

CITY GOVERNMENT, HISTORY, AND COMMUNITY ATTRACTIONS

CITY GOVERNMENT

The City of Suffolk is organized under the Council-Manager form of government as defined under the Code of Virginia. The governing body of the City is the City Council which establishes policies, sets goals and priorities, and interprets and represents the needs of the community to ensure the economic, social, educational, and physical quality of the City. The City Council consists of eight members: the Mayor elected at large and one member from each of the seven voting boroughs who are elected for four year terms by the voters of the borough in which the member resides. The City Council appoints a City Manager to act as the administrative head of the City. The City Manager directs the general operation of the city government in order to meet the needs of its constituents in accordance with the policies established by the City Council. The City Manager establishes service priorities and advises City Council members about the financial requirements needed to provide services to the community. Each fiscal year, the City Manager prepares and submits a proposed budget to the City Council, which is consistent with the identified goals and priorities of the City. The City Manager also interacts with various elements of the community, including members of the legislative delegation, the business community, civic organizations, and other government bodies.

HISTORY

The area around Suffolk, Virginia, which is now an independent city in the Hampton Roads region in the southeastern part of the state, was originally inhabited by Native Americans. At the time of European contact, the Nansemonds lived along the river later known by the same name. Suffolk was first explored by the English settlers based at Jamestown, not long after their arrival. They sought a means to survive the inhospitable environment at Jamestown Island.

The area was first part of 1634's Elizabeth River Shire and then, in 1637, part of Upper Norfolk County, part of which became Nansemond County in 1646. The English created a settlement at Constant's Wharf (named for Captain John Constant) at Sleepy Hole Point on the Nansemond River, to take advantage of commerce they could conduct along the river. In 1742, authorized by the House of Burgesses, the new town was officially named "Suffolk" after Royal Governor William Gooch's home county of Suffolk in England.



During the American Revolutionary War, the town was burned by the British in 1779. It was totally destroyed after thousands of barrels of turpentine and pitch caught fire in warehouses along the river.

Suffolk became an incorporated town in Nansemond County in 1808. As part of Virginia, it sided with the Confederacy in the American Civil War. From May 12,



1862, to July 3, 1863, the town was occupied by 25,000 Union troops under Major General John J. Peck. Peck made his headquarters in the Greek revival house now called “Riddick’s Folly”. Graffiti from the occupying soldiers can still be seen on the walls.

During this period, Confederate General James Longstreet unsuccessfully besieged the town with 20,000 men between April 11 and May 4, 1863. He was ordered to disengage by General Robert E. Lee to join the Army of Northern Virginia at Fredericksburg. Two months later on July 3, the Union forces abandoned the town for strategic reasons, as decided by General John Adams Dix. Confederate cavalry general Laurence S. Baker is buried in the City’s Cedar Hill Cemetery.



Suffolk became a city independent from the surrounding county in 1910. At a practical level, the two remained closely linked, and the county seat remained at Suffolk after the city became politically independent. Thus it remained until 1972 when the county was converted to city status to become the short-lived lost city the City of Nansemond. On January 1, 1974, the City of Nansemond and the City of Suffolk united to become the present City of Suffolk, consolidating with the outlying incorporated towns of Holland and Whaleyville. The end result was a new municipality encompassing a total of 430 square miles, making it the largest city in land area in Virginia. Suffolk celebrated its 400th anniversary in 2008.

In 1912, Italian immigrant Amedeo Obici came from Pennsylvania and opened facilities of the Planters Nut and Chocolate Company in Suffolk. He built on the widespread cultivation of peanuts in the area. By 1941, Suffolk had been declared “The Peanut Capital of the World”. The city also became home to Planters’ Mr. Peanut, a world-famous advertising icon. Today, Suffolk remains a major peanut processing center and transportation hub.

COMMUNITY ATTRACTIONS

Parks and Recreation

- Four regional parks (Bennett’s Creek, Lake Meade, Lone Star Lakes, and Sleepy Hole) are offered throughout the City with various amenities including open fields, playgrounds, shelters, skateboard spots, tennis courts, and boat ramps with access to the Nansemond River.
- Thirteen neighborhood parks are offered throughout the City with numerous amenities including basketball courts, playgrounds, and picnic areas.



Parks and Recreation

- The City offers the East Suffolk Recreation Center, which features a full size gym, multipurpose room, and fitness facility, and six joint use recreation facilities at various elementary schools throughout the City. Programming varies at each location and includes before and after school programs, summer programs, youth and adult athletic leagues, youth cheerleading, karate, open gym, and various other programs, activities, and special events.



Cultural Amenities

Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge

The Great Dismal Swamp is the largest intact remnant of a vast habitat that once covered more than one million acres of southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. The Great Dismal Swamp consists of over 112,000 acres of forested wetlands and Lake Drummond, the largest natural lake in Virginia. It is home to various animals including black bears, bobcats, river otters, rattlesnakes, and 200 species of birds. Visitors may participate in hiking, biking, nature photography, wildlife observation, hunting, fishing and boating. Trails are open year round and swamp safaris and canoe tours are available through the Suffolk Visitor Center.



Cedar Hill Cemetery

The Cedar Hill Cemetery is a 32-acre historic cemetery in downtown Suffolk located behind the Riddick's Folly House Museum and Seaboard Station Railroad Museum. The cemetery is an official site of the Virginia Civil War Trails program as it is the final resting place for many Confederate Generals and soldiers.



Suffolk Center for Cultural Arts

Suffolk High School, built in 1922, has been restored and repurposed as the premier visual and performing arts venue for Suffolk. In the heart of downtown, the classic Greek-Revival structure houses a 500 seat theatre which is the stage for concerts, ballets, musicals, dramatic works, symphony performances, films, children's plays, puppet shows and much more. The 62,880 square foot facility offers studios for dance, painting, sculpting, weaving classes and several other arts related classes. Within the massive three-story Center, there is a ballroom and banquet hall, classroom museum, gifts shop and an on-site restaurant (Mosaic by Holland's).



Riddick's Folly House Museum and Gift Shop

Riddick's Folly House Museum in downtown Suffolk is the former home of Mills Riddick and served as headquarters for the Union Army during the Civil War. This 1837 Greek Revival home is registered with the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission and the National Register of Historic Places. The museum is open to the public and features workshops in 19th century arts and crafts and various events throughout the year.



Seaboard Station Railroad Museum

The Seaboard Station Railroad Museum is the restored Main Street station, built in 1885, and displays a two-room HO-scale model of Suffolk in 1907. The museum hosts several events annually, including Thomas the Train days for kids, book signings, craft fairs, wreath sales, and holiday open houses.



The Suffolk Art Gallery

The Suffolk Art Gallery hosts a variety of exhibits and year-round programming including painting, weaving, quilting, and lectures. Annual events include The Suffolk Art League's Juried Arts Exhibition, The Student Exhibit of Excellence, Suffolk Art Gallery's Annual Juried Photography Exhibit, and the Suffolk Art League's open Member's Show.

