



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for HISTORIC DISTRICTS

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) 020-6167

1. General Information

District name(s): Highland Hills Historic District

Main Streets and/or Routes: Robert Bruce Drive, Ben Nevis Drive, Greenock Drive

City or Town: Bon Air

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

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: 41.25

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban ☐ Suburban ☒ Town ☐ Village ☐ Hamlet ☐ Rural ☐

Briefly describe the district's overall setting, including any notable landscape features:

Highland Hills is a suburban neighborhood in Bon Air, Virginia. Bon Air sits about eight miles to the southwest of Richmond. The terrain is hilly and fairly wooded, with open garden and yard areas surrounding homes. The main circle of the neighborhood is composed of North Robert Bruce Dr. and Robert Bruce Dr. which curves from north to east and Greenock Dr. which curves towards the east connecting to Robert Bruce Dr. at both ends. Ben Nevis Dr. curves from west to roughly southeast, intersecting with Robert Bruce Dr to create a second loop. Greenock Dr. and Ben Nevis Dr. curve parallel to one another. Halidan Dr. extends towards the west from Robert Bruce Dr. and Flodden circle extends north from Halidan Dr. At the northern intersection of Robert Bruce Dr. and Ben Nevis Dr. and on the eastern side of Robert Bruce Dr. before Tuscora Rd, Highland Hills signs mark the entrances to the neighborhood. The streets are paved asphalt. The neighborhood is bordered roughly by train tracks to the south and a small stream to the east, while the Bon Air Historic District (VLR/NRHP, 1988) sits to the west. Highland Hill's proximity to the Bon Air Historic District emphasizes its uniqueness. The development of Bon Air began in the late 19th century with the goal of creating a retreat from urban life. The historic area is primarily known for Victorian cottages and Victorian history, in contrast with the mid-century contemporary style represented in Highland Hills.

3. Architectural/Physical Description

Architectural Style(s): Mid-Century Modern/Contemporary

If any individual properties within the district were designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: Charles Goodman

If any builders or developers are known, please list here: Sowers Realty

Date(s) of construction (can be approximate): 1955-1958

Are there any known threats to this district? Flooding and treefall associated with storms

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 neighborhood of Highland Hills consists of 73 original mid-century prefabricated homes, four later non-historic homes, and a community pool with a bath house. The historic homes are contemporary in style and designed by renowned architect Charles Goodman. They were manufactured by National Homes Corporation in Lafayette, Indiana. The components for each house were shipped to Highland Hills to be assembled by the neighborhood's developers. The majority are rectangular, some L-shaped, and sit on concrete block foundations.

There were five basic home designs available to original buyers, with considerable options for customization of each model. A shared characteristic among them is a low-pitched gable roof with deep eaves and an unusual gable end attic vent design composed of projecting triangular panels. Most of the homes are one-story on slab foundations. Many of the homes sited on sloping lots have walk-out basements. There are several two-story homes in the neighborhood, including one of the two first homes constructed in the neighborhood to serve as models for prospective buyers, located at 8316 Halidan Drive. Another shared characteristic of most houses are fixed floor-to-ceiling metal windows with floor level sliders. This original feature can still be seen on many homes in the neighborhood and even where they have been replaced many homes have large single pane windows, preserving the original style of the house. An additional common feature in Highland Hills are two doors on the front of the house, usually on opposite ends and separated by windows. Period plans indicate that one door opened into the kitchen while the other opened into the living room. A very unique feature found in several homes across the neighborhood are stepped brick chimneys offset several inches from the wall of the house. This spacing allows a row of clerestory windows the wall behind the chimney, making the chimney brickwork visible when looking through the window from the interior of the home.

Of the customizable options available to original buyers, one of the most commonly chosen seems to be flat-roofed carports. These carports are attached to the house but could be configured differently according to the landscape of the lot and placement of the house. An integrated storage shed could be attached to the carports and can be seen at a few of the houses today. Air conditioning was available as an add-on as well, but most buyers appear to have chosen built-in attic fan systems, some of which are still used by current residents. In addition to these structural options, buyers could choose siding materials and exterior paint colors. Original siding options were listed as Masonite, cedar shakes, and Texture-3, which was most likely an Asbestos shingle. The manufacturer's siding was horizontal and a common update to homes has been its replacement with vertical siding. At least one home in the neighborhood still has original cedar shakes siding. Some homes have been expanded and outbuildings, primarily prefabricated sheds, have been added to a handful of

properties. While many homes have undergone alterations since their construction, most still retain the original style.

In 1959 a pool and recreation center was added to the neighborhood, located at 8300 Greenock Dr. The pool bathhouse was designed by a Highland Hills resident in the 1960s. The building matches the overall style of Highland Hills, featuring a low-pitched gable roof with wide overhang. It is a one-story rectangular building with two recessed entrances leading to men's and women's bathrooms. The bathhouse has been recently repainted by a current resident of Highland Hills, with geometric artwork and the Highland Hills logo on the front of the building. There is an adult pool and baby pool on the premises, both concrete.

In May 2021, volunteers from the Virginia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and staff from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources performed an architectural survey of each property in the Highland Hills neighborhood. The resulting survey data was added to the Virginia Cultural Resource Information System in 2021 and 2022. The survey provided examples of approximately five house types available for purchase from National Homes. The following architectural descriptions detail each type, though the above mentioned modifications and customizations alter slightly the appearance of each property in the neighborhood. Additional research is required to confirm the home models outlined below.

The Hanover model is a one-story five-bay rectangular home with a low pitched side gable roof and deep eaves. In the 1955 National Homes catalog the floorplan for The Hanover has three bedrooms. The house has two primary entrances on the front elevation, one entering the living room and one the kitchen. Between these entrances are three fixed floor to ceiling windows with bottom sliders. In the center of the roof is a small brick exhaust chimney. Buyers had the option of living rooms with either another fixed floor to ceiling window with bottom sliders or a fireplace with an external offset chimney in front of a row of clerestory windows spanning the length of the wall. A covered carport and/or terrace are included in all available designs of The Hanover featured in the 1955 edition of National Homes catalog, with varying placements on the house. In Highland Hills the covered terrace is commonly placed over the floor to ceiling windows on the front of the house. Some examples of The Hanover in Highland Hills do not have a covered terrace or carport, so the feature may have been optional as with other models or it may have been removed at a later time. Wood screen fences enclosing the terrace or carport were also included in designs for The Hanover model, and these are still present at several examples of the house in Highland Hills today. The Highland Hills Board completed a video tour for the 2024 Goodman Symposium hosted by Friends of Hollin Hills. Multiple homeowners participated and identified their home model after reviewing the original National Homes catalog, a copy of which the board shared. Many listed their home as a Canterbury model and one as Devonshire model. These models, which are similar to the Hanover but distinct from it, may have become available later.

The Birchbrook is a one-story five-bay rectangular home with a low-pitched gable roof and deep eaves. The primary entrance sits in the middle of the front elevation with three small windows to the left and a set of large fixed floor to ceiling windows with bottom sliders directly adjacent to the right. In the center of the roof is a small brick exhaust chimney. The back and side elevations are populated by smaller casement windows. The 1955 edition of National Homes catalog describes The Birchbrook as having a full basement and four bedrooms. While a covered carport and exterior offset chimney are not present in the original designs found in the National Homes catalog, they are present on some examples of the model in Highland Hills.

The Hollybrook Ranger Design R-24 is a two-story, four bay home with a low-pitched side gable roof with deep eaves. The model is designed for sloped lots with the bottom floor partially embedded into the hillside. The home has two primary entrances, both on the upper floor, with three floor to ceiling windows between them. On the back and sides of the house are seven smaller casement windows. On the side wall of the kitchen is another row of floor-to-ceiling windows with bottom sliders, which have been substituted for an exterior offset fireplace and row of clerestory windows on some models in Highland Hills. On the ground

floor, the wall facing down the hillside is almost entirely composed of floor to ceiling windows with two glass doors opening onto a flagstone terrace. There is one other exterior entrance to the ground floor, placed on an end wall which is partially embedded into the hill. The upper level has a slight overhang over the ground floor. The original plan for this model found in the 1955 National Homes catalog describes it as being a five bedroom home with three bedrooms upstairs and two downstairs, as well as having a large activities room on the ground floor.

The Hollybrook model in design Ranger R-25 is a two-story, four-bay home with a low-pitched side gable roof with deep eaves. The model is designed for a sloped lot, with the ground floor being partially embedded into the hillside. On the upper floor front elevation are two main entrances with a row of floor-to-ceiling windows between them. On the back and side elevations of the house are seven smaller casement windows and another panel of floor-to-ceiling windows with bottom sliders on the side wall of the kitchen. This panel of floor-to-ceiling windows has been substituted for an exterior offset fireplace with a row of clerestory windows on some models in Highland Hills. Roughly a quarter of the ground floor is taken up by a recessed carport, with the overhanging upper level supported by posts. Within the recessed carport are three small casement windows and a single leaf door. The remaining walls of the ground floor not embedded into the hill contain a row of closely spaced casement windows. The 1955 edition of National Homes catalog describes this model as being a four bedroom home with the ground floor containing one bedroom, an activities room, and a storage room.

The fifth house type in Highland Hills is an L-shaped model which has not been identified as a specific model in the 1955 National Homes catalog. The model is a one-story home with a low-pitched, cross gable roof with deep eaves. The front elevation has two doors on either side of a bay of fixed floor-to-ceiling windows with bottom sliders. The door furthest from the inner corner of the L sits under the attached carport, which extends outward from the house parallel with the opposite side of the L. On the opposite side of the L is an additional entrance next to five fixed floor-to-ceiling windows with bottom sliders. On the front gable end facing outward towards the street is another set of three fixed floor to ceiling windows with bottom sliders. On the outer elevation of the side of the L facing the street is an exterior offset chimney in front of a row of clerestory windows. In the center of the roof adjacent to this chimney is a small exhaust chimney. The remainder of this outer wall is populated by four small casement windows.

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.

Highland Hills is defined by curving streets and a hilled landscape, both of which were intentional elements of the neighborhood's design. Architect Charles Goodman chose to work in areas which were usually seen as unsuitable for development, as is evidenced by his Alexandria, VA neighborhood. Hollin Hills. Homes in Highland Hills are oriented according to the landscape they are situated in, rather than in relation to the street. This creates a nontraditional neighborhood where no two houses are oriented the same. Goodman discouraged developers from allowing fences in his neighborhoods to encourage a sense of community and shared space, and properties in Highland Hills remain unfenced. While there was no overall landscaping plan in the original development of the neighborhood, landscaping consultations may have been available to buyers, and landscape plays a large part in the character of the neighborhood. The neighborhood is well populated with mature trees and the low roofs blend into their branches, as intended by Goodman. With the exception of the one more recent pool bathhouse complex, all structures in the neighborhood are residential. A plot of land owned by the neighborhood association is located adjacent to the pool, running along the small creek to the north and east of the pool parking lot. On the eastern side, there is a flatter area cleared of trees. This area is available for recreation and neighborhood events.

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.

Highland Hills was established in 1955 when Sowers Realty, owned by brothers Bruce and Jim Sowers, began developing the neighborhood in Bon Air, VA. Sowers Realty collaborated with Lafayette, Indiana based National Homes Corporation and architect Charles Goodman in the development of Highland Hills. National Homes, a producer of prefabricated houses, had hired Charles Goodman to design a number of home plans available for purchase through the National Homes catalog. Sowers Realty offered five of these plans as options for their prospective customers to choose from, along with several additional features such as car ports, attached storage sheds, and air conditioning, which could be added to homes for an extra cost.

The Mid-Century style of the homes is rare in central Virginia. The neighborhood's architecture is characterized by low, gabled roofs with deep eaves, a rectangular shape, and large floor to ceiling windows. In addition to designing the homes of Highland Hills, Goodman chose the positioning of the neighborhood's roads and the placement of the houses on their lots. Once buyers purchased their lot and home plan, National Homes shipped the prefabricated panels to the neighborhood where they were unloaded at the site which is now the Highland Hills pool. The materials were then assembled into a home on the buyer's selected lot by the Sowers brothers in as little as three days. A sales trailer where buyers would meet with Sowers Realty was located at the corner of Ben Nevis Dr. and Robert Bruce Dr. In 1955 the first two houses in the neighborhood were built to be used as model homes for prospective buyers, located at 8316 Halidan Dr. and at 8324 Robert Bruce Dr. The remaining 71 original houses were built over the next three years. In 1959, a community swimming pool and poolhouse were added to the neighborhood. As Highland Hills differed significantly from the more traditional Colonial Revival style homes popular in Richmond at the time, the neighborhood originally attracted buyers from outside the area. A 1962 Richmond Times Dispatch article stated that roughly 75% of Highland Hills inhabitants had moved there from other regions. The nontraditional style of the neighborhood also attracted those working in creative fields, including numerous architects, artists, and professors at what was then Richmond Professional Institute (today VCU). This still holds true in Highland Hills today as many of its current residents are employed in creative fields.

Architect Charles Goodman was instrumental to the development of Highland Hills. After graduating from the Illinois Institute of Technology Goodman began his architectural career in Washington D.C.. First working for the Treasury Department and later for the Army Air Forces, Goodman was an advocate for moving government architecture away from the Neoclassical towards Modernism. A notable example of his work in this period is the Washington National Airport. After World War II, Goodman moved his focus from government to domestic architecture, opening his own D.C. based firm Charles Goodman Associates. As well as working independently through his own firm Goodman became involved with the Lafayette, Indiana based National Homes Corporation in the mid-1950s designing prefabricated homes, of which over 30,000 were built throughout the United States. As he had with government projects, Goodman sought to promote modern innovation in residential housing. Goodman's residence in Alexandria, VA has been recognized as having national historical significance. The house is a Victorian farmhouse which Goodman expanded in the International style, combining tradition and modernity in the design. Another of Goodman's most well-known residential projects is the Hollin Hills Historic District in Alexandria, VA, which has received state and national recognition for its historical significance. Hollin Hills is notable for its curving roads, hilled landscape, and the consideration of the natural environment into the design of the

neighborhood. These elements of Goodman's design can also be seen in Highland Hills. As previously stated, Goodman designed all of the original homes in Highland Hills as well as choosing the layout of the neighborhood. Goodman rejected the typical grid layout found in many suburban neighborhoods in favor of curving streets intended to slow traffic and create a safer community. Rather than orient houses in relation to the street, Goodman chose the position of homes in his neighborhoods according to the landscape of the individual lot with the intention of creating both privacy and the best view possible. The combination of this landscape focused orientation with the large floor to ceiling windows present on most Goodman houses served to create homes which felt blended with their natural surroundings, both outside and in. Goodman's design choices were made with the intention of creating better, safer suburban communities, and shaped Highland Hills into the unique community it is today.

The Highland Hills neighborhood is a highly intact example of Mid-Century Modern, prefabricated residential design associated with a prominent architect. Beyond the other Goodman-designed neighborhoods in Maryland and Northern Virginia (Hammond Woods, Rock Creek Woods and Hollin Hills), there are no other previously identified examples of holistically designed Mid-Century Modern neighborhoods that match the scale and integrity of Highland Hills. The proposed Highland Hills Historic District is recommended eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for Architecture with a period of significance of 1953 to 1959, corresponding to the neighborhood's construction. The district is recommended at the state level of significance given the association with architect Charles Goodman.

Sources

Highland Hills website, "Our Homes", The Architect Charles Goodman"

<https://www.highlandhillsrva.com/>

"The Architecture of Hollin Hills", Gregory K. Hunt, FAIA

<https://www.hollin-hills.org/the-architecture>

An Uncommon Architect, "Charles Goodman and His Legacy At The Commons of Mclean"

<http://anuncommonarchitect.com/bio.html>

The Washington Post, "Charles Goodman Dies At 85", Martin Weil, *October 31, 1992*

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1992/10/31/charles-goodman-dies-at-85/3ea24ba4-ed32-4aeb-ba76-a8e1c0d55e90/>

Chesterfield Observer, "Building Highland Hills", Rich Grisct, *March 21, 2018*

<https://www.chesterfieldobserver.com/articles/building-highland-hills/>

Highland Hills Test of Time, "Highland Hills Chronology"

Richmond Times Dispatch, "Highland Hills-Planned Land Use Enhances Homes" Susan Wagner, *September 23, 1962*

National Homes Catalog, 1955 "Customline" and "Pacemaker" Houses by National Homes,

https://www.highlandhillsrva.com/files/ugd/6276fc_25dde46d9916433b98298a42d6fc0fd5.pdf

Highland Hills VCRIS Records, DHR/AIA Survey, May 2021.

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

Private: X Public\Local 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: Mike Bennett, Resident, & Mariko Saito, Resident/Director of HHCA

organization: Highland Hills Community Association

street & number: P.O. Box 3756

city or town: North Chesterfield state: VA zip code: 23235

e-mail: highlandhillsneighborhood@gmail.com; mbennett02@gmail.com;

bradandmariko@gmail.com telephone: Mike (815) 291-8109; Mariko (804) 878-4179

Applicant's Signature: Mansaito
Date: 12/19/24

• • *Signature required from local contact for the historic district proposal.* • •

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: _____

Date: _____

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.

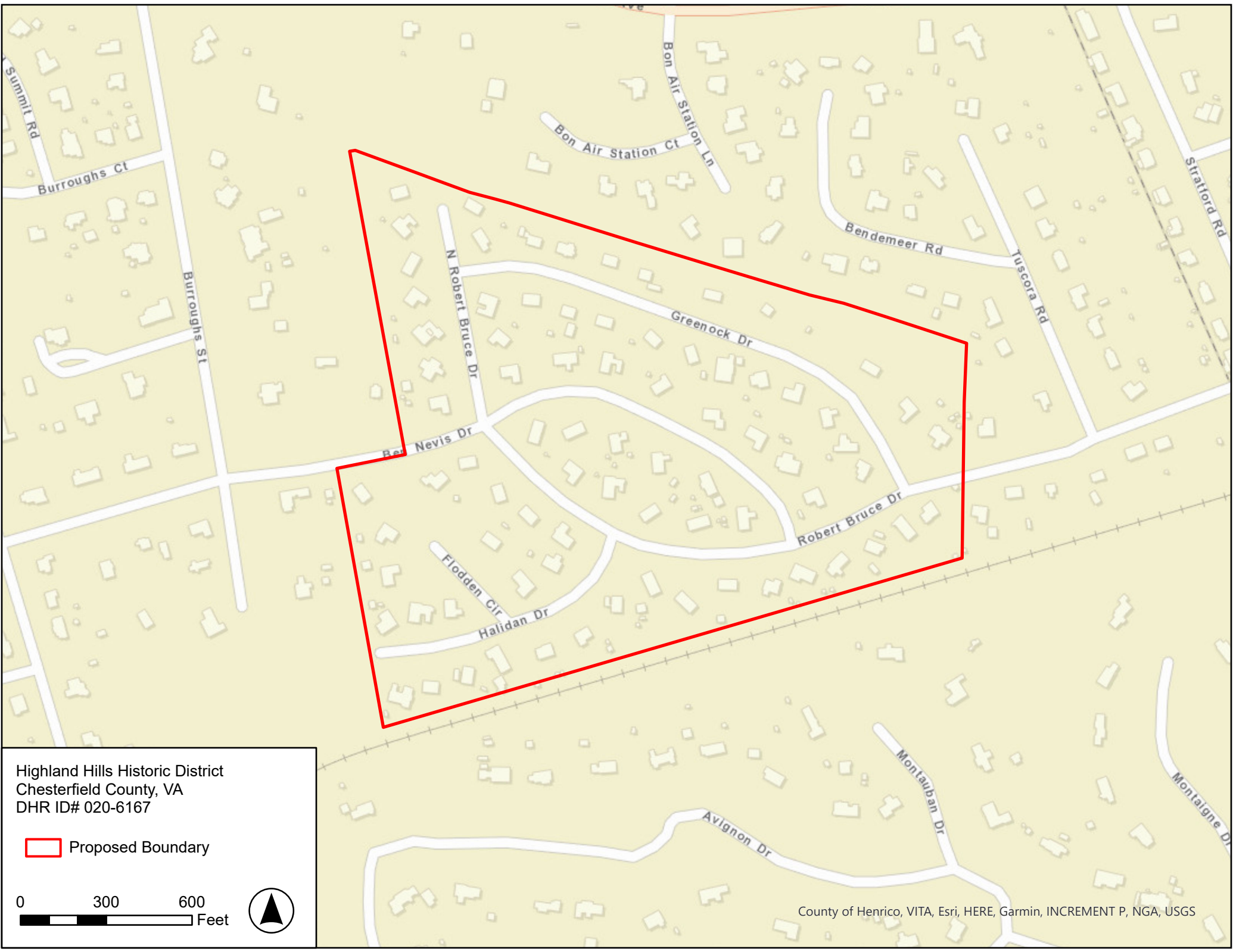
name/title: Dr. Joseph Casey, County Administrator

locality: Chesterfield County


street & number: 9901 Lori Road


city or town: Chesterfield state: VA zip code: 23832

telephone: (804)748-1190

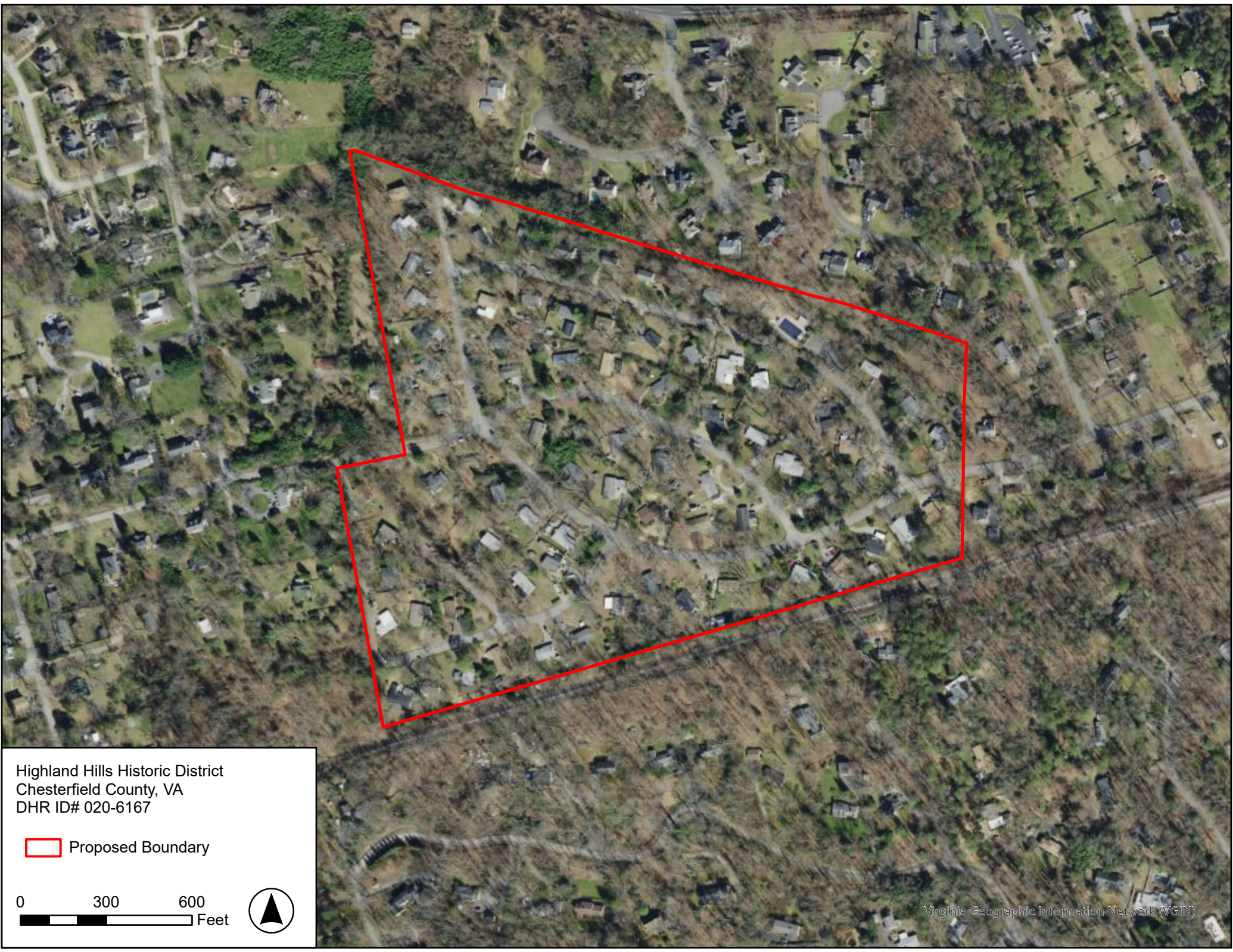


Highland Hills Historic District
Chesterfield County, VA
DHR ID# 020-6167


 Proposed Boundary

0 300 600
 Feet





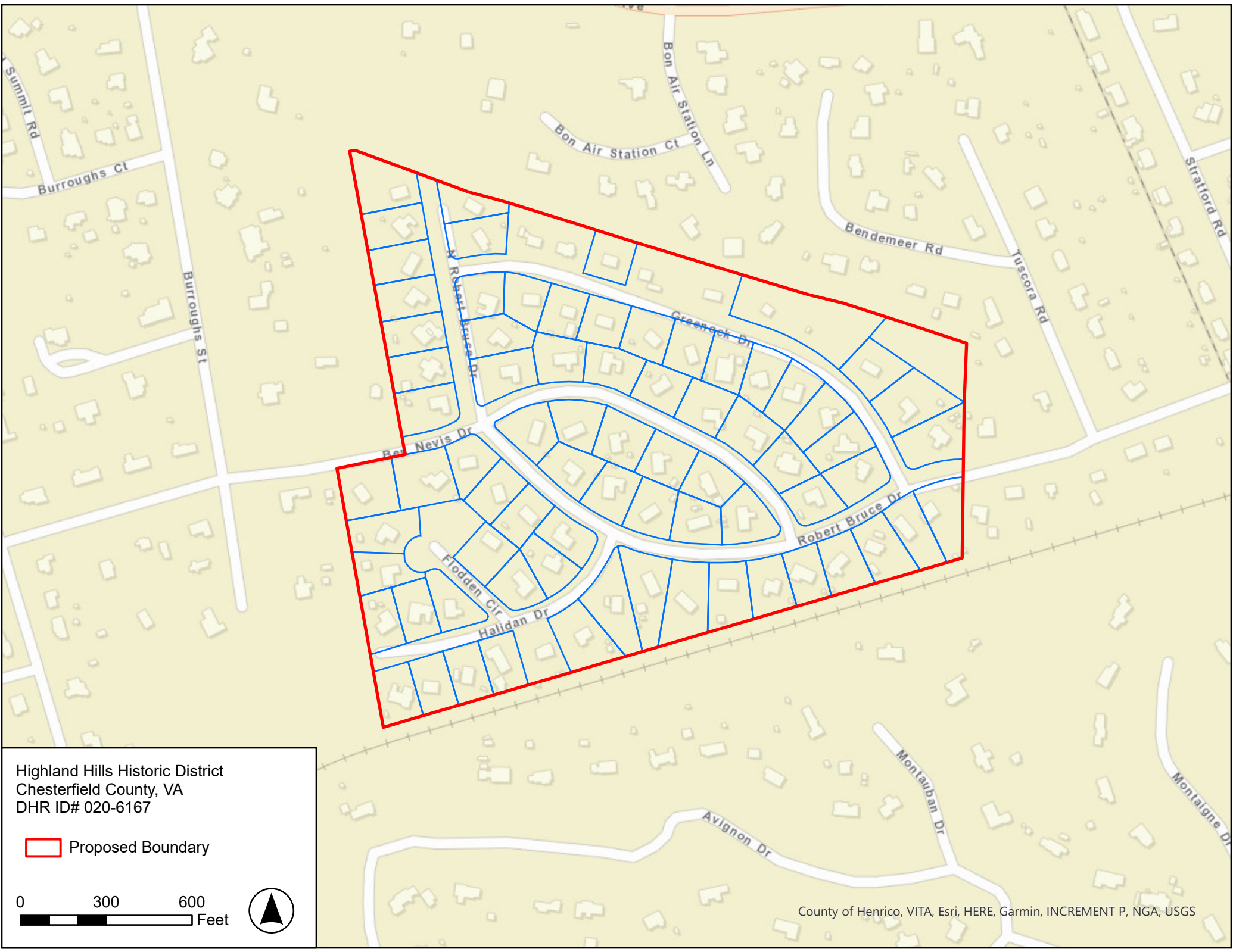
Highland Hills Historic District
Chesterfield County, VA
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 Proposed Boundary


0 300 600
Feet

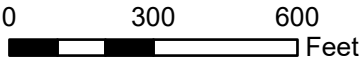


Virginia Geographic Information Network (VGIN)



Highland Hills Historic District
Chesterfield County, VA
DHR ID# 020-6167

 Proposed Boundary







































INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CARE AND MAINTENANCE OF YOUR NATIONAL HOME
A HOME OF SUPERIOR PERMANENT CONSTRUCTION
DECORATING INTERIOR WALLS

GYPSON - THE WALLS AND CEILINGS CAN BE PAINTED WITH ANY TYPE OF PAINT LEAVING THE V-JOINTS. NEVER FILL THE V-JOINTS WITH PATCHING PLASTER OR OTHER JOINT FILLER. IF A SMOOTH WALL IS DESIRED, THE V-JOINTS IN THE WALLS, CEILINGS AND CORNERS SHOULD BE COVERED ONLY WITH U. S. GYPSON'S PERFATAPE APPLIED ACCORDING TO THE MANUFACTURER'S RECOMMENDATIONS. IF THE PERFATAPE HAS BEEN PROPERLY APPLIED TO THE WALLS AND CEILINGS, YOU CAN PAINT OR PAPER AS YOU DESIRE.

UPSON - THE STRESSED SKIN PRINCIPLE USED IN BUILDING THE HOUSE, WHICH IS THE PRINCIPLE EMPLOYED BY AIRCRAFT MANUFACTURERS, DEVELOPS A STRENGTH FAR GREATER THAN THAT USED BY CONVENTIONAL METHODS AND ASSURES CRACK-PROOF WALLS BUT WILL CAUSE A SLIGHT MOVEMENT IN THE WALLS, KNOWN AS BREATHING. THIS BREATHING WILL BE DETECTED IN THE WINTER BY THE WALLS MOVING OUT SLIGHTLY AND RETURNING IN THE SUMMER WHEN THE TEMPERATURE AND HUMIDITY EQUALIZE. BREATHING ALSO CAUSES SLIGHT MOVEMENT OF NAIL HEADS BUT THIS DOES NOT AFFECT STRUCTURAL STABILITY. SHADOW MOLDINGS ARE USED TO CONCEAL MOVEMENT. WHEN THE WALLS ARE REDECORATED, EITHER PAINT OR PAPER MAY BE USED. NEVER FILL THE SHADOW LINE OF THE MOLDING WITH FILLER OR PAINT.

PAPERING

- IN PAPERING, MAKE SURE THAT THE PAPER EXTENDS UNDER THE SHADOW MOLDING AND THAT WIRE JOINTS ARE USED. THE WALLS MUST BE SIZED PRIOR TO PAPERING. ADD ONE PINT OF CLARSYN #180 AND ONE POUND OF TIK SIZE TO 10 PINTS WATER.

WASHING

- WALLS MAY BE WASHED WITH BEST RESULTS BY USING A MILD SOAP IN LUKEWARM WATER. DRY WITH A CLEAN, SOFT, DRY CLOTH.

REMOVING WALL PAPER

- WALL PAPER MAY BE REMOVED BY STEAMING OR SOAKING THE PAPER SUFFICIENTLY SO THAT REMOVAL CAN BE DONE WITHOUT FORCING. CARE SHOULD BE TAKEN NOT TO MAR THE FINISHED SURFACE OF THE WALL.

EXTERIOR PAINT

GROOVED EXTERIOR PLYWOOD - THE PLYWOOD SHOULD BE RESTAINED EVERY THREE YEARS. THE MATERIAL RECOMMENDED IS A HIGHLY PIGMENTED STAIN. SUITABLE PRODUCTS ARE SOLD UNDER SUCH NAMES AS SHAKE PAINT, SHINGLE STAIN, SHAKE STAIN, SHINGLE OR SHAKE FINISH.

MASONITE SIDING AND CEDAR SHAKES - THE EXTERIOR COVERING SHOULD BE REPAINTED EVERY THREE YEARS.

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