

# Toano is full of history and now the state is giving it recognition

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The Toano revitalization project, led by developer Jack Wray, has taken its next step as a historic district approved by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. (Alexa Doiron/WYDaily)

Drivers on the small section of Richmond Road leading through Toano can now look out their windows and see a recognized historic district.

“We realized that the district was going to make Toano happy,” said Jack Wray, a developer leading the revitalization project. “It’ll help make better advances as far as our Main Street revitalization. It’s a good honorary title and bring more awareness to the little village.”

The Toano Historic District was approved on Dec. 13 at a meeting of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources in Richmond, according to the department’s website. The approval means the nine buildings on 4.1 acres of land along Richmond Road will be placed on the Virginia Landmarks Register, said Randy Jones, spokesman for the department.

It also means the sites will move on to be considered by the National Parks Service as part of the National Register of Historic Places. But approval for the National Register cannot begin until the government shutdown that has already gone on for two weeks is lifted, Wray said.

Without approval from the National Register, Wray said they are at a standstill on starting revitalization work because any changes to a historic building have to be documented and submitted to the register.

As a registered historic district, property owners can be given substantial incentives such as participation in federal and state rehabilitation tax credit programs, according to the department's website. The incentives will help restore the building's to operational standards and preserve their historic nature.

But Wray said not all residents within the district have to use the tax credits.

"There are no restrictions on what a person can do to their building if they own a building in the district," Wray said. "(It's) only if they want to get tax credits do they have to comply to the department of historic preservation."

The nine buildings were all constructed between 1900 and 1926 and operated as commercial properties, such as banks, grocery stores and funeral homes, according to the district's registration form. The district represents buildings with a collection of architectural styles from Queen Anne to Italian Renaissance Revival to Colonial Revival.

"The contributing buildings grow in scale and elaboration as one travels Route 60 from Williamsburg toward Richmond, so that the smallest, least elaborate survivors stand at the district's eastern end," according to the registration form.

Many of the residents in the district expressed a desire to preserve those unique details at a meeting in November. Wray has taken 15 years to curate the buildings which represent his familial background and the local geographical history over the past century.

But until the government shutdown ends, Wray said there is no set date on when the National Register can approve the district. But he hopes it will be before work begins on the Toano Drainage Project, which is aimed to begin in the spring of 2019 and will involve construction on sections of route 60 near the district.

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