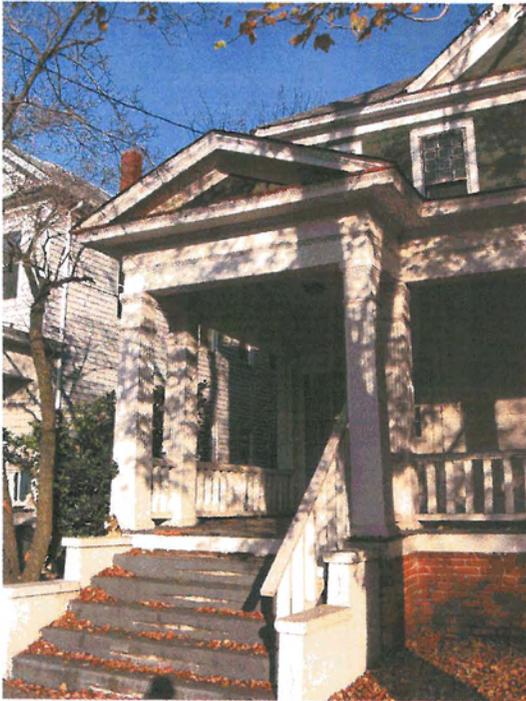


CS-123

COST SHANE



**SOUTH NORFOLK
HISTORIC DISTRICT
STATUS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

CHESAPEAKE, VIRGINIA

**THOMASON
AND
ASSOCIATES**

**PRESERVATION
PLANNERS**

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



MAY 2008

I. INTRODUCTION

This study was completed as part of a matching grant between the City of Chesapeake and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Both agencies participated in the 2007 funding of the completion of a new design guideline manual for the South Norfolk neighborhood, which is also a National Register and Virginia Landmarks Register Historic District. This project was primarily concerned with the creation of an illustrated design guideline manual for use by the City's Board of Historic and Architectural Review (BHAR) and property owners. A component of this study was also a review of the existing South Norfolk National Register Historic District boundaries and recommendations for any boundary revisions as well as the identification of additional survey and National Register efforts in the area. This report was completed in response to this scope of work.

In 2005, the City of Chesapeake's Planning Department completed "Forward Chesapeake, 2026 Comprehensive Plan." This plan addressed the importance of historic preservation in the City "as historic preservation preserves a sense of community; enhances economic development through reinvestment and tourism; stabilizes/increases property values, and makes better use of natural resources."

Historic preservation efforts in the City have included the following:

Historic District Guidelines

In 1990, the South Norfolk Civic League Historic District Committee prepared the report, "Historic District Design Guidelines: Building on the History of Chesapeake." It included a guide to architectural styles; guidelines for rehabilitation, new construction, moving buildings and demolishing buildings; as well as guidelines for street elements and streetscapes. These guidelines were presented to City Council for consideration but were not adopted at that time. However, a revision of these guidelines by the City's Historic Preservation Commission in 2000, was approved.

Historic Preservation Plan (adopted by City Council in 1996)

This plan established a number of goals and objectives regarding preservation issues. A chief objective was the establishment of a seven member Historic Preservation Commission to advise City Council, the Planning Commission and City staff in regards to preservation issues.

Architectural Surveys and Assessments

The following are major survey projects conducted for the City:

1987 Reconnaissance Survey

This survey included approximately 800 structures within the South Norfolk Historic District and more than 700 in the remainder of the City. A successful recommendation of this survey was the listing of the South Norfolk Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register (listed in 1989).

1999 Reconnaissance and Intensive Survey Update

This survey included 200 reconnaissance level surveys and 20 intensive surveys within the most threatened suburban areas of the City, including Western Branch, Deep Creek, Indian River, Rivercrest, Greenbrier, and Great Bridge. Recommendations from this

survey resulted in the listing of three additional communities to the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register.

1999 Archeological Assessment

This document represents an assessment of archaeological resources in the City. It is designed to provide the following:

- A user friendly reference for planners
- A summary of current knowledge
- A catalog of officially recorded sites
- Locations of officially recorded sites
- Discussion of relative site significance and rank
- Definitions and locations of sensitivity areas, and
- Recommendations for planning/management of these resources

2002 Most Significant Structures list

The City's Historic Landmarks Commission approved the listing of the City's most significant sites from information provided with the previous survey reports. This list was developed to better identify those structures that need special consideration when impacted by development.

Districts and Structures

When the City's Historic Preservation Plan was adopted in 1996, only four districts/sites were listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. Since 1996, five additional districts/sites with a total of 173 resources were listed along with an additional individual site. The City's nine historic districts/sites are described as follows:

South Norfolk Historic District – The South Norfolk Historic District covers about ½ of a square mile at the northern end of the City of Chesapeake. Begun as a streetcar suburb and retaining its residential character, the district contained 795 buildings when listed with only 127 non-contributing structures. A majority of the Register district is now also a local historic district with design review by the City's Board of Historic and Architectural Review.

Dismal Swamp Canal and Associated Development – This 22 mile long district is located to the west of U.S. Route 17 between Deep Creek in Chesapeake and South Mills, North Carolina. The canal's origin was a charter in 1787 by the Virginia General Assembly, ratified by North Carolina in 1790. Insofar as is known, it is the oldest operating canal in the United States.

Sunray Agricultural Historic District – The Sunray Agricultural Historic District retains its visual integrity and reflects an early 20th century immigrant farming community. Early 20th century vernacular farmhouses are located throughout the district and are simple in form and treatment. The district includes 317 resources; 97 contribute.

Oaklette Historic District - The Oaklette Historic District is an example of an early 20th century planned, streetcar suburb. Oaklette is defined by large scale single family dwellings of frame construction dominating the waterfront and smaller Bungalow and Colonial Revival dwellings located on the landlocked parcels. The district includes 63 resources; 31 contribute.

Centerville-Fentress Historic District – The Centerville-Fentress Historic District is an example of a rural farming community that developed a small commercial core, which grew with the addition of a road linking the community to the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal, and the Norfolk and Elizabeth City Railroad in the 1880's. Most dwellings and buildings are modest frame Colonial Revival and Craftsmen inspired buildings, reflecting the vernacular quality of the craftsmanship. The district includes 67 resources; 34 contribute.

Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal Historic District – This district was listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register in 2003 and on the National Register in 2004. The Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal is significant on the state level in the areas of Transportation, Engineering and Military, with the period of significance being 1775-1953. There are 11 contributing resources in the District.

Battle of Great Bridge Site – The site of the Battle of Great Bridge is located on both sides of the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal. Route 168 Business (Battlefield Boulevard) cuts through the area on the north-south axis and runs over the site of the colonial bridge and causeway in which the battle was named. The Great Bridge Battlefield site is significant as a landmark to Virginia's role in the American Revolution, for in this marshy location took place the first armed conflict between British soldiers and the colony's patriot forces.

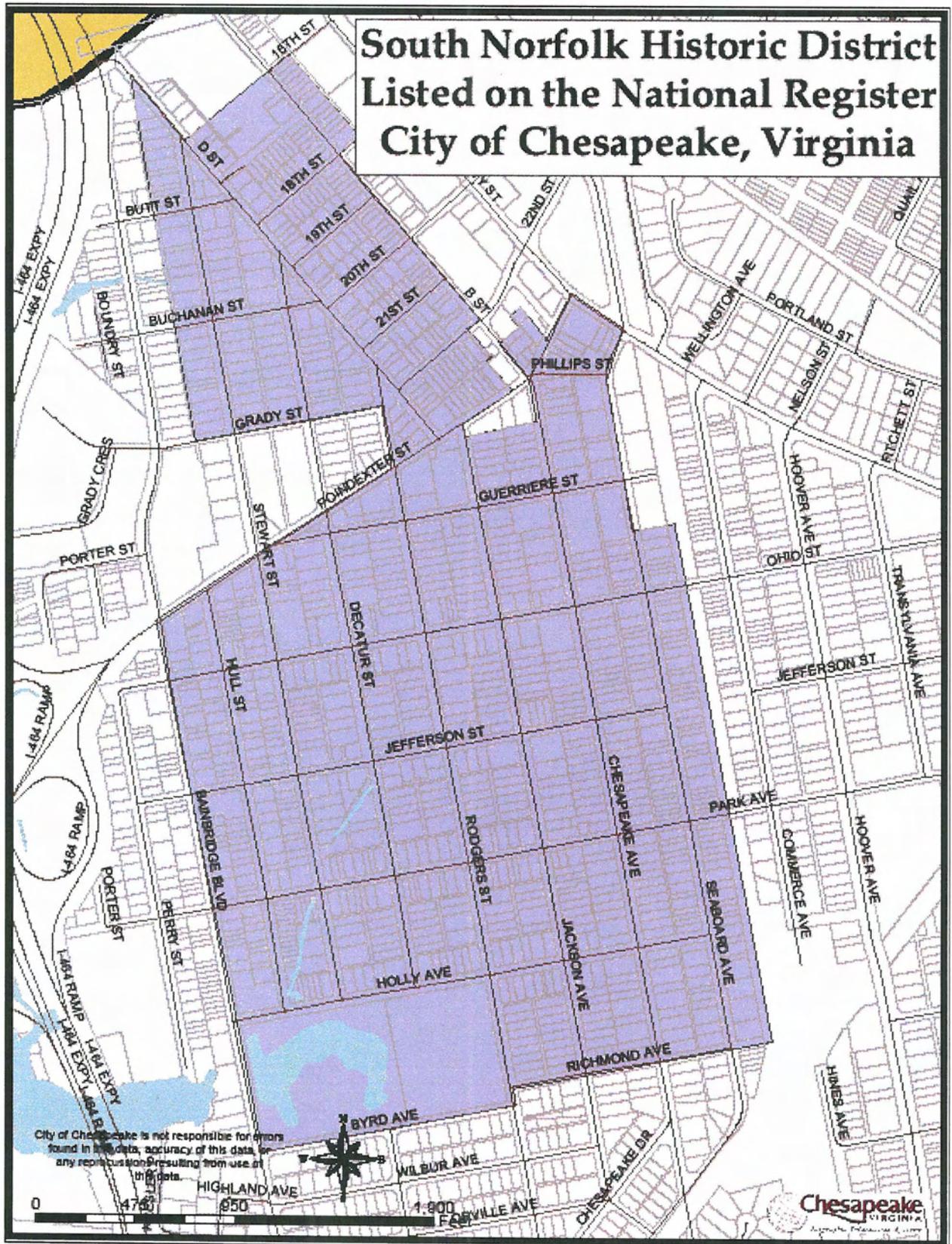
Wallaceton – This house is located along the Dismal Swamp Canal and was built in 1855. The most outstanding feature of the home is the vertical hand hewn logs covered by the standard weatherboard siding.

Old Portlock School Number 5 - One of three early 20th century schools in Chesapeake that have been put into adaptive re-use.

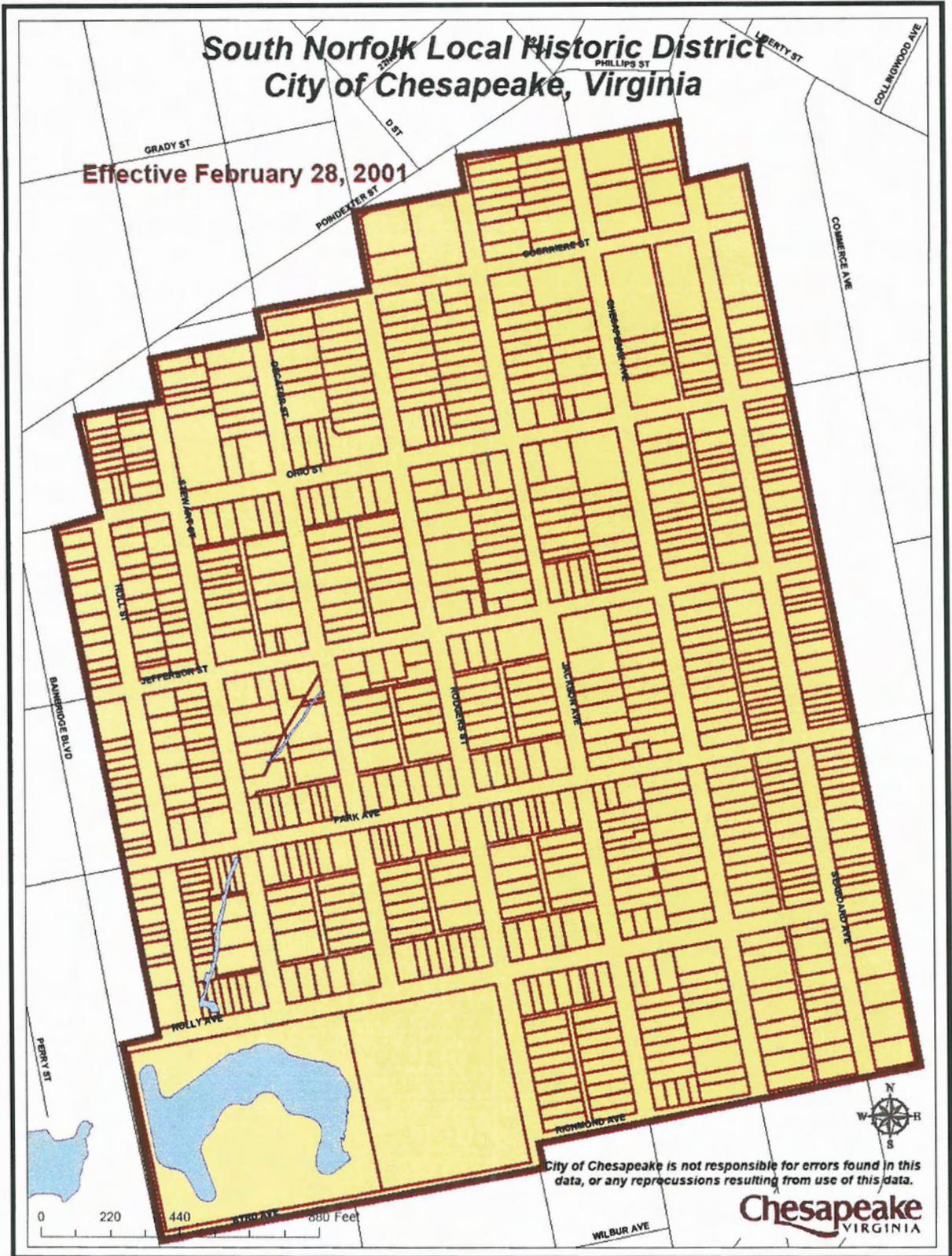
South Norfolk Historic Preservation Overlay District

In November, 2000, the South Norfolk Historic Preservation Overlay District was established. This district encompasses approximately 75% of the district listed on the National and State Register. A Historic and Architectural Review Board has been established to review exterior modification within the district as can be seen from the paved public right-of-way. The Board hears approximately 40-50 applications per calendar year and another 40-50 minor applications are approved by the Planning Department.

As part of the administration and review of this district, the "South Norfolk Historic and Cultural Preservation Overlay District Design Guidelines" was prepared and submitted in 2008. In addition to the completion of this guidelines manual, a review of the district's boundaries and immediate area was also performed. The following summarizes this review and recommendations.



The South Norfolk Historic District, listed on the National Register in 1989.



The South Norfolk Local Historic District follows the National Register boundary with the exception of the area adjacent to and north of Poindexter Street.

II. Boundary of the South Norfolk National Register Historic District, Analysis and Recommendations

North Boundary

The north boundary of the existing South Norfolk National Register Historic District boundary follows sections of Poindexter Street and 16th Street. This boundary along Poindexter Street is drawn to omit a collection of largely post-1958 public, commercial and residential buildings in the blocks between Poindexter and Grady Streets and between Bainbridge Boulevard and Decatur Street. This boundary line is appropriate and omits properties largely built in the past several decades.

The line along 16th Street marks the northernmost boundary of the district and this also appears to be logical and appropriate. The northeast corner omits an industrial area as well as four dwellings on the east side of D Street in the 200 block of D Street. Two of the dwellings were built prior to 1958 while the other two were built in recent years. This section of D Street is not architecturally significant enough to warrant amending the boundary for inclusion. Beyond this block to the north are railroad tracks, industrial buildings of the late 20th century, modern housing developments and the interstate.



200 block of D Street, east side of the street. Amending the boundary to include these properties is not recommended.



View north from D Street and Bainbridge Boulevard. There are no properties of historical or architectural significance north of the existing northern boundary along 16th Street.

West Boundary

The South Norfolk National Register Historic District's western boundary runs along the rear lot lines on the west side of Stewart Street north of Grady Street. This boundary is drawn to omit the 700-1000 blocks of Bainbridge Boulevard. This boundary appears to be justified and no revisions or extensions in this area are recommended. The 700 block of Bainbridge is primarily composed of post-1950 dwellings and commercial buildings. The 800 block of Bainbridge consists of 1920s to 1970s dwellings including two large ca. 1970, two-story brick apartment buildings on the east side of the street. Most of the properties are one-story, frame dwellings built ca. 1945 to 1960 with added siding and porches. The 900 block of Bainbridge has buildings with a slightly higher level of significance and integrity, including several frame Bungalows from the 1920s. This block also has a couple of modest Tudor Revival influenced houses. To the south of Grady Street on the west side of Bainbridge Boulevard in the 1000 block is the modern housing complex known as the Bainbridge Commons.

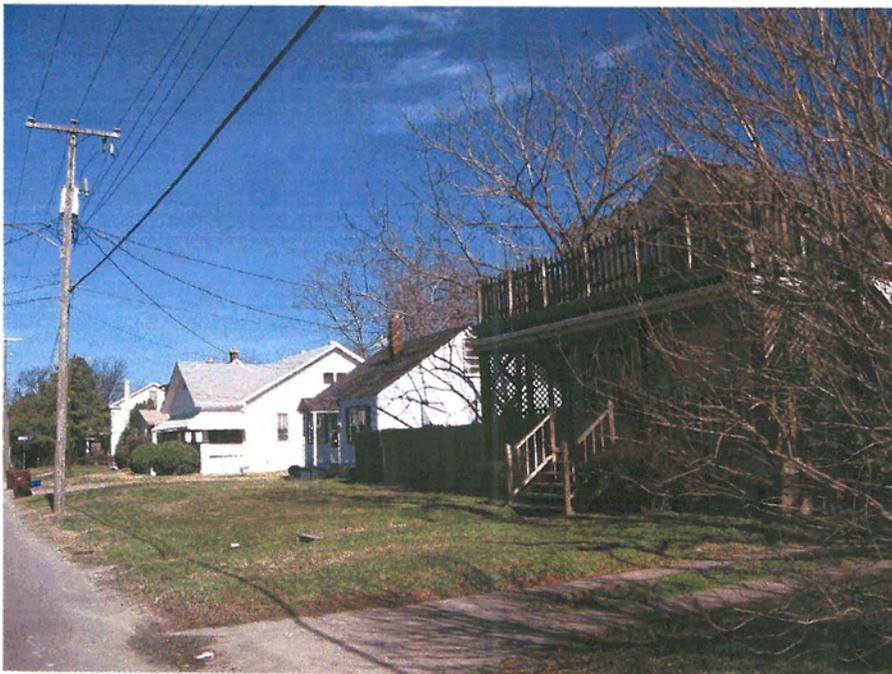
Overall, these blocks of Bainbridge lack sufficient architectural distinction to warrant amending the district boundary. Most are modest examples of early- to mid-20th century architecture in styles such as Bungalow and Minimal Traditional. Many of these properties have been altered with added synthetic siding materials and rebuilt porches. No amendments to the existing boundary are recommended for the western boundary line north of Poindexter Street.



800 block of Bainbridge Boulevard, west side of street.



800 block of Bainbridge, west side of the street.



900 block of Bainbridge, east side of the street.



900 block of Bainbridge, east side of the street.

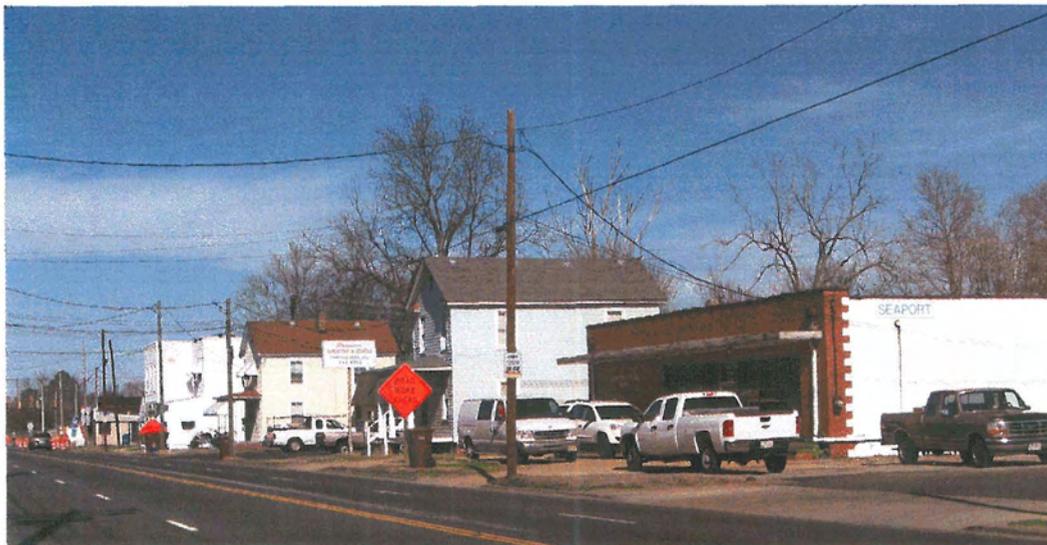


Bainbridge Commons in the 1000 block of Bainbridge Boulevard.

To the south of Poindexter Street the western boundary of the South Norfolk National Register Historic District runs along the east side of Bainbridge Boulevard. The nomination's verbal boundary description does not explain why only the east side of Bainbridge Boulevard was included while omitting the west side. The nomination describes Bainbridge Boulevard as "a busy commercial street with many modern business buildings" but provides no justification for including it in the boundary.

Today, the 1100-1500 blocks of Bainbridge Boulevard are a blend of ca. 1900-1920 frame dwellings and post-1930 commercial buildings. These blocks also have a number of vacant lots. While there are some small concentrations of buildings with architectural and historic integrity, the overall streetscape is fragmented and not cohesive. For every cluster of three or four frame dwellings from the early 20th century, there are post-1958 commercial buildings or vacant lots. Overall, these blocks on the west side of Bainbridge Boulevard do not possess sufficient concentrations of intact historic buildings to justify amending the existing boundary.

To the west of Bainbridge Boulevard are the 1300-1400 blocks of Perry Street. These two blocks contain a mixture of ca. 1910-ca. 1970 dwellings and commercial buildings and lack architectural distinction to justify amending the boundary west past Bainbridge Boulevard. Perry Street's 1300 block has a several intact Gable Front houses from the early 1900s as well as several modest dwellings built mid-century with added siding and porches. The 1300 block also contains several altered commercial buildings and the Southside Baptist Church built in the 1970s. The 1400 block is composed primarily of ca. 1945-1960, one-story frame houses with added siding materials and rebuilt porches. On the west side of the street in the 1400 block is the Rena B. Wright Primary School built in 1971.



1200 block of Bainbridge Boulevard, east side of street. This block is within the National Register Historic District boundary.



1300 block of Bainbridge Boulevard, west side of the street. There are several small groups of early 20th century dwellings on the west side of Bainbridge but overall the streetscape lacks continuity.



1300 block of Bainbridge Boulevard, west side of the street. This section of the block includes modest dwellings of the mid-20th century as well as commercial buildings.



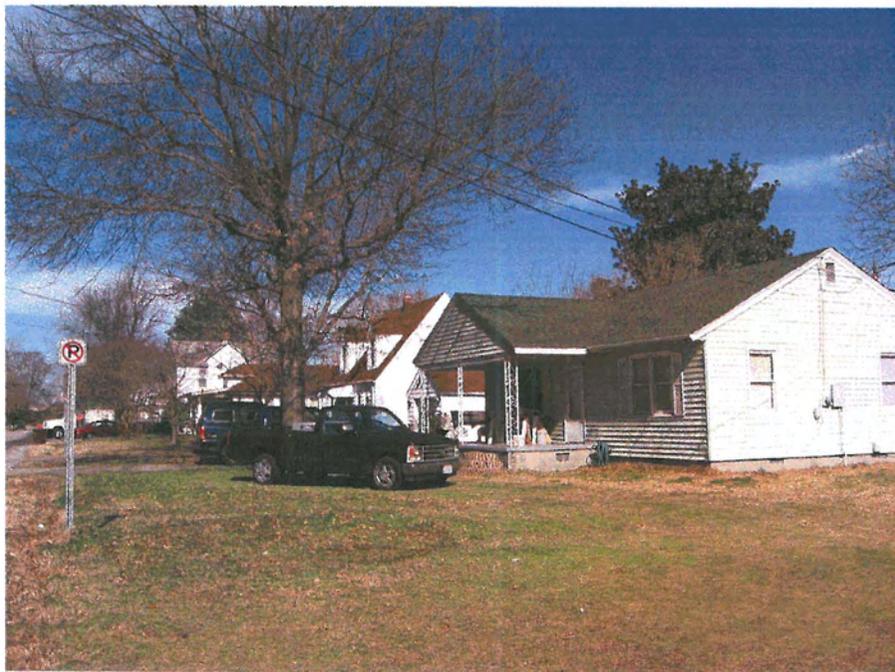
1400 block of Bainbridge Boulevard, east side of the street. This block is within the boundary but several of the buildings have been altered in recent decades with added synthetic sidings and rebuilt porches.



1400 block of Bainbridge Boulevard, west side of the street. This small cluster of early 20th century buildings is flanked by large vacant lots.



1200 block of Perry Street, west side of street. These are the oldest and most significant buildings on the block.



1200 block of Perry Street, east side of the street. Most dwellings on this side of the street date from the mid-20th century.



1200 block of Perry Street, west side of the street. Commercial buildings and altered dwellings comprise most of this block.



1400 block of Perry Street, east side of the street. Most of these dwellings are modest houses from the mid-20th century with added siding materials and rebuilt porches.



1400 block of Perry Street, east side of the street. This block lacks architectural distinction.



Rena B. Wright Primary School built in 1971 on the west side of Perry Street.

East Boundary

The east boundary of the South Norfolk Historic District north of Poindexter Street goes along the west side of B Street and omits an industrial area along this street as well as the busy commercial district along Liberty Street. Liberty Street is composed primarily of ca. 1960-2000 brick and metal commercial buildings as well as several churches and large parking lots. The boundary in these blocks is appropriate and no amendments are recommended.

South of Poindexter Street the eastern boundary largely follows the right-of-way of the Norfolk and Western Railroad. The boundary follows the railroad line south to Richmond Avenue. South of Richmond Avenue the 1600 block of Seaboard Avenue is omitted from the district since it is composed of post-1958 buildings.

Regarding the eastern boundary, the nomination stated that “Although there is an area on the other side of the track that has a history similar to that of the district, it contains a much larger percentage of new and altered buildings and has less integrity than the district.” This observation remains true and this area has eroded even further in terms of its architectural cohesion since the nomination was prepared twenty years ago.

To the east of the railroad line are Commerce, Hoover, and Transylvania Avenues. The four blocks of these streets between Liberty Street and a branch line of the Norfolk and Western Railroad contain numerous examples of Folk Victorian, Colonial Revival and Craftsman dwellings dating from ca. 1890 to the 1930s. However, there has also been extensive new infill in these blocks. This area should be evaluated on its own merit as a possible local historic district with some type of overlay. However, given the extent of alterations to dwellings in these blocks and the large number of inappropriate infill buildings, it does not appear to qualify as a National Register historic district.



600 block of Liberty Street, west side of the street.



Norfolk and Western Railroad tracks looking north from Park Avenue. The railroad forms much of the eastern boundary of the district.



1600 block of Seaboard Avenue, east side of the street. These dwellings were built after 1958 and are outside of the district boundary.



1100 block of Hoover Ave., west side of the street. These Gable Front dwellings are largely intact but many similar dwellings have been altered in these blocks.



1200 block of Commerce, west side of the street. This row of dwellings has been altered through the addition of synthetic sidings, added porch materials, or missing front porches.



1200 block of Hoover Avenue, east side of the street. There are numerous incompatible infill dwellings built in the past 20 years in these blocks.

South Boundary

The southern boundary of the South Norfolk National Register Historic District is justifiable and the existing boundary should not be enlarged. However, a separate National Register district appears to be eligible to the south of the existing South Norfolk Historic District. This district is comprised of the Avalon neighborhood which was originally platted as the Avalon subdivision. The majority of properties were built from the late 1920s to the early 1950s and approximately 248 parcels are within this area. The proposed district would be bounded on the north by the southern boundary of the South Norfolk District, on the east by the east side of Chesapeake Avenue, and on the west by Bainbridge Boulevard. The boundary on the south is recommended to follow the Norfolk and Western Railroad tracks with the exception of the block south of Post Avenue and the 2000 block of Chesapeake Drive. These blocks are composed primarily of post-1958 buildings and structures.

The 1989 nomination for the South Norfolk Historic District excluded this area because “The buildings south of the boundary are generally more modern, and the street pattern is different because another railroad line curves through the area.” This observation was correct at the time and this justification is still valid since the period of significance for the South Norfolk Historic District ends by the late 1930s. The proposed Avalon Historic District is composed primarily of ca. 1925 to ca. 1958 dwellings with most appearing to be built from the mid-1930s to the early 1950s. These dwellings reflect the Bungalow, Minimal Traditional, Tudor Revival, Cape Cod and Colonial Revival dwellings of the period. Most of these blocks have good cohesiveness and post-1958 infill dwellings are minimal.

Apparently the street names in the subdivision were named for famous aviators of the early 20th century. These include: Byrd Avenue (Richard Byrd); Wilbur Avenue (Wilbur Wright); Orville Avenue (Orville Wright); Wright Avenue (Wright Brothers); Hughes Avenue (Howard Hughes); Post Avenue (Wiley Post), and Chamberlin Avenue (Clarence D. Chamberlin). Of these, historical research may identify the exact origins of the subdivision and the choice of street names.

The proposed Avalon Historic District represents a significant collection of architectural styles of the mid-20th century. By the 1930s, the Bungalow style was falling out of popularity and instead revival styles such as Colonial and Tudor Revival dominated. Many of these were stripped down or built with restrained detailing resulting in the stylistic terminology of “Minimal Traditional” as noted by Lee and Virginia McAlester in their book *A Field Guide to American Houses*. The Avalon subdivision appears to have been extensively developed during the late 1930s and after World War II. Historical research may also find that due to the major military presence in the Norfolk and Chesapeake area, house construction during World War II may have been greater in the area than in most communities in America. Many of the properties in the Avalon subdivision may also be “kit” houses sold by Sears, Aladdin and other companies of the period. The recent study, “The Kit House in Southeast, Virginia” unfortunately did not include any survey or analysis in the Avalon neighborhood but future research may identify such properties in the neighborhood. The proposed Avalon Historic District should be considered for eligibility under National Register criterion C for its architectural significance of the mid-20th century.



800 block of Hughes Avenue, north side of the street.



800 block of Hughes Avenue, south side of the street.



800 block of Orville Avenue, north side of the street.



800 block of Wilbur Avenue, south side of the street.



1100 block of Wilbur Avenue, north side of the street.



1600 block of Chesapeake Avenue, east side of the street.



1700 block of Chesapeake Drive, south side of the street.



1700 block of Seaboard Avenue, north side of the street.



800 block of Byrd Avenue, south side of the street.



Tudor Revival style dwelling at 1100 Byrd Avenue built in 1948.



Colonial Revival style dwelling at 1201 Orville Avenue built in 1939.



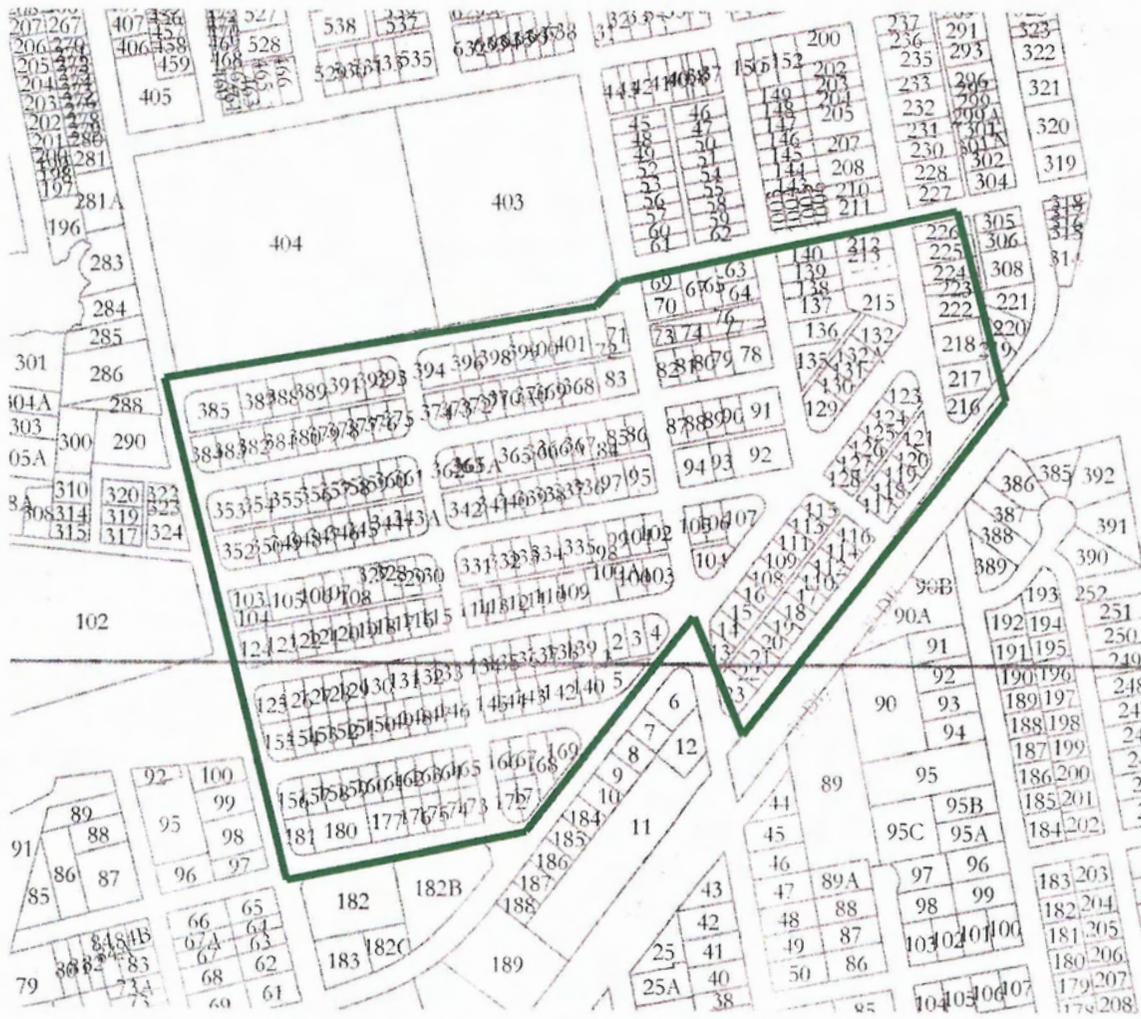
Colonial Revival dwelling at 1700 Jackson Avenue built in 1938.



Tudor Revival style dwelling at 1705 Chesapeake Avenue built in 1949.



2000 block of Chesapeake Drive, south side of the street. This block would be omitted from the district.



Boundary of the proposed Avalon Historic District showing lots recommended for inclusion.

III. Summary

As part of the completion of a new design guidelines manual for the South Norfolk Local Historic District, a review of the existing South Norfolk National Register Historic District boundaries was also undertaken. As a result of this review the following recommendations are presented to the City of Chesapeake and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources:

- The existing boundaries of the South Norfolk National Register Historic District appear to be justified and no expansions or contractions are recommended. None of the areas directly to the north or west of the boundary appear to possess sufficient concentrations of architecturally significant properties to warrant inclusion within the district.
- To the east of the district is an area which contains several blocks of dwellings built in similar styles and ages as those in the South Norfolk neighborhood. However, this area has experienced extensive infill construction in past decades and many of the pre-1958 dwellings have been altered with added synthetic siding materials and rebuilt porches. This area should be evaluated for its National Register eligibility as a historic district separate from South Norfolk. Due to the extent of alterations and the amount of new construction in these blocks National Register eligibility is doubtful, but a building inventory should be completed prior to making this determination.
- To the south of the existing South Norfolk National Register Historic District is the Avalon neighborhood which was developed in the early- to mid-20th century. This neighborhood contains a wide variety of architectural styles and was primarily developed from the 1930s to the early 1950s. Part or all of 16 blocks containing approximately 248 properties are within this area. This neighborhood appears to meet National Register criterion C as a cohesive neighborhood from this period and its survey and assessment as a National Register district is recommended.