Preliminary Information Form

Purpose of Evaluation

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

The settlement within the Norwich area dates back to the late 1800s when foundries and factories established along the south bank of the Roanoke River. The village flourished with factories, mills, grocery stores, churches, variety of residential building and a school, all supported by a community well fed from an underground spring.

Recent development and redevelopment activities within the Norwich have caused negative impact on the historic fabric of the area. Inappropriate building alterations, construction of new buildings that lack architectural features or details, and inconsistent arrangement of the buildings on-site have significantly impacted the neighborhood character.

The City of Roanoke is submitting this PIF as part of the process for considering this area for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and inclusion in the Commonwealth of Virginia historic districts. National Historic Districts have provided the City of Roanoke an economic development tool, providing property owners and investors incentives to improve their properties and preserve historic building.

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):  Norwich

   Main Streets and/or Routes:  Roanoke Avenue, S.W.

   City or Town:  Roanoke

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

2. Physical Aspects

   Acreage:  200

   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 Roanoke Development Company, formed in 1890 developed the layouts for most of the City of Roanoke in a grid of streets and allies also made grid pattern layout of streets and allies for this area.

   The Roanoke River runs along the north boundary of the area and has great potentials for recreation. The greenway along the Roanoke River and a park within the area provide great recreation open spaces.
3. Architectural/Physical Description

Architectural Style(s): Craftsman Bungalows, Colonial Revivals, American Foursquare, Minimal Traditional, and shotgun houses.

If any individual properties within the district were designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: Charles Gordon Beebe, President of the Norwich Lock Company, New London County in Connecticut moved to this area in 1890, to build his Lock Company that created an employment base that provided many different types of housing, including shotgun houses, for the factory workers and their families.

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

Date(s) of construction (can be approximate): ca. 1895

Are there any known threats to this district?
New construction include inconsistent exterior building alterations which lack architectural character and have utilized inappropriate exterior building material.

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.

Within the proposed district boundary are estimated to be 380 properties that include buildings or structures, very few of which have been surveyed to date. There is a great variety of residential buildings with significant architectural styles. The majority of the buildings have maintained their architectural integrity including shotgun houses, Craftsman Bungalows, Colonial Revivals, and American Foursquare.

Prominent residential building materials include weatherboard siding, wood double hung windows, and gabled and hipped roof with slate and architectural shingles. The prominent industrial buildings include brick and masonry concrete blocks, metal windows and flat roofs.

Building alterations and new constructions, including multi-family developments, have taken place within the area, causing negative impact on the historic buildings, and the neighborhood character. Majority of these new buildings lack architectural details, and they have utilized inappropriate exterior building material, such as vinyl siding, etc. In addition, some of the new building placements on-site are inconsistent with the existing neighborhood context.
The pictures below display inappropriately installed solar panels on a Bungalow style home and a couple of the new multi-family development that lack architectural features or fenestrations.

The City of Roanoke HUD program invests in properties located within the National Register Districts such as recently designated Belmont. Section 106 Reviews are required for all federally funded projects and such reviews could prevent further negative impact on buildings in Norwich. Creating a National Designation of the Norwich area may be a step toward the possibilities of creating a local historic district that would prevent inappropriate exterior building alterations.

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.

Charles Gordon Beebe, President of the Norwich Lock Company, New London County in Connecticut, named the neighborhood. Norwich is a historic community, located approximately two miles west of downtown Roanoke. The neighborhood is located south of the Roanoke River, wedged in between the River and Raleigh Court neighborhood.

The Roanoke River is a natural feature that runs along the northern boundary of the area with light industrial uses that include many of the original historic buildings that contributed to the early settlement in this area. Most of the original shotgun houses that housed the factory workers still remain and are in use. The Roanoke Development Company, formed in 1890, developed layouts for most of the City of Roanoke in a grid of streets and allies also made grid pattern layout of streets and allies for this area.

In the early 1900’s, Roanoke Streetcars ran east-west direction through Roanoke Avenue, S.W., and connected this area to the rest of the City. Roanoke Avenue, S.W., is currently one of the main streets within the area, and includes single-family and multi-family residential buildings, an old school, several churches a park, and historic industrial buildings nearby.

Norwich School opened in 1891 and was one of the important neighborhood hubs. The school closed in 1979. Walker Machine & Foundry was founded in 1920 as one of the major employer within the Norwich area. It currently operates as a manufacturing company with 75 employees.

In 1919, the area was annexed into the City of Roanoke, which allowed for public utilities and schools to come to this area.
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 settlement of the area dates back to the late 1800s when foundries and factories were established along the south bank of the Roanoke River, west of the city. The Norwich village flourished with factories, mills, grocery stores, churches, and a school, all supported by a community well fed from an underground spring.

The Norwich neighborhood gets its name from Charles Gordon Beebe (1818-1895), President of the Norwich Lock Company, New London County in Connecticut. Mr. Beebe moved to this area in 1890 to build his Lock Company that created an employment base providing many different types of housing, including shotgun houses, for the factory workers and their families. In 1893, a flood and a tornado totally devastated this area; however, the residents rebuilt and remained steadfast, and today they pride themselves in their long and continuous ties to the Norwich neighborhood. The lock company did not last too long and in 1901, it reopened as Morice Twine Mill Company, allowing the Roanoke electric railway to run a line along Roanoke Avenue, S.W., connecting the area to the rest of the City. Walker Foundry located along the Roanoke River, was founded in 1920, and employed many of the area residents. It is still operating as a small manufacturing company with 75 employees.

The quiet neighborhood contains a few side streets, rows of shotgun style houses, long-time residents, one park, two stores, three churches, and incredible potential for recreational land use along the river where the mill and lumberyard once stood. The residents pride themselves in their long and continuous ties to the neighborhood; one such family has resided there for five generations. The majority of the housing stock has kept its historic charm, depicting a strong image of its earlier industrial heritage associated with the mills.

Sources for the above information:
New London County, Connecticut Biographies, April 2002
City of Roanoke Neighborhood Plans 2003 and Roanoke Public Library
City of Roanoke Mountain View/Norwich Corridor Plan 2008
City of Roanoke Television (RVTV5), “Spotlight on Neighborhoods”, May 11, 2018

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

7/19/2022
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: Parviz Moosavi, Historic Preservation Planner
Organization: City of Roanoke
Street & Number: 215 Church Avenue, S.W.
City or Town: Roanoke State: Virginia Zip code: 24011
E-mail: Parviz.moosavi@roanokeva.gov
Telephone: (540) 853-1522

Applicant’s Signature:

Date: 05/01/2020

• • 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: Parviz Moosavi, Historic Preservation Planner
Daytime Telephone: (540) 853-1522

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than applicant/sponsor listed above)
Name/title: ____________________________________________________________
Organization: ___________________ N/A ____________________________
Street & number: _______________________________________________________
City or town: __________________________ state: ____________ zip code: ________
E-mail: ______________________________ telephone: _______________________

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: Bob Cowell, City Manager
Locality: City of Roanoke
Street & Number: 215 Church Avenue, S.W.
City or town: Roanoke State: Virginia Zip code: 24011
Telephone: (540) 853-2333

A proposed boundaries map of the Norwich National Historic District is attached.
Norwich National Register District

- Proposed boundaries

View of Roanoke Avenue, Norwich 1929 [obtained from the Roanoke Public Library]