



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

Note: PIFs are prepared by applicants and evaluated by DHR staff and the State Review Board based on information known at the time of preparation. Recommendations concerning PIFs are subject to change if new information becomes available.

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) 001-5479

1. General Property Information

Property name: Mary N Smith Cultural Enrichment Center

Property address: 24577 Mary N. Smith Road

City or Town: Accomac, VA

Zip code: 23301

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

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):

Building ☒

Site ☐

Structure ☐

Object ☐

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: 8 acres

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban ☐ Suburban ☐ Town ☒ Village ☐ Hamlet ☐ Rural ☐

Briefly describe the property's overall location and setting, including any notable landscape features:

Located on the Eastern Peninsula of Virginia known for its coastal character, Mary N. Smith's location instead mirrors the rural agricultural landscape of the interior "spine." Located immediately west of U.S. Highway 13, the school is surrounded by rural homes and active farms. Additionally, the Perdue chicken factory is immediately southwest of the property which is a primary employer of the region. The property itself does not have any notable elevation changes or landscape features inconsistent with a rural coastal interior region.

3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): Post-War Modernism

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

If the builder is known, please list here: English Construction Co. Lynchburg, VA

Date of construction (can be approximate): 1953

Narrative Description (Please do not exceed one page in describing the property):

Briefly describe the property's general characteristics, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions or other major alterations.

The Mary N. Smith Cultural Enrichment Center is approximately 48,000 square feet spanning across two floors. The former African American school's exterior consists of a brick (5-course American bond pattern) façade with large steel paned windows consistent with the era of post-war modernist design. One of the more unique features of the school is the large brick chimney that sits atop the flat roof of the second story. Originally, the entire school was heated by coal, but the chimney remained after they switched to gas powered heating. The front entryway includes an awning with white lettering resting above saying "Mary N. Smith Middle School." The building continues into two wings creating a "U" shape with a central courtyard. Mary N. Smith's design is consistent with many schools constructed during this period. The first floor includes a gymnasium with hardwood flooring, three rows of bleachers, and locker rooms. The logo of the Mary N. Smith Bulldogs remains painted onto the center of the basketball court. Located between the two locker rooms is a stage where graduation and theater performances once occurred. The curtains typically drawn to the side continue serve as a reminder of the graduates before. Additionally, the school has a cafeteria that currently is used as an event space for the community. Alongside the cafeteria is an attached kitchen no longer tasked with serving students, but functions as a food preparation space for all the school's events. The library space and classroom also resides on the first-floor hosting community meetings including the Mary N. Smith Alumni Association. Moving to the second floor, the space is not currently used by the Cultural Enrichment Center and has not been maintained to the same conditions as the first. One of the two trophy cases is located along the main hallway upstairs hosting various awards involving both sports and academics. Even without any further occupancy, the classrooms along the second floor remain intact reminiscent of an earlier period including rooms for science laboratories and home economics. Some of the windowpanes are broken while the steel frames remain intact, and the dropped ceiling tiles are missing from parts of the corridor exposing the pink fiberglass insulation. The elevator was constructed as part of the original building, but no longer is in active use. Overall, the structure of the former Mary N. Smith mostly remains in its original, sound condition even as its purpose within the community has changed.

In a bullet list, include any outbuildings or secondary resources or major landscape features (such as barns, sheds, dam and mill pond, storage tanks, scales, railroad spurs, etc.), including their condition and their estimated construction dates.

- Athletic Field: Mary N. Smith has a storied history on the football field being one of the top teams along the Eastern Shore. The school has produced three NFL players during its time as a high school. Many Friday nights, members of the community including students, alumni, and neighbors would gather to cheer on the Bulldogs. The cleared, grassy area behind the school is what remains today, but alumni continue to reminisce about its ability to foster a sense of community pride.
- Portable Classroom: constructed in ____ the classrooms were added to handle the influx of students increasing the capacity of the school.
- Church Building: Constructed in 1953 alongside the main building, the church building uses the same brick design with steel windows. Originally, the building was used for music education hosting band practices, a community staple. Currently, the building operates as the place of worship for the congregation of Abba's House

4. Property's History and Significance (Please do not exceed one page)

Briefly explain the property's historic importance, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property.

If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

The former Mary N. Smith High School was named after prominent black educator Mary Nottingham Smith. Receiving her degree in education from the Hampton Institute, she began teaching in Essex County in 1910. She then returned to the Eastern Shore to become the Jeanes Educational Supervisor; a role supported by philanthropist Anna T. Jeanes to support education for rural African American communities in the South. From here, she supported classrooms in Accomack County to provide meaningful education to African American children. Her impact was formally recognized in 1932 when the school district named the first all-black high school in Accomack County after her. Still today, there is a highway marker in the town of Accomac memorializing her impact on the students who attended this school. The original Mary N. Smith School continued to operate until the construction of the current site.

The current property was purchased by the school board with financial support from local black organizations in 1948 due to overcapacity of the original school according to archives of the *Peninsula Enterprise*. Construction of the current Mary N. Smith school completed in 1953 with the building costing \$587,000. The first principal was Frederick L. Joynes. The school continued to be a vibrant space for the African American community of the Eastern shore boasting some of the highest graduation totals on the shore with as many as 244 students in 1960.

Integration did not occur in Accomack County until 1971 when the Supreme Court threatened action. More broadly, the schools across state of Virginia met with significant pushback including protesters blocking school grounds, closing nearby black schools in favor of white ones, and removing their kids from the public school system entirely. Accomack County had very similar instances of overtly discriminatory education practices beyond the legal integration practices. However, Mary N. Smith school's continued use as an integrated school proves both the exceptional quality of the building as well as the commitment to youth education on the shore. Regardless of the school's previous use, prejudice did not outweigh the desire to provide children with the best educational opportunities. Continuing to operate as a junior high school and middle school until 2003. The school sat vacant until 2011 when the Mary N. Smith Alumni Association purchased the property and began operating it as the Cultural Enrichment Center. Even after the building had served its purpose as an educational facility, the community members of the Eastern Shore continue to prioritize youth development and success through Mary N. Smith.

Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property, such as deeds, census and tax records, and/or published articles and books. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.)

- *Peninsula Enterprise* archives via the Virginia Chronicle database
- Accomack County Tax Record
- *Historic Architectural Resource Survey Eastern Shore- Accomack and Northampton Counties*: Virginia Department of Historic Resources
- Visit Eastern Shore Virginia Facebook

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

Private: ☒ Public\Local _____ 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: _____

organization: Mary N Smith Alumni Association

street & number: 24577 Mary N Smith Rd PO Box 915

city or town: Accomac state: VA zip code: 23301

e-mail: mnsulturalenrichcenter@gmail.com telephone: (757) 709-3267

Legal Owner's Signature: _____

Date: _____

• • *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: Colby West, Executive Director

Daytime Telephone: (757) 709-3267

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: Chancellor Reynolds

organization: University of Virginia: Main Campus

street & number: 360 14th St NW

city or town: Charlottesville state: VA zip code: 22903

e-mail: cmreynoldsjr@icloud.com telephone: 901-930-9151

Date: _____

PLEASE DO NOT ATTACH CONTINUATION SHEETS TO THIS FORM. THANK YOU!

PIF AERIAL-VICINITY MAP

Mary N. Smith School
Accomack County, VA
DHR ID# 001-5479


 Proposed Boundary

0 1,200
 Feet



PIF BOUNDARY MAP

Mary N. Smith School
Accomack County, VA
DHR ID# 001-5479

 Proposed Boundary

0 300
 Feet





MARY N. SMITH MIDDLE SCHOOL













