



## **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)** 047-5147

### **1. General Information**

District name(s): Toano Historic District

Main Streets and/or Routes: Richmond Road; Church Lane; School Lane; Chickahominy Road; Depot Street; Chesapeake Avenue

City or Town: Town of Toano

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

### **2. Physical Aspects**

Acreage: \_\_\_\_\_

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:

The potential Toano Historic District is located within the town limits of Toano, Virginia. Toano is composed of late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century residential and commercial buildings, concentrated along Richmond Road (State Route 60). The potential district would expand the existing Toano Commercial District situated on the north side of Route 60 to include residential and institutional buildings to the east, west, and south of Route 60.

Richmond Road (State Route 60) is a four-lane highway that runs through the middle of the district with commercial development and residential properties on either side. The north side of Richmond Road is primarily industrial/commercial in nature due to the tracks of Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad located to the north. The south side of Richmond Road is typified by light commercial and residential development. On both sides of the road, residential buildings have been converted to commercial use. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth- century dwellings are scattered throughout the district with the heaviest concentration of dwellings south of Richmond Road. The residential dwellings are sited on large yards with mature trees and plantings and do not form the patterns of organized, connecting blocks or sprawling subdivisions.

### 3. Architectural/Physical Description

Architectural Style(s): Queen Anne, Craftsman, Colonial Revival, Ranch, Minimal Traditional, Vernacular

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

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

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Date(s) of construction (can be approximate): 1886-c. 1966

Are there any known threats to this district? Development, demolition

#### **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 district lies largely south of Route 60, in and adjoining the town of Toano. The older sections of Toano reflect the rural character and architectural traditions of late nineteenth and early twentieth century life in James City County. The oldest extant dwellings in the district date from the second half of the nineteenth century and tend to be simple frame houses clad in weatherboard. Older houses tend to sit at the margins of Toano and were the dwellings of established local land-owning families. The cleared sites emphasize the agricultural basis of Toano's wealth and they predate the creation of the Toano Terrace subdivision mentioned below. They tend to be further from the core commercial area, relating to their original construction as farmhouses. Most of these houses are on large tracts, formerly farms, but stand near the main Richmond Road (60) facing it. A few dwellings in the Queen Anne style range from the very large 7849 Church Lane (047-5147-0002) to the smaller 7840 Richmond Road (047-5147-0032), reflecting turn-of-the-century domestic architecture. 7849 Church Lane features a complex roofline, wraparound porch, bay window, and decorative elements such as spindle work, brackets and cladding in saw-tooth shingles. 7840 Richmond Road features fish-scale- and saw-tooth-shingle cladding, turned porch posts, and an intersecting gable roof. The residential dwellings are typically sited on large lots, many of which were originally farmsteads. Throughout the district, most outbuildings are limited to small barns and garages.

However, the majority of the dwellings in the potential Toano Historic District dwellings are one- and two-story dwellings from the early twentieth century. Colonial Revival and Craftsman elements are especially strong, corresponding to construction dates in the 1920s and 1930s when the average homeowner was more able to personalize their home through stylistic choices. Toano Terrace, a 1915 platted subdivision, would be the heart of the district. Most houses in the subdivision date from the later, inter-war period with some pre- and post-dating that timeframe. They tend to be modestly scaled dwellings in varying styles of the period; before WWII, Colonial Revival and Craftsman influences dominated. Lesser dwellings tend to be frame, plainly built. Garages accompany most houses, and are predominately detached. Interspersed among these pre-war dwellings are a few post-war ranch houses. These all predate the Route 60 expansion. Gambrel roofs, typical of mail-order homes, are seen at 102 Chesapeake Avenue (047-5147-0014) and 7937 Church Lane (047-5147-0016). Examples of Craftsman Bungalows are 122 School

Lane (047-5147-0022) and 110 School Lane (047-5147-0020), while Colonial Revival features such as brick construction with white painted trim, broken pediments, cornices with modillion blocks, partial returns, and gable-roof dormers can be found among 137 School Lane (047-5147-0023), 144 School Lane (047-5147-0024), and 136 School Lane (047-5147-0025).

Toano Terrace subdivision stands south of Toano, adjoining the old C&O right-of-way. Platted in 1915, it was a pioneering enterprise – one of the earliest residential subdivisions in James City County, though it was slow to develop due to economic downturns. It occupies a relatively flat tract of ground surrounded on every side by declivities. As first laid out, it comprised 10.55 acres divided into 52 lots; many of these lots were since combined to create larger parcels, which has given certain parts of the subdivision an open character. Chesapeake Avenue forms the subdivision's northern boundary – parallelling Route 60 and the old C&O right-of-way, it traverses an open landscape. The C&O right-of-way is now a grassy, park-like setting. Originally, Toano Terrace centered on an open, elevated site occupied by the church; today, large parking lots surround the church and Sunday School wing. Church Lane and School Lane run south-to-north, both “tee-ing” into Chesapeake Avenue. The two lanes are leafy, narrow roads with mailboxes at the street but no curbs or sidewalks. The houses tend to be modestly scaled; some are enfolded by mature vegetation. South of Toano Terrace are larger Colonial Revival houses on cleared parcels, which highlights the significance of those more prominent dwellings.

At the bend of Route 60 is the Toano Women's Club – this building and the church are the only institutional buildings in the district, but unlike the church, the clubhouse stands on a lot barely larger than the building itself.

The commercial buildings of Toano, fronting on Richmond Road and backing on the C&O rail line, are tightly grouped, brick or frame buildings, mostly with Italianate-style brick facades. There are 11 buildings currently listed in the Toano Commercial Historic District.

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 Toano Historic District is located within the town limits of Toano, Virginia. Route 60, a four-lane highway, runs through the middle of the district with commercial development, both old and new on either side. The north side of Route 60 is industrial/commercial in nature due to an adjacent railroad that influenced development. The south side is typified by light commercial and residential development.

Late 19th and early 20th century dwellings are scattered throughout the district with the heaviest concentration of dwellings south of Route 60. The residential dwellings are situated on large yards with mature trees and plantings

#### 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.

Toano, originally known as Burnt Ordinary, traces its origins to the seventeenth century when taverns and ordinaries were common markers of place throughout the region. The earliest record of the ordinary, later known as Burnt Ordinary, appears to be an advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette* in the 1760s. John Lewis, the owner of Fox's and Rhodes ordinaries, was residing at Fox's Ordinary while receiving inquiries for the sale of Hickory Neck Plantation, on behalf of the late Mary Holdcroft. In January 1780, the *Virginia Gazette* reported that Fox's Ordinary had burned to the ground.

During the Revolutionary War in August 1781, General George Washington and Comte de Rochambeau's armies moved south to Virginia. A lack of adequate vessels to transport the French Army's horses and wagons forced them to travel overland along the route known today as Virginia State Route 60. In October 1781, Alexander Berthier, assistant quartermasters-general, recorded the route of the French wagon train from Annapolis to Williamsburg. He recorded that the road to Williamsburg was good and after passing a meetinghouse on the left (Hickory Neck Church) and emerging from the woods, there were two old chimneys marking the former location of Fox's Ordinary. In 1789, Christopher Colles, tasked with establishing a postal route, retraced the French wagon train's route and recommended the route for future postal service. Colles' map of the route identified the site of the two old chimneys as "Burnt brick Orny."

The character of Burnt Ordinary in the mid- nineteenth century is known from several sources. In 1845, Robert Morris, a local schoolteacher, indicated in his diary that he did most of his shopping in the store at Burnt Ordinary. Morris also stated that he attended militia musters there and went there to catch the stage coach to Richmond and Williamsburg and to vote. Clearly Morris' diary entries suggest Burnt Ordinary was an active rural community.

Historian Martha W. McCartney has identified references to Burnt Ordinary in the *Virginia Gazette* describing the town (in 1854) as 'a healthy, prosperous community' with a post office, churches, and stores." McCartney later quotes William Barton Rogers, in a letter dated April 1859, describing Burnt Ordinary as a "hamlet of neat white houses." Following the Battle of Williamsburg May 2, 1862, the Confederate Army withdrew from Williamsburg and set up camp at Hickory Neck Academy just west of Burnt Ordinary.

By 1881, The Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad (C&O) built a rail line connecting Richmond to Newport News establishing regular freight and passenger service to Burnt Ordinary by 1882. This spurred economic development for Toano. By 1896, Burnt Ordinary had become known as Toano (probably as a result of the construction of the train station), and was a focal point of commercial activity and contained a post office, law offices, train depot, freight station, a hotel, stores, and a bank. Toano also had a barrel factory, and when potato production was at its peak, it was the largest revenue-producing freight-stop on the C&O route between Newport News and Richmond. Toano was also described as a great trucking center from which many boxcar loads of melons, sweet and Irish potatoes, peas, and other vegetables were sent to northern and western markets. At a canning factory in Toano, local farmers' green beans,

peas, and tomatoes were processed and their cucumbers were made into pickles. Walter Martin's general store in Toano carried everything from custom-made suits and shoes to groceries and baked goods. Toano also had a barbershop equipped with billiard tables. Near the intersection of what became Old Forge Road and Richmond Road was Toano's public well. At the turn of the twentieth century, Toano had two hotels and nearly 20 business establishments.

The community saw a slow decline in the twentieth century. In the 1910s, Toano experienced three disastrous fires. The Toano School, completed in 1908, was razed and a modern fire station was built on the site in 1965-1966. Route 60 was expanded from two lanes to four lanes in the mid- 1960s and caused additional architectural destruction and decline of the historic setting. In the next decade, the construction of Interstate 64 parallel to Route 60 to the north caused Toano to be bypassed by most travelers between Richmond and Williamsburg. These factors have diminished the nineteenth and early twentieth century role of Toano as a bustling market community, but as a result of the economic decline, a unique collection of buildings has been preserved without many alterations of modernity. Similarly, to this day, the area has been relatively free from modern residential subdivisions, with most residences pre-dating the Second World War and the area surrounding the commercial core retaining an agricultural feel.

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

Private:  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: Jack Wray, President

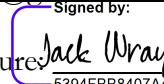
organization: Toano Historical Society

street & number: P.O. Box 433

city or town: Toano state: VA zip code: 23168

e-mail: jewray75@gmail.com telephone: (434)531-3479

Signed by:

Applicant's Signature: 

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Date: October 8, 2025

**• • 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: Mark R. Wenger

organization: Mesick Cohen Wilson Baker Architects

street & number: 402 Duke of Gloucester Street

city or town: Williamsburg state: VA zip code: 23185

e-mail: mwenger@mcwb-arch.com telephone: (757)293-8003

Date: October 8, 2025

## 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: Scott Stephens, County Administrator

locality: James City County

street & number: 101 Mounts Bay Road, Building D

city or town: Williamsburg state: VA zip code: 23185

telephone: (757)253-6602



























































