

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER/GEORGIA REGISTER NOMINATION

1. Name: Henry Alexander Hunt High School Gymnasium

2. Location: 600 Spruce Street, Fort Valley, Peach County, Georgia

3a. Description: The Henry Alexander Hunt High School Gymnasium (“Hunt Gymnasium”) is a large, 88,200 square foot, one-story building clad in brick veneer in American bond. The gymnasium was constructed in 1953 on the Henry Alexander Hunt High School campus, Peach County’s equalization school for Black students, to provide recreational space for the students and surrounding community. Relatively utilitarian in design, the Hunt Gymnasium features a slightly pitched, side gabled roof, largely rectangular massing, and minimal ornamentation, including engaged piers and a large chimney on the front (east) elevation, which was painted red in the late 1980s. The six-bay, front elevation contains the gymnasium’s two main entryways, which consist of recessed double doors covered by awnings located in the northern- and southernmost bays to accommodate the centered, interior bleachers. Historic, metal awning windows are evenly spaced across the front elevation and the remaining, unpainted elevations. The north and south elevations feature the gable ends and three tall, metal awning windows each. A centered, flat-roofed, nearly full-height wing, flanked by two, lower, flat-roofed wings projects from the rear (west) elevation, housing a stage, weight room, storage room, and library. The interior is largely composed of gymnasium space, including a large basketball court, which features historic raised, permanent, wooden bleachers on the east wall, a shellacked and painted wooden floor, and two basketball goals and electric scoreboards on either side of the court. Originally unpainted, the unfinished interior walls reveal a bond pattern of two rows of concrete masonry units alternated with one row of brick stretchers. To the east of the basketball court, the gymnasium’s original girls’ and boys’ locker rooms have been converted to meeting and storage rooms, a kitchen, and adjacent bathrooms. These spaces still retain the original red quarry tile flooring of the shower rooms and the black and white ceramic tiles of the locker rooms. The basketball court opens onto a stage to the west, which was added to the building in the late 1950s and still features the original banner reading “H.A.H” running along the top. The Hunt Gymnasium is surrounded mostly by grassy area with some foundation plantings. A public pool and pool house were built to the northwest of the gymnasium. Although the pool was filled with dirt in 2019, it’s form is still legible, and it thus remains a contributing structure.

3b. Period of Significance: 1954-1970

3c. Acreage: 1.18 acres

3d. Boundary Explanation: The boundary of the nominated property comprises the current legal boundary of the Hunt Cultural and Educational Center, which encompasses the intact historic resources associated with the Henry Alexander Hunt High School Gymnasium.

4a. National Register Criteria: A

4b. National Register Areas of Significance: Entertainment/Recreation, Ethnic Heritage- Black, Social History

4c. Statement of Significance: In 1895, a group of citizens in Fort Valley, Georgia, concerned about the lack of formal educational opportunities for Black children in Peach County (then part of Houston and Macon counties), petitioned the Superior Court of Houston County for a charter to legalize the Fort Valley High and Industrial School for Black students. The school went through several iterations, first becoming Fort Valley Normal and Industrial School in 1932 when it incorporated the education of teachers and then becoming a senior college as a unit of the University System of Georgia and State Board of Regents in 1939 renamed Fort Valley State College (now Fort Valley State University). Throughout these transitions, the high school, renamed the Henry Alexander Hunt High School to commemorate Fort Valley High and Industrial School’s second principal, continued to operate on the Fort Valley State College Campus, later moving to barracks on the campus of the Peach County Training School, the county’s Black elementary school. Following a trend in Southern states to maintain a racially segregated educational system in the 1950s and 60s after the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court Decision, the State Board of Regents in 1954 funded the construction of a new campus for the Henry Alexander Hunt High School, which continued to function as a laboratory school for student teachers from the college. This new campus included a gymnasium, which would become a focal point of the Black community in Peach County. The Henry Alexander Hunt High School Gymnasium is significant in the areas of entertainment/recreation, Black ethnic heritage, and social history as the first facility in the county that offered Black students and community an indoor space for athletic events, physical education, and other school and community activities, including basketball games, band practices and performances, dance team practices and competitions, graduation ceremonies, and a safe place for children to play on the weekends. The county’s only public swimming pool was constructed on the gymnasium property in 1966, furthering the property’s significance. The gymnasium was saved in the 1980s from demolition by a group of alumnae, led by the high school’s former principal, Henry E. Bryant and Evelyn D. McCray, who formed the Hunt Educational and Cultural Center, ensuring that the gymnasium remained a community center for future generations. While most of the Henry Alexander Hunt High School buildings have been substantially altered, the gymnasium remains remarkably intact and continues to serve as a symbol of pride for the Black community in Fort Valley.

4d. Suggested Level of Significance: The property is being nominated at the local level of significance as the first and only equalization school gymnasium in Fort Valley and Peach County.

5. Sponsor: The nomination is sponsored by the Hunt Educational and Cultural Center, Inc. (HECC), and nomination materials were prepared by HECC member Deloris Bryant-Booker and Greg Boike of the Middle Georgia Regional Commission.