



## 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) 122-0866

### 1. General Property Information

Property name: Congregation Beth El

Property address: 422 Shirley Ave

City or Town: Norfolk Zip code: 23517

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

Norfolk

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

Building x Site \_\_\_\_\_ Structure \_\_\_\_\_ Object \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: +/- 1.37

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:**

Congregation Beth El is a complex located on the north side of Shirley Avenue between Colonial and Debre Avenue. The lot extends to the northeast to Spotswood Avenue. The congregation owns an adjacent lot at the west along Shirley Avenue that is surface parking. The subject lot, Norfolk GPIN # 1428828218, also contains some limited surface parking at the north side along Spotswood Avenue. The property sits at the transition from a less densely developed area, namely Maury High School with adjacent athletic fields and surface parking, to a more tightly platted section of the Ghent neighborhood which includes commercial, institutional, and residential uses. It is just east of Colonial Avenue, a major arterial road.

### 3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): stylized Gothic Revival

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: Henry Beaumont Herts (original sanctuary) Rudolphe Cooke and Van Leuwen (education wing) Charles P. Leavitt (new sanctuary & school annex) Design Collaborative (ADA rehabilitation)

If the builder is known, please list here: E. W. Minter & Co. (1921)

Date of construction (can be approximate): 1921, 1939, 1950

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

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

Congregation Beth El was established in 1870. It was a descendant congregation of Norfolk's original Congregation House of Jacob, founded in 1848 and renamed Ohef Shalom in 1867. In the early nineteenth century, the majority of the Jews in Norfolk were Ashkenazic, of German descent, and employed in retail businesses, with Orthodox Jews from eastern Europe arriving in significant numbers only in the late nineteenth century. After the Civil War, Ohef Shalom transitioned to Reform Judaism and a faction that adhered to more traditional practices became Congregation Beth El, a Conservative congregation.

Congregation Beth El worshipped in a building on Fenchurch Street and later in Ohef Shalom's former temple on Cumberland Street before moving to the Ghent neighborhood, where it built a synagogue in 1921 with significant expansions in 1939 and 1950. In the early twentieth century Beth El was closely tied to the Zionist movement and its female members established the first Virginia chapter of Hadassah in 1912. Despite the post-WWII movements of many houses of worship to the suburbs, Beth El has continued in close proximity to downtown Norfolk, despite the migration of many of its congregants to Virginia Beach.

The original synagogue was designed by a significant New York architect Henry Beaumont Herts (1871 – 1933) who had studied at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*. Herts was a prominent architect with a national reputation who designed a number of significant New York City theatres. The 1939 Education Building was designed by Norfolk firm Rudolph, Cooke and Van Leeuwen and the 1950 sanctuary and annex were designed by Charles P. Leavitt, also of Norfolk.

Congregation Beth El is significant in the area of Architecture both for its stylized Gothic Revival with disparate influences and as a representative work of local and nationally prominent designers. It may also be significant in the area of Ethnic Heritage both for its Germanic roots and its Zionist sympathies. It may also be the oldest, extant, purpose-built Conservative synagogue in the Tidewater region.

**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.)**

- <https://synagoguesofthesouth.cofc.edu/synagogues/norfolk-va-ohef-sholom-1902/>
- <https://www.isjl.org/virginia-norfolk-encyclopedia.html>
- *Norfolk Ledger Dispatch, Virginian Pilot and Norfolk Landmark*

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

Private:   x   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: Beth El Congregation Trustees  
organization: Congregation Beth El  
street & number: 422 Shirley Ave  
city or town: Norfolk state: VA zip code: 23517  
e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ telephone: (757) 625-7821

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: Mary Ruffin Hanbury  
organization: Hanbury Preservation Consulting  
street & number: PO Box 6049  
city or town: Raleigh state: NC zip code: 27628  
e-mail: maryruffin@hanburypreservation.com telephone: (919) 828 1905  
Date: 7/10/2025

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



## PIF BOUNDARY MAP

Congregation Beth El  
City of Norfolk, VA  
DHR ID# 122-0866

 Proposed Boundary


0 100  
Feet





# PIF AERIAL-VICINITY MAP

Congregation Beth El  
City of Norfolk, VA  
DHR ID# 122-0866

 Proposed Boundary

0 500  
Feet

























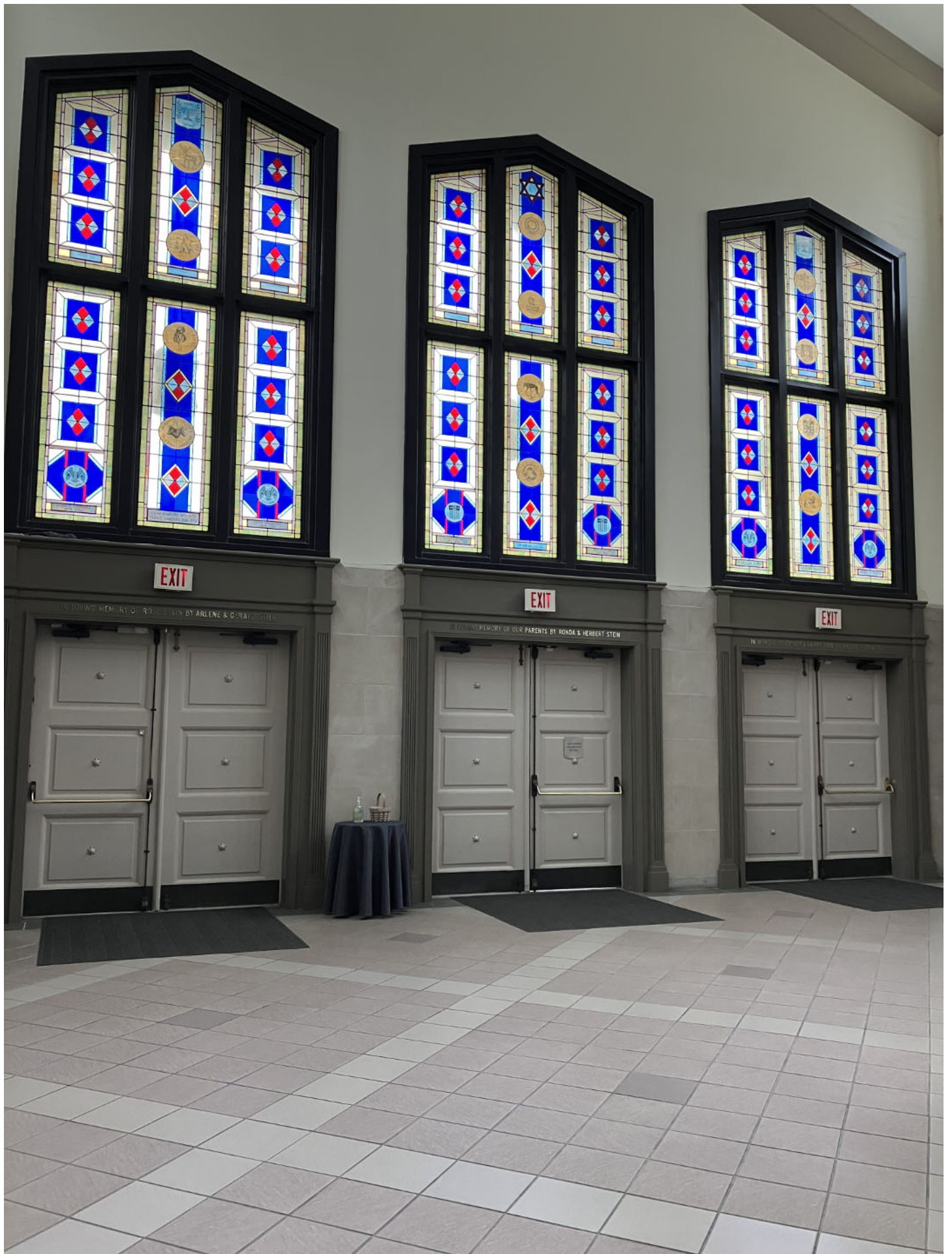














Maxwell Zedd  
1902 - 1995

Burnette Shuman Zedd  
1912 - 1957

Memorial Lobby

PARENTS: PEARL & ARTHUR ALECK ETIA & SOL GOLDBLITZ



GRANDFATHERS: LEWIS KESSER, KAY & M. DARRON KESSER



HELEN, WARREN, DEANNA & ALECK

























