city initially saw a significant boost to downtown businesses, but this resulted in a corresponding crisis from the lack of parking. Like nearly every other American downtown, it was designed for a majority of shoppers to arrive by bus, streetcar, or on foot. The parking crisis pushed many shoppers to the malls. Suburbs and accompanying shopping centers began to emerge in the 1950s, mostly along Warwick Boulevard, well north of downtown. Longstanding businesses began to abandon downtown in the late 1960s, again mostly for the new commercial corridor of Warwick Boulevard. Businesses which left downtown during this period included Nachman’s, La Vogue’s, W. T. Chapin, First and Merchants Bank; the last major retailer to leave downtown was Sears Roebuck in 1975.14

Redevelopment and Renewal were two concepts which played a devastating role in the early historic fabric of downtown Newport News. The Housing Act of 1949 was passed with the specific purpose of clearing older, low-income “slum” areas and creating new housing for citizens. “Commercial renewal” led to a similar process for smaller businesses and older commercial buildings. The first period of redevelopment in Newport News occurred in the 1950s and resulted in over forty-five acres of homes and small businesses being cleared for new buildings to house Sears, the Home Federal Savings and Loan, a new Municipal Court Building, the Wilbern Building, several parking lots, as well as other projects never realized.15 Redevelopment continued in 1964 with most of the three blocks between thirtieth and thirty-third streets being demolished in favor of the Bank of Warwick, an addition to the La Vogue Store, a drive-in branch for the Bank of Hampton Roads and, again, parking lots. The following year saw another round of redevelopment which led to the demolition of nearly everything from twenty-third to twenty-eighth streets between Washington Avenue and West Avenue. The buildings eventually constructed in this newly cleared area included the new (and current) City Hall (1972), the First and Merchants Bank (1969) at 2600 Washington Avenue, Newport Towers (1972) at the corner of twenty-seventh Street and West Avenue and the Superblock Park from twenty-sixth to twenty-eight streets.16 The issue of urban renewal aside, the goal of the city in establishing the new City Hall downtown, and encouraging large commercial businesses such as banks to follow, was to halt the abandonment of the downtown area. To a certain extent this was achieved.

Too late for much of early historic downtown Newport News, the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act (1966) amended the 1949 Housing Act to refocus urban renewal on providing housing, and required future urban renewal plans to consider historic properties and preservation as part of any larger efforts. The 1966 National Historic Preservation Act bolstered this effort by expanding the National Register of Historic Places to all potential resources and requiring all federally linked projects to take into account any effects on National Register properties. Unfortunately, this did not apply to any projects

of the City of South Norfolk and South Norfolk County; the City of Suffolk was formed by the 1974 merger of the City of Suffolk and the City of Nansemond (former Nansemond County).

16 Reid and McCartney, Renaissance Survey, 158; Newport News, A Centennial History, 189.
started before 1966, resulting in continued unmitigated loss of resources in many areas for several decades.\textsuperscript{17}

The final city-led effort to redevelop downtown Newport News, which postdates the period of significance, was the 1982 Newport Centre plan. The plan initially called for $275 million in spending creating a hotel/cultural/retail complex on the Superblock Park, a new office center, residential towers and a landscaped seventeen-hundred-foot sea-walk along the James River. The area covered by this plan consisted of over fifty acres from the waterfront to the railroad tracks past Warwick Boulevard and between twenty-fifth and thirty-fifth streets. The plan was largely unrealized, but did result in the demolition of historic commercial buildings on Washington Avenue between twenty-ninth and thirtieth streets as well as a block of residential and commercial historic buildings between thirty-fourth and thirty-fifth streets. The only privately funded part of the plan which was built was the River Park Tower apartment building, located close to the existing residential Newport Towers. However, continuing its efforts to bolster the downtown area, the city did construct a new courthouse near the City Hall.\textsuperscript{18}

There are currently eight existing National Register listings within the proposed Newport News Downtown Historic District:

\begin{itemize}
\item Basic Construction Building, 121-5453
\item First Baptist Church, 121-0031
\item Hotel Warwick, 121-0040
\item Medical Arts Building, 121-0223
\item Newport News Public Library, 121-0080
\item Noland Company Building, 121-0299
\item St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church, 121-0032
\item Walker-Wilkins-Bloxom Warehouse Historic District, 121-0076
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{17} Huxtable, “Many Historic Buildings Fall.”
\textsuperscript{18} Reid and McCartney, \textit{Renaissance Survey}, 158; Newport News, \textit{A Centennial History}, 202-03.
5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

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

6. 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: Mr. Jonathan Provost (Check)
- organization: Provost Construction (Check)
- street & number: 206 23rd Street (Check)
- city or town: Newport News (Check)
- state: VA (Check)
- zip code: 23607
- e-mail: jprovost@provost.com
- telephone: 757-651-3455

Applicant's Signature:

Date: 05/23/2022

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: ____________________________
- Daytime Telephone: ________________________

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

- name/title: Marcus Pollard (Check)
- organization: Commonwealth Preservation Group (Check)
- street & number: 536 W 35th Street (Check)
- city or town: Norfolk (Check)
- state: VA (Check)
- zip code: 23508
- e-mail: marcus@commonwealthpreservationgroup.com
- telephone: 757-651-0494

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: Cynthia D. Rohlf, City Manager (Check)
- locality: Newport News (Check)
- street & number: 2400 Washington Avenue (Check)
- city or town: Newport News (Check)
- state: VA (Check)
- zip code: 23607
- telephone: 757-926-8411