

NEWS RELEASE
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Contact:
Diana Klink
757-514-4104
757-284-9488

SOMERTON NAMED TO NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

SUFFOLK, VA (February 10, 2009) The residents of Somerton have accomplished something they can truly be proud of – having their community listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places. Assisted by the Suffolk Historic Landmarks Commission, residents initially met in June of 2007, and based on strong interest, the City contracted with the Commonwealth Preservation Group to begin the nomination process.

The village of Somerton began in the 17th century when Sir Thomas Jernigan of Suffolk County, England came to Virginia. The 236-acre Somerton Historic District is a collection of wood-frame dwellings of mid 18th to 19th century construction and architecture. The architectural styles range from Federal to Folk Victorian. The development of the village weighed heavily on its location along the main route from Suffolk to northeastern North Carolina, and it thrived as a trade center as early as the mid-18th century. During his tour of the United States, Marquis de Lafayette stopped in Somerton, and while he was in the village went to the Washington Smith Ordinary where a grand dinner party was held in his honor.

Somerton is the first rural community nominated for historic listing in the City of Suffolk. The streetscapes and physical appearance convey its rural character. While the streets are paved, many of the driveways and agricultural roads remain unpaved. There are no curbs or gutters, nor are there any stoplights or sidewalks. Other community buildings beside the historic Washington Smith Ordinary include the Ellis General Store and the

Somerton United Methodist Church, circa 1880. A cemetery located directly south of the Church was deeded to the trustees of the church in the mid-1800's by Dempsey Odom, a resident of Somerton in the 19th century. The oldest stone dates to 1881 and original land owner Dempsey Odom and his immediate family members are buried there.

When advised of Somerton's distinct honor, Mayor Linda T. Johnson said, "In a city that is quickly urbanizing, the Village of Somerton is a part of the rural heritage of the City and its preservation through listings on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places will help to maintain its unique place in Suffolk's history".

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