



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) 133-5467-0016

1. General Property Information

Property name: State Highway Department (or VDOT) Suffolk District Office

Property address: 1700 N Main Street

City or Town: Suffolk

Zip code: 23434

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

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

Building X Site _____ Structure _____ Object _____

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: 7

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban _____ Suburban X Town _____ Village _____ Hamlet _____ Rural _____

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

The Suffolk District Office is a seven-acre suburban property on the east side of N Main Street (Route 460), on the north side of the Nansemond River from downtown Suffolk. The office building is set back from the road by a large grass lawn and is accessed by a paved U-shaped drive that is lined by large mature trees. A small paved three-row parking lot is located on the west side of the building. The parking lot is lined with mature hedges and crepe myrtle trees. Crepe myrtles and magnolia trees are located adjacent to the building entrance and corners respectively. Streetlights are evenly spaced throughout the parking lot, and two flagpoles are centrally located next to the parking lot walkway that provides access to the main entrance. A blue highway-style sign hung by cast iron posts is located near the main road and reads "Virginia Department of Transportation."

3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): International Style

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: J. Henley Walker, Jr (1950); Ballou and Justice (1965)

If the builder is known, please list here: Reid-Hope Construction Company (1950); Charles H Sotton (addition, 1966)

Date of construction (can be approximate): 1950, ca.1958, 1966. ca.1985

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 Suffolk District Office, constructed ca. 1950, is a two-story brick building on a raised basement. The building features elements of the International style common among mid-twentieth century office and government building design in Virginia. The concrete block structure has a 1:5 American bond brick veneer exterior. The façade is characterized by its bands of one-over-one aluminum windows framed by projecting concrete surrounds that emphasize horizontality. The main entrance is centrally located on the façade and accessed by a brick and concrete stair with iron handrails. An aluminum storefront vestibule with a flat roof shelters the entrance; an aluminum fascia wraps the vestibule's flat roof and has deep horizontal channels. Concrete coping lines the flat roof of the central core and south addition, while the north and rear additions have metal coping. The recessed original core is flanked by two similarly sized projecting square additions.

While the original rectangular core was constructed in ca. 1950, two major additions were constructed in the 1950s and 1960s, and a third in the mid-1980s. All additions were sensitively constructed to match the overall height, scale, and massing, and matched the material and design aesthetic of the original building. Based on historic aerials the first addition was constructed by 1958. This rectangular addition was appended to the rear of the building. It has aluminum coping, gutters and downspouts lining the flat roof. The east elevation has a metal exterior fire stair and a brick stair/elevator shaft addition. An aluminum canopy supported by metal posts shelters the ground floor entrance along the south elevation.

The first wing added to the original core was constructed in ca. 1966 on the north end of the building. It matched the height and materials of the original design, including the brick exterior, horizontally emphasized concrete window surrounds, and concrete coping. A one-story rear addition was connected to the north wing at the same time. While the planning and design for the south wing addition began as early as 1967, aerial imagery suggests that the addition was not completed until the mid-1980s (likely due to funding constraints). The south wing mirrors the north wing in size, materials, and overall design, without the rear one-story component.

The interior of the building is comprised of various offices connected by central corridors. While office configurations have likely changed overtime for the continued use and function of the space, many historic features have been retained such as divided light wooden office doors, wood paneling, and chair rail. Walls in primary spaces are covered with smooth drywall or gypsum board, while secondary spaces have exposed painted concrete block. Floor finishes are primarily linoleum vinyl tile and carpet, and dropped acoustic tile

ceilings are present in most spaces. Many finishes are in poor condition due to water infiltration and long-term vacancy.

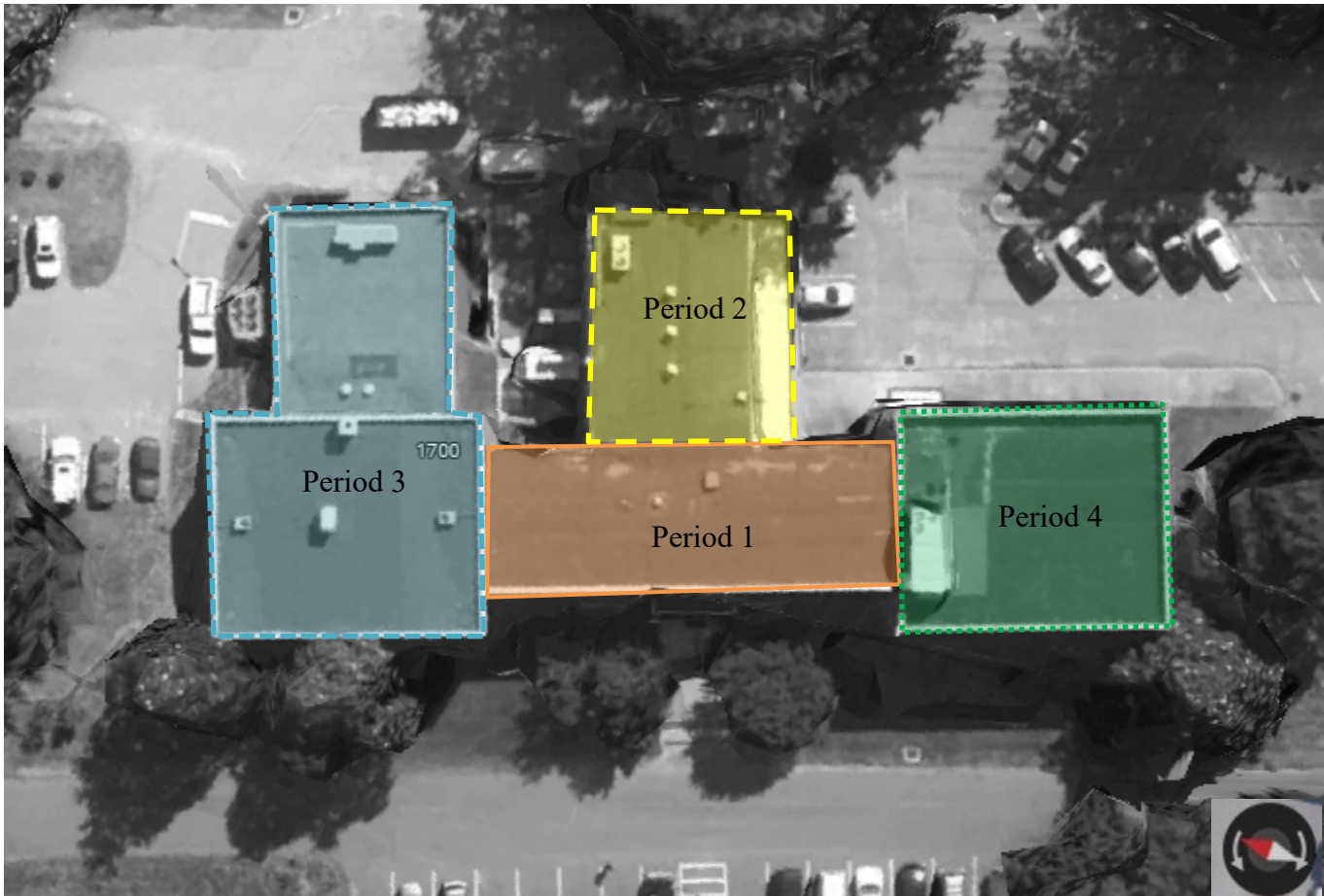


Figure 1: Suffolk District Office Evolution Key: Period 1 (c. 1950), Orange; Period 2 (ca. 1958), Yellow; Period 3 (ca. 1966), Blue; Period 4 (ca. 1985, planned/proposed 1967), Green.

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.

- There are no other secondary resources

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 State Highway Department (VDOT) Suffolk District Office is locally and regionally significant under Criterion A in the area of Transportation. The Suffolk District Office was constructed ca. 1950 and continuously served as the headquarters for the District Engineer and supporting offices that oversaw the planning, design, construction, inspection, and maintenance of state highways, interstates, bridges, and tunnels in the southeast Virginia region until 2017. The proposed period of significance of the District Office is 1950 to 1976, from the building's original construction to the completion of some of the region's largest and most influential infrastructure projects. There is a potential for the use of Criteria Consideration G, and extending the Period of Significance to 1985 to include the development and construction of the James River Bridge as well as the south wing addition to the main building (planned in 1967).

The modern state highway program first developed in 1906, when Virginia the legislature created the first State Highway Commission. The commission was originally composed of an appointed commissioner who was a Virginia resident, a civil engineer, and experienced in road construction. The commission also included appointed civil engineering professors from three of the state's universities. The commission was responsible for overseeing construction, improvement, and maintenance of Virginia's roads. During that same year, the General Assembly approved funding for the Commission's first improvement project, which was located in the future Suffolk District – the road between Williamsburg and Jamestown Island, now known as Jamestown Road.

While construction and improvement of roads began with the establishment of the commission, most work paused during World War I. Vehicles, labor, and manufacturing were restricted for the purposes of wartime use. Following World War I, the state's population and the number of personal motor vehicles registered increased exponentially. In 1910, the total number of motor vehicles registered in Virginia was just over 2,700. By 1920, that number was more than 145,000. Gasoline taxes and toll roads were the primary source of funding for road improvements throughout the state. In 1922, Virginia's General Assembly divided the state into eight highway districts that initially shared equal portions of the state's funds. It was out of this action that the Suffolk District Office was formed. The first office was located a short distance to the south on N. Main Street from the current office.¹

Plans for the new district office were prepared by J. Henley Walker, Jr. of Richmond, Virginia in May 1950. Construction moved quickly and by January 1951, the building was complete with the exception of minor finishes such as plaster and paint. The contract for construction was awarded to the local, Suffolk-based firm, Reid-Hope Construction Company for a total cost of \$95,000. By March 1951, the District Office was ready for occupancy.²

The Suffolk District Office covered a vast area of southeast Virginia, the Middle Peninsula, and the Eastern Shore of Virginia. In 1950, when the new District Office headquarters was mostly completed, the coverage area

¹ Virginia Department of Transportation, *Office of Public Affairs, A History of Roads in Virginia: "The Most Convenient Wayes,"* October 2006. The other seven original district offices were located in Bristol, Culpeper, Fredericksburg, Lynchburg, Richmond, Salem, and Staunton. The Northern Virginia District was formed in 1984 out of the existing Culpeper District, making a total of nine district offices.

² "Highway Workers to Move in March," *Suffolk News-Herald*, 15 Jan 1951.

included fourteen counties: Surry, Sussex, James City (including City of Williamsburg), Greensville (including Emporia), Southampton, Isle of Wight, York, Elizabeth City (now City of Hampton), Warwick County (now City of Newport News), Nansemond (now City of Suffolk), Norfolk (now City of Norfolk and Chesapeake), Princess Anne (now City of Virginia Beach), Accomack, and Northampton. The area spanned from the Atlantic Ocean to I-95 in Emporia, and from the North Carolina to Maryland borders encompassing a wide-ranging geography and large portion of the state's population. For decades prior to the establishment of the Northern Virginia district, the Suffolk District received the largest portion of the highway department's appropriations to build the area's highways, interstates, bridges, and underwater tunnels.³ Under the umbrella of the District Office were six smaller Residency Offices located in the various cities and counties within the region. These Residency Offices were managed by the Resident Engineer; the District Engineer oversaw and supervised the work of the residency offices and engineers throughout the district.⁴ The residency offices were located in the towns or cities of Suffolk, Franklin, Norfolk, Waverly, Williamsburg, and Accomac.⁵

The Suffolk District Office was the main headquarters for several divisions including Engineering, Design, Drainage, Landscaping, Maintenance, and Right of Way.⁶ When the building opened in 1951, the first floor was home to the offices of the District Engineer, and Right of Way Engineer, as well as administrative departments such as Reception, Computer & Clerk Office, and Personnel (or Human Resources). The Landscape Engineer's office was located on the second floor, along with the Construction Office, the Accounting Office, and a large file room. A large majority of the second floor was reserved for the Drafting Room, which required large tables and space for drawing and reviewing large plot plans, as well as engineering and construction drawings.⁷ The Landscape Division was acknowledged statewide for its role in making the Suffolk District known for its "highways lined with crepe myrtle, scotch broom, way myrtle and dogwood."⁸ Perhaps a lesser-known responsibility of the Landscape Division, but critical for travelers, was signage. The Landscape Division helped to make sure drivers were headed in the right direction. The Right of Way Engineer and his Department was first established in the Suffolk District in 1929, and was responsible for acquiring the land necessary to build highways throughout the region. Engineering, Design, and Maintenance were responsible for the planning, construction management, inspection, and upkeep of the region's state-owned roads, bridges, and tunnels.⁹

The basement of the District Office building was also home to the District's Soils Lab, which moved from its original location in Kempsville where it had operated since 1940. The work of the Soils Lab is one of the first steps in highway construction, following the survey and preliminary design of the route. The Soils Lab conducted a soil survey and tested the material composition of the proposed location of the new highway. The results of their work were critical to design and their recommendations impacted decisions such as road pavement design and thickness, as well as pile length and plotting for bridges. As the highway system became more widespread and complex, the Soils Lab grew and their work also increased and became more complex. Between 1958 and 1966 the lab grew from seven to forty-five employees. By the mid-1960s, the operations of

³ Wesley King, Oral History Interview Conducted by Celina Adams and Kayla Halberg in Suffolk, VA, July 2025; The Virginia Department of Highways, *Virginia Highway Bulletin*, Vol 16, No. 11, September 1950; "Significance of Local Highway Office Great," *Suffolk News Herald*, 22 Sept 1966.

⁴ "Significance of Local Highway Office Great," *Suffolk News-Herald*, 22 Sept. 1966.

⁵ "Va. Department of Highways Grows Yearly," *Suffolk News-Herald*, 22 Feb 1970. Note: The spelling of Accomack with a 'k' refers to the county, while the Town of Accomac does not have a 'k' at the end. This spelling was determined by the Virginia General Assembly in 1940 in order to resolve confusion between the two. See:

<https://www.accomac.org/overview#:~:text=In%201940%2C%20in%20order%20to%20differentiate%20the,the%20eight%20shires%20during%20colonial%20settlement%20in>

⁶ Wesley King, Oral History Interview Conducted by Celina Adams and Kayla Halberg in Suffolk, VA, July 2025.

⁷ J. Henley Walker, Jr., District Office of the Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Highways, May 1950, Architectural Drawing Set, Virginia Department of Transportation.

⁸ The Virginia Department of Highways, *Virginia Highway Bulletin*, Vol 16, No. 11, September 1950, pg 6.

⁹ The Virginia Department of Highways, *Virginia Highway Bulletin*, Vol 16, No. 11, September 1950, pg 7.

the Soils Lab outgrew the District Office basement, and it was moved to a separate building. Survey and Field Offices were also located in the District Office basement.¹⁰

In addition to the District Office's primary role in the design, construction, and maintenance of the region's transportation infrastructure, the office played a role in local community economic development and civic engagement. The office employed many Suffolk area residents in its various offices, with a variety of roles that accommodated both the college-educated as well as those without formal higher education.¹¹ Employees of the various offices boosted company and community morale through their softball league, which was frequently reported on in the local newspaper, the *Suffolk News-Herald*. The District Office also frequently opened its campus to community blood drives, as well as community open houses for local residents to learn about the work of the Highway Department.¹²

Over the course of the District Office's period of significance (1950-1976), it supervised the design, construction, and maintenance of the region's (today known as the Hampton Roads Region) most important highways, bridges, and tunnels. While the list below is not all encompassing, it is illustrative of the regional significance of the District Office in the area of Transportation.

Highways, Bridge, and Tunnels Constructed 1950-1976:¹³

- Downtown Tunnel, 1952 (expanded 1987)
- Berkley Bridge, 1952 (expanded 1991)
- Interstate 64, completed in various sections from 1957-1976 (additions/expansions continue to present)
- Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel, 1958
- Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel Expansion, 1974
- Midtown Tunnel, 1962
- Twin Bridges, 1967
- High Rise Bridge, 1969
- Interstate 264, 1967
- Portions of Interstate 95, 1960
- Portions of Interstate 464, 1967

Other major regional projects completed after 1975:

- Interstate 664, began 1971 (not completed until 1993)
- Monitor Merrimac Bridge Tunnel, 1992
- New, four-lane James River Bridge, 1975-1982

¹⁰ The Virginia Department of Highways, *Virginia Highway Bulletin*, Vol 16, No. 11, September 1950, pg 5; "Soil Lab's In From Beginning," *Suffolk News-Herald*, 27 Feb 1966; J. Henley Walker, Jr., District Office of the Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Highways, May 1950, Architectural Drawing Set, Virginia Department of Transportation.

¹¹ Wesley King, Oral History Interview Conducted by Celina Adams and Kayla Halberg in Suffolk, VA, July 2025.

¹² Wesley King, Oral History Interview Conducted by Celina Adams and Kayla Halberg in Suffolk, VA, July 2025; "Highway Office Open House is Interesting," *Suffolk News-Herald*, 20 Sept 1966; "State Highway Workers Here Playing Softball," *Suffolk News-Herald*, 15 July 1963; "Soil Lab, Right-of-Way Dominate All-Star Team," *Suffolk News-Herald*, 23 July 1963.

¹³ List of projects provided by the Virginia Department of Transportation.

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.)

- See footnotes

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

Private: _____ Public\Local X 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: William Ferguson

organization: Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Transportation

street & number: 1401 East Broad St

city or town: Richmond state: VA zip code: 23219

e-mail: william.ferguson@vdot.virginia.gov telephone: 804-338-5983

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: William Ferguson

Daytime Telephone: 804-335-5983

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

name/title: Kayla Halberg, Director of Survey & Research

organization: Commonwealth Preservation Group

street & number: 536 W 35th Street

city or town: Norfolk state: VA zip code: 23508


e-mail: admin@commonwealthpreservationgroup.com telephone: 757-254-2694

Date: 9/8/2025

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

PIF BOUNDARY MAP

VDOT Suffolk District Office
City of Suffolk, VA
DHR ID# 133-5467-0016


 Proposed Boundary

0 200
 Feet



PIF AERIAL-VICINITY MAP

VDOT Suffolk District Office
City of Suffolk, VA
DHR ID# 133-5467-0016

 Proposed Boundary

0 800
 Feet







Effective Monday 8/13/2018
VDOT Hampton Roads
District Office is located at
7511 Parbage Drive,
Suffolk.

Effective Wednesday 8/15/2018
VDOT Hampton Roads
District Office is located at
7511 Parbage Drive,
Suffolk.



















































