 DHR | Virginia Department of Historic Resources

PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Purpose of Evaluation

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

Evaluation sought by City of Virginia Beach Planning Department in advance of Underrepresented Communities Grant Application to list several historic districts with African-American significance.

Are you interested in applying for State and/or Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits?   Yes _____ **No** _____

Are you interested in receiving more information about DHR's easement program? Yes _____ **No** _____

1. General Information

District name(s): **Seatack Historic District**

Main Streets and/or Routes: **Birdneck Road, Hope Avenue, Hughs Avenue, Kenya Lane, Longstreet Avenue, Norfolk Avenue, Sea Street**

City or Town: **Virginia Beach**

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

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: **151 acres**

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:

Seatack is located about one-and-a-half miles west of the oceanfront. The neighborhood is centered on N. Birdneck Road and its intersections with Virginia Beach Boulevard and Norfolk Avenue. Interstate-264 extends across the northern end of the community. The area is a combination of residential, commercial, and industrial development.

3. Architectural/Physical Description

Architectural Style(s): **Craftsman, Ranch, Minimal Traditional, Vernacular, and Dutch Colonial**

If any individual properties within the district were designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: **None Known**

If any builders or developers are known, please list here: ___**None known**___

Date(s) of construction (can be approximate): ___**Ca. 1920 – Ca. 1960**___

Are there any known threats to this district? ___**Storm surge, sea level rise**___

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.

The proposed Seatack Historic District is primarily residential in nature with a scattering of civic, religious, and commercial buildings along the primarily roads. A mid-twentieth century school (now used as the Virginia Beach Law Enforcement Training Academy) caps the north end of the proposed district. To the south of the former school sit several duplex rental complexes, at least one of which appears historic. Less than a dozen non-historic commercial buildings and one historic service station line South Birdneck Road. There are two historic churches within the proposed district area. Much of the rest of the proposed district area consists of modest single family dwellings dating from the second quarter of the twentieth century through the 1960s. Common forms and styles include Bungalow, Ranch, and Minimal Traditional. There are few outbuildings, consisting primarily of historic garages and non-historic, temporary sheds.

In the 1980s, Seatack was part of the City of Virginia Beach's Target Neighborhood Program, and under that program received investment of long overdue infrastructure upgrades. Although residents greatly benefitted from the program, the upgrades also made Seatack a focus of private redevelopment. In recent years, numerous industrial businesses (e.g., self-storage units) and new multi-family and single-family residential development have replaced some of the historic buildings. Since Seatack, like the Oceana neighborhood to the west, stands in the crash zone for nearby Oceana Naval Air Station, the city has also undertaken demolition of some of Seatack's historic houses in an effort aimed at lowering residential density (Reed 1996). Outside of these limited demolitions and replacements, the buildings within the proposed Seatack Historic District exhibit few significant alterations or remodeling beyond expected replacements of windows and sidings on some resources.

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.

The proposed Seatack Historic District consists primarily of residential developments lining South Birdneck Road. South Birdneck Road is four lanes with sidewalks and a median. The majority of the rest of the district's streets are two-lanes, unmarked, and lacking sidewalks. Parcel sizes within Seatack are not uniform; the area is an amalgam of various small-scale subdivisions that hold single-family and multi-family residences and businesses. Most properties are level with grass lawns bordered by a few mature, deciduous trees.

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 name Seatack was first used to describe an area along the Atlantic oceanfront and is said to have been derived from a combination of "sea" and "attack," stemming from a British attack on the shore

during the War of 1812. An alternate derivation may come from the "tacking" ships performed as they headed south along the coast at this point (Virginia Beach Public Library 1996: 75). The area was the site of one of five lifesaving stations located along the oceanfront. The first Seatack station, built in 1878, was located on the west side of present-day Atlantic Avenue at 24th Street (formerly Indiana Avenue). In 1903, that station was replaced by a new station built on the east side of Atlantic Avenue. The station was active until 1969 when it was decommissioned and vacated by the U.S. Coast Guard. In 1979, the City of Virginia Beach acquired the structure, listed it on the NRHP, and moved the building about 100 yards south to its present location. The station currently serves as the Virginia Beach Surf & Rescue Museum (DHR #134-0047).

During the early nineteenth century, Seatack was not the oceanfront resort of today's Virginia Beach. It was not until the 1880s that recreational development began in earnest along the coastline. Prior to that, the Seatack area was occupied by farmers and fishermen, many of whom also served as lifesavers and surfmen. As the area became desirable for development, these residents moved away from the oceanfront. Additional research could confirm the ownership of the oceanfront property, which was sold to the Virginia Beach Development Company, and the ethnicity of residents, leaseholders, and tenants.

Sometime after the turn of the twentieth century, a "new" Seatack neighborhood was established around the intersection of Virginia Beach Boulevard and Birdneck Road (labeled "Seatack Road" on the 1948 Virginia Beach USGS quadrangle). Some historical records indicate that this area may have been known previously as "Chatham." In 1883, the Norfolk and Virginia Beach Electric Railroad Company's line, later the Norfolk, Virginia Beach and Southern Railroad, extended east-to-west through the area and paralleled Front Street (present-day Southern Boulevard/Norfolk Avenue) and a station was built at Seatack in the early twentieth century. This more inland area was on the site of an earlier settlement of free blacks in Princess Anne County. Swampy and wooded at the time, it was not considered by most residents of the County to be desirable for living. Adopting the name Seatack in the early twentieth century for their segregated community, the residents strove to build infrastructure, including the Princess Anne County Training School in 1938. The 1948 Seatack Fire Station was also built to serve the area since County services were not provided to African Americans (now the site of the 1997 Community Recreation Center). Black men from the area served at the Seatack Life Saving Station (listed on the NRHP). During WWII, 24 Seatack residents served as Air Raid Wardens for the U.S. Civil Defense, whose primary function was to watch for enemy planes along the coast. The community retains a strong sense of pride in the accomplishments and contributions of its residents throughout the twentieth century including modern times. The Seatack Community Civic League has existed for nearly 100 years and became a member of the Virginia Beach Council of Civic Organizations in 1969.

Previous architectural survey in the City of Virginia Beach identified the Seatack neighborhood as an intact, early twentieth-century, historically African American neighborhood that held potential as an NRHP historic district (Frazier 1992:103). At the time of that survey, the neighborhood boundaries were drawn to extend to the oceanfront. For purposes of this study, however, survey has focused on the community on either side of Birdneck Road, where the largest concentration of historic buildings is located. Other neighborhoods have developed between present-day Seatack and the oceanfront, such as Shadowlawn, which presents difficulties when discussing developmental history and historical associations.

Today, Seatack continues to serve as one of Virginia Beach's significant African American communities. The presence of two churches, including the historically significant Mt. Olive Baptist Church (310 North Birdneck Road, VDHR #134-0567), the Seatack Elementary School, and pockets of dwellings and commercial buildings make up the core of the historic neighborhood. It was at Mt. Olive that the first area negro school was begun in 1908. This school was later replaced by the first Seatack Elementary School which opened in 1952. Because many of the older buildings had already been recorded, the present effort focused on resources that had not yet been documented in VDHR's

V-CRIS database. The majority of historic resources within Seatack appear to date from about 1920 through 1960.

National Register of Historic Places Integrity and Eligibility Evaluation: The Seatack community retains a good-to-fair level of overall level of integrity. As described above, Seatack's integrity with regard to location, setting, feeling, and association has been impacted by developmental pressures, beginning with the community's transition from the oceanfront in the late 1880s to its current inland location during the twentieth century. As a group, the extant historic resources in the community possess a sufficient level of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship to convey their historical appearance and character.

As noted, the 1992 architectural survey of the city identified Seatack as an NRHP-eligible historic district (Frazier 1992). That effort documented several historic buildings near the intersection of N. Birdneck Road and Virginia Beach Boulevard, as well as areas to the south. In describing the area, the authors noted: Seatack presently contains several small gable-front bungalows and two churches of historical significance. Of these properties, the survey recorded a typical dwelling; the largest, and most significant dwelling; and an early-twentieth-century church.... The Seatack community is significant as an intact, early twentieth century black community (Frazier 1992:8, 12). In their evaluation of Seatack, the authors stated: Seatack is a more sparsely-settled community than Oceana [which was also recommended as an NRHP-eligible historic district], but it still preserves a strong sense of cohesion among the surviving structures. Seatack contains the only two black churches recorded in this survey, both early-twentieth-century masonry structures with crenelated side towers. The majority of the houses are one- or 1 1/2-story frame bungalows, typical of more modest vernacular housing forms, and date from the first half of the twentieth century. This district would contain approximately twenty contributing buildings, largely domestic properties (Frazier 1992:103).

The authors recommended Seatack as district eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criteria A and C. The present study confirms Seatack's NRHP eligibility. Despite the demolition of or significant alterations to some of the historic resources documented in 1992, the community retains a sufficient number of resources and a sufficient level of integrity to convey its historical appearance and character. Such resources include two churches, a school, and several historic dwellings and commercial buildings that date from the early and mid-twentieth century. The district is recommended eligible under Criteria A and C in the areas of Community Planning and Development, Ethnic Heritage: African American, Social History and Other: Civil Rights Movement. For these reasons, Seatack also qualifies for listing individual properties to the Virginia Beach Historical Register.

Additional field survey would fully confirm the exact number of surviving historic architectural resources in the community, resulting in a justifiable NRHP historic district boundary. Additional background research, including obtaining oral history from longtime residents and former residents, would inform a more fully developed statement of significance.

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

　　　Private: __**X**___　　Public\Local _**X**___　　Public\State _____　　Public\Federal _____

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: ___**Mark A. Reed, Historic Preservation Planner**_____
organization: ___**City of Virginia Beach**_____
street & number: __**2875 Sabre Street, Suite 500**_____

city or town: __**Virginia Beach**__ state: __**VA**__ zip code: __**23452-7385**__
e-mail: __**MReed@vbgov.com**__ telephone: __**757-385-8573**__

    Applicant's Signature: _____
    Date: _____

• • 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: _____
        Daytime Telephone: _____

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than applicant/sponsor listed above)
    name/title: _____
    organization: _____
    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: __**Same as above**__
    locality: _____
    street & number: _____
    city or town: _____ state: _____ zip code: _____
    telephone: _____