Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR)
Historic District or Complex Guidance

DHR, in response to on-going conversations with professional consultants and cultural resource management professionals, has added "complex" as a new resource to the VCRIS data entry module. In general, the purpose of this resource type is to expedite the identification and documentation of properties for review and compliance projects at the Phase I/Reconnaissance level that share a common history, architectural forms and styles, and design intent. If a property meets the definition of historic district and is documented for listing on the Virginia Landmarks Register (VLR) and/or the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) it will be recorded in VCRIS as a historic district and the appropriate supporting documentation will be prepared.

DHR understands that, for reconnaissance level surveys conducted for review and compliance projects, there can be groupings of buildings that meet the definition of a historic district as outlined above, but could have resources that are not within the area of potential effect (APE). Understanding that recording all these resources as a historic district with each building as a tertiary resource could be unnecessary; DHR offers the following guidance for distinguishing between a historic district and a complex for identification and documentation purposes, within the Section 106/environmental review process.

Historic District Definitions

The National Park Service defines a historic district as having "a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development." A historic district can be important for one or more reasons, such as its architectural design, history, inhabitants, and archaeology. Typically, a district contains a number of resources that are relatively equal in importance (such as a downtown business center, a neighborhood, or a shipyard) or it has large acreage with a variety of resources (such as a park, battlefield, large farm, mine, or military installation). A district may also contain resources that, although linked by association or function, were separated geographically (such as a 19th century canal system made up of locks, dams, turning basins, towpaths, and other features). The National Park Service further adds that "a district derives its importance from being a unified entity, even though it is often composed of a wide variety of resources. The identity of a district results from the interrelationship of its resources, which can convey a visual sense of the overall historic environment or be an arrangement of historically or functionally related properties. For example, a district can reflect one principal activity, such as a mill or a ranch, or it can encompass several interrelated activities, such as an area that includes industrial, residential, or commercial buildings, sites, structures, or objects. A district can also be a grouping of archeological sites related primarily by their common components; these types of districts often will not visually represent a specific historic environment.

For additional information please reference: https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/HistoricDistricts.pdf or contact Lena Sweeten McDonald, DHR's Register Historian at: Lena.McDonald@dhr.virginia.gov or 804-482-6439.

NOTE: While a property may meet the NPS definition of a historic district, it may not necessarily meet Virginia's regulatory definitions of a historic district regarding public hearings. Schools, farmsteads, parks, and apartment complexes, which the NPS consider historic districts, typically do not meet state requirements for public hearings. In general, state regulations require multiple owners and tax parcels within a defined historic district for the purpose of a public meeting.

Complex

A historic complex as a resource type is to be used primarily for reconnaissance level surveys conducted as part of the review and compliance process. A complex is generally defined as a group of resources on the same parcel that share a common context and/or building history and are best understood as a group. Complexes will not have an easily identified primary resource. Instead it is generally a collection of similar buildings in terms of use, scale, form, and function. Common examples are: apartment developments, hospitals, and large mining and industrial facilities. Below is a table of resource categories in VCRIS under which complexes are found and common examples.

VCRIS Resource Category	Example
Agriculture	A property with a group of agricultural production buildings and processing facilities.
Domestic	A group of apartment buildings of similar size, age, style, and form.
Government	A group of government administration buildings with a common development history such as a master planned government center, a group of correctional facilities.
Health Care	A large grouping of hospital buildings.
Industry	A large mining facility with group of similar buildings in terms of size, use, scale.
Transportation	A group of transportation-related buildings and structures such as VDOT facilities.

VCRIS Data Entry

When documenting a complex in VCRIS the entire parcel will be mapped as the property boundary. The category is the use of the property (see table above) and the primary resource type is "complex." If all of the buildings are in the APE they each will be recorded as secondary resources. If only some of the buildings are within the boundaries of the APE, then only those within the APE will be recorded in VCRIS as secondary resources to the complex. The site description in the VCRIS record should identify how many total resources are on the property and indicate in the property notes which buildings are documented as part of the survey effort.

Tertiary numbers will not be issued for buildings that comprise the complex at the Phase I/Reconnaissance level for review and compliance surveys. Properties recorded as complexes in VCRIS

will not be identified as a historic district survey on the Project Tab. Therefore, they do not need to be entered in their own VCRIS project and can be included in projects with other individual properties.

Photographic Documentation:

Each building/structure/site/object in the APE will be photographed with a sufficient number of photographs to fully document the resource. Overview shots of the property should also be provided that clearly illustrate the physical relationship of the buildings on the property and the overall scale of the property.

Site Plans:

A site plan that illustrates the property boundaries will be included and the documented secondary resources and any important landscape features (parks, walkways, entry points, etc.) identified on the site plans.

NOTE: If the complex is documented at the Phase II/Intensive Level and/or is documented for listing on the VLR/NRHP the resource type will change to historic district and all buildings/sites/structures/objects on the property will be issued tertiary numbers.

For additional clarification about documenting resources, entering data into VCRIS, and preparing the survey materials please contact: Blake McDonald, Architectural Survey and Cost Share Program Manager at: Blake.McDonald@dhr.virginia.gov or: 804-482-6086.