



## 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) 121-5320

### 1. General Property Information

Property name: The Moton Theatre / The Moton Community House

Property address: 2101 Jefferson Avenue

City or Town: Newport News

Zip code: 23607

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

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

Building X Site \_\_\_\_\_ Structure \_\_\_\_\_ Object \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: .11/5590 ft.2

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban X Suburban \_\_\_\_\_ Town \_\_\_\_\_ Village \_\_\_\_\_ Hamlet \_\_\_\_\_ Rural \_\_\_\_\_

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

The Moton Theatre building sits at the corner of Jefferson Avenue and 21<sup>st</sup> Street in the City of Newport News. The building encompasses most of the parcel, but there is a concrete driveway/alley at the rear of the building, which extends down the entire block. The building adjoins the neighboring building along Jefferson. There is a large, open parcel behind the building, on the other side of the driveway.

### 3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): \_\_\_\_\_

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): c. 1920s; theatre c. 1941

#### **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 building is included on the area's 1919 Sanborn Map as a duplex, by 1953, it shows as a theatre. The theatre is painted brick with block paneling on the front, wrapping around the sides. The central entrance retains its marquee – either original or in the same form as that shown on the 1953 Sanborn, and ticket counter flanked by entrance doors. The main block contains an entry vestibule, downstairs seating area, theatre stage, bathrooms, and kitchen; upstairs holds balcony seating, a projection room, front room, and bathrooms. Multiple staircases provide access to the upper floor. Drop ceilings have been installed throughout, except in the theatre. Decoration is minimal in the theatre with only a molded chairrail throughout. The attached section next door is a community center that is accessed by exterior doors, as well as a connector between the theatre and center block.

One story addition - purchased June 1978. Four 25 ft shops were purchased and combined for the community area.

Physical changes/updates - Facility renovated IAW codes and compliance.

Added 2nd Floor balcony area with seating

Added projection room

HVAC

Sound system

Sprinkler system

New Retractable Projection Screen

Handicap bathrooms

Side stairs added on both sides

Original

Entrance, ticket booth, stage, molding and attic structure

Mechanisms in the original areas were not functional.

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.

- No secondary resources
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#### 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 Moton Theater in Newport News, Virginia, is a compelling candidate for state historic site designation due to its significant associations with the history of African American cultural life, and the legacy of a nationally significant historical figure.

The Moton Theater, or Moton Community House as it's now known, opened in 1940 as a cinema house, a period when segregation was a legal and social reality in Virginia. While records indicate that it closed around 1965, its initial period of operation spans a crucial time in the Civil Rights movement. As a movie theater, it served as a segregated space for the Black community, providing a place for entertainment and social gathering during a time when such opportunities were limited by law and custom. Moton Theatre is the city's latest operating theatre built for African Americans.

The facility was purchased on May 30, 1978 by the Greater Southeast Development Corporation (GSDC). Operated as a multi-purpose facility, providing culturally enriched programs for the community. The GSDC had a grand opening of the Moton on January 21, 1987 featuring Pearl Bailey, a Newport News, VA native. Its existence and function within this context make it a tangible representation of the social and cultural landscape of African Americans in the southeast community.

The theater is named after Robert Russa Moton (1867-1940), a towering figure in American education and civil rights. Moton, a Virginia native and graduate of Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) in Hampton, Virginia, served as the commandant of the male students for over a decade. He then served as the second president of Tuskegee Institute from 1915 to 1935. He was a key figure in promoting vocational education and was instrumental in the establishment of the United Negro College Fund. His work and influence extended beyond academia, as he advised multiple U.S. presidents on race relations. The Moton Theater, by bearing his name, links the local community of Newport News directly to the legacy of a man whose life and work had a profound national impact on the advancement of African Americans. Other state recognitions are the Robert Russa Moton Museum, Farmville, VA, Robert R. Moton elementary school, Hampton, VA and Gloucester Institute, Gloucester, VA.

Designating the Moton Theater as a state historic site would be a meaningful way to preserve this important cultural landmark. It would not only protect the physical structure but also provide a venue for interpreting the stories of the community it served. The site will be used to educate the public about the challenges and triumphs of the African American community, as well as a community space in fostering resilience, economic development and the enduring legacy of Robert Russa Moton. It stands as a vital link between local history and national events, justifying its recognition and protection for future generations.

The parcel is currently being developed to house the new Virginia Peninsula Community College, Newport News Trades Center. The project is funded through a partnership between VPCC, the Maritime Industrial Base and the city of Newport News.



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.)

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**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: \_\_\_\_\_

street & number: \_\_\_\_\_

city or town: \_\_\_\_\_ state: \_\_\_\_\_ zip code: \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

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: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

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

name/title: \_\_\_\_\_

organization: \_\_\_\_\_

street & number: \_\_\_\_\_

city or town: \_\_\_\_\_ state: \_\_\_\_\_ zip code: \_\_\_\_\_


e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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

## PIF BOUNDARY MAP

Moton Theatre  
City of Newport News  
DHR ID# 121-5320

 Proposed Boundary


0 150  
Feet





# PIF AERIAL-VICINITY MAP

Moton Theatre  
City of Newport News  
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 Proposed Boundary

0 600  
Feet













# MOTON

## MOTON THEATRE

Since the 1950s, this location has been used for community entertainment and is the site of the city's last original African American theater. In 1941, the Moton Theatre, a movie house with a capacity of 557 persons, opened here. The name honors Robert Russa Moton (1867-1940), an 1890 graduate of Hampton Institute, who served as president of Tuskegee Institute from 1915 to 1935 and was instrumental in the establishment of the United Negro College Fund. The theater operated until 1966. In 1978, the Greater Southeast Development Corporation purchased the building for renovation as the Moton Community House, a multi-purpose facility providing culturally enriched programs. Nationally renowned entertainer Pearl Bailey was featured at the 1981 grand opening.





















ABDULLAH MUHAMMAD

JONI IVEY

LINWOOD DEBREW

THOMAS "TRICKY" HARMON

BY:  
MAHARI  
CHABWERA  
SEPTEMBER 2023















RECEPTION...









