

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

City Motor Company

Salisbury, Rowan County, RW2240, Listed 12/7/2022

Nomination by James Maynard and Clay Griffith, RedClay Design and Acme Preservation Services, LLC

Photographs by Clay Griffith, March and July 2022



Facade, view to southeast



Oblique front view of showroom to east

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: City Motor Company

Other names/site number: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 419 South Main Street

City or town: Salisbury State: NC County: Rowan

Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

 Signature of certifying official/Title:	<u>10/25/22</u> Date
<u>North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources</u> State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

In my opinion, the property <input type="checkbox"/> meets <input type="checkbox"/> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title : State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store
COMMERCE/TRADE/business
COMMERCE/TRADE/warehouse

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE/department store
COMMERCE/TRADE/warehouse

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Moderne

OTHER/Quonset Hut

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: concrete

brick

Walls: brick

concrete block

glass

metal

Roof: membrane

metal

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Built between 1946 and 1958, City Motor Company is an automobile dealership complex in Salisbury, North Carolina, the county seat of Rowan County. The complex consists of five buildings erected for the sales and service departments of Salisbury's Ford dealership. City Motor Company occupied the 2.06-acre site at 419 South Main Street from 1946 until the mid-1980s. The irregularly shaped parcel spans the full depth of a 400-foot square city block bordered by South Main Street, East Horah Street, South Lee Street, and East Monroe Street.

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The complex consists of the main two-story brick and glass building constructed in 1946, a one-story concrete block storage building and a metal Quonset hut used for repair and storage built around the same time, between 1946 and 1949, and a one-story body shop constructed in 1954. The buildings are arranged along a northwest-southeast axis through the block from South Main Street to South Lee Street. A detached sales office was constructed around 1958 to the southwest of the main building when an adjacent parcel was acquired for an exterior sales lot and additional parking. The site is mostly flat along South Main Street but slopes gently toward East Horah and South Lee streets. Except for a small yard in front of the main building, the property has no significant landscaping since the parcel containing the dealership is either built upon or paved. The overall complex maintains a high degree of integrity.

Narrative Description

Bound on the northwest by South Main Street, the City Motor Company complex is located southwest of East Horah Street near the urban center of downtown Salisbury, North Carolina. The property is irregular in shape and is bordered on the northeast by a service station, East Horah Street, and a private residence. A second service station and residences along East Monroe Street border the property to the southwest. At the rear, single-family residences flank the parcel along South Lee Street to the southeast. A six-foot-tall chain-link fence with three strands of barbed wire surrounds the rear portion of the property and the additional lot to the southwest. The site can be accessed from three of the adjacent streets.

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Site evolution

The full 2.06-acre site containing the City Motor Company dealership consists of three groups of lots within the 400 block of South Main Street that were acquired piecemeal over a period of years from 1943 to 1972. In the early 1940s, the block bound by South Main Street on the northwest, East Horah Street to the northeast, South Lee Street to the southeast, and East Monroe Street to the southwest was primarily residential.¹ The present property consists of four 50-foot lots on the southeast side of South Main Street located in the middle of the block, with another three vacant 50-foot lots on the southwest side of East Horah Street and two 50-foot lots to the northwest side of South Lee Street.

When the owners of City Motor Company began planning for a new sales and service facility in 1943, they looked beyond Salisbury's urban center to allow for future growth. On October 19, 1943, the company purchased two separate tracts that bilaterally severed the mostly residential city block. Tract No. 1 is the central parcel containing the main building, with 115 feet of frontage on South Main Street and extending back 200 feet into the city block. Tract No. 2 backs up to Tract No.1 from South Lee Street with 50 feet of frontage. The owners purchased an adjacent parcel on September 15, 1944, to the northeast of Tract No. 2, extending the Lee Street frontage another 60 feet. These three tracts represent the original parcel occupied by the new dealership.

¹ Salisbury's street grid is rotated approximately 43 degrees from cardinal north and, as a result, Main Street generally runs northeast to southwest.

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In 1946, the owners transferred the original parcel to City Investment Company and construction began on the main sales and service building at 419 South Main Street. A narrow drive on the northeast side of the building connected South Main Street to the rear portion of the site on Lee Street. On April 7, 1955, City Investment Company purchased an adjacent parcel for the construction of an exterior car sales lot on the southwest side of the main building. The additional lot extended the South Main Street frontage 50 feet to the southwest. The company erected a small sales office around 1958 in the middle of the car lot, adjacent to the southwest parcel line.

Once more planning for future growth, City Investment Company began assembling lots on the southwest side of East Horah Street, beginning with a single parcel on November 24, 1958. Two additional lots were purchased on April 16, 1965. The three side-by-side parcels provided 164 feet of frontage on East Horah Street and connected with the dealership property at their rear. Based on aerial photos these three lots do not appear to have been cleared and paved until March 16, 1972, when a final parcel was added to the site. The final addition contained a 1920s Craftsman bungalow, which stood to the northeast of the main sales and service building. The addition gave another 60 feet of frontage on South Main Street and abutted the East Horah Street lots at its rear. The residence was demolished and the four lots assembled from 1958 to 1972 were paved and connected to the rest of the complex.

1. City Motor Company Building, 1946, 2000, 2022 – Contributing building

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The City Motor Company building, which contained the Ford dealership's showroom, sales offices, and service department, sits perpendicular to South Main Street. The two-story rectangular building features a projecting, three-sided showroom flanked by offices at the front. The building is constructed of red brick laid in five-and-one Common or American bond veneer over a steel structure with vast expanses of original blue glass on the sides. A low-pitched gable roof with flush fascia caps the building. A one-story toilet room and adjacent boiler room project on the rear.

The main sales and service building is oriented in a northwest-southeast direction with the principal façade on South Main Street. The seven bays of the bilaterally symmetrical two-story facade are primarily painted brick except for the three central showroom bays, which originally featured a full height of two-story storefront glazing for a large display space that often showcased four cars at a time. In early 2000, the showroom glazing was removed and replaced with smaller storefront windows on the ground story surrounded by stucco infill. In July 2022, the stucco panels were removed, and the full height of the open window bays were boarded over to secure the building temporarily. The original window frames were left exposed at the building corners and edges along the fascia band.

Above the formerly glazed façade bays, a tall painted corrugated metal fascia that bands the roofline and features a metal capped parapet continuing back to the main part of the building. The visual line created by this higher parapet gives an indication that the showroom itself is octagonal in plan as it connects back to the main part of the building, with a higher angled parapet completing the form as it connects to the higher back wall. On either side of the

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showroom, the adjoining bays are defined with austere two-story brick wings that would have contrasted the showroom bays. The height of these brick wings, a few feet short of the upper parapet, are also capped in metal. The fronts of the wings are identical featuring a recessed single leaf door on the ground story and rectangular steel sash window units, two panes wide by six panes tall. The recessed doors are the primary pedestrian entrances and are accented with three elongated octagonal stacked glass panels adorned by glass block sidelights curved in plan from the front wall to the door recess. The windows above are unadorned with only simple steel lintels and running bond headers with cast concrete sills. The sides of these brick wings are similar but not identical. The right side has three equally spaced windows on both stories that mirror the size and proportion of the steel sash window units on the front. The ground story windows are one row of panes shorter in height, and the window nearest the front, is only one row of panes wide. Similarly, on the side of the left brick wing the upper story has the same three equally spaced windows, however only the one smaller window toward the front is mirrored at the ground story. The remaining bays flanking the showroom and brick wings, are wider and more in proportion to the main building bays on the side. The height of these walls matches the height of the showroom portion and wrap the corners about one quarter part of the bay width back on the side. These mirrored bays are identical in form and material, and feature roll-up garage doors. The garage door on the right is original, with seven vertical rows of ten horizontally paneled intermediate sections. The door on the left side is a modern metal replacement.

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A uniform rhythm of tall, steel-sash window units fills the bays of the southwest and northeast side elevations. The nearly identical side elevations consist of eight bays defined by steel columns spaced roughly 18 feet apart. The vertical bays are subdivided into four horizontal bands with a continuous brick wall roughly 16 courses above the interior floor line serving as the base at grade level. A cast-concrete sill accents the strong horizontal lines of the elevations and the divisions of the bays become visible above the sill as delineated by the steel columns. All original frames and sashes are intact, along with nearly all the original glass, although some panes have ventilation fans spaced randomly on the side elevations. The glazed bays are subdivided in smaller panes of equal size—four window units wide and three window units tall—that form three horizontal rows. The bottom steel sash units are two panes wide and four panes tall, inclusive of a center two-over-two center pivot sash. The second horizontal row of four fixed steel sash units, two panes wide and three panes tall. The top row of four window units are two panes wide and five panes tall, with a center pivot two-over-two sash one row from the top. A continuous inverted steel angle runs the length at the top of the wall, forming a slight soffit for a roof overhang that supports an aluminum gutter. The bay nearest the front façade, has one less vertical row of windows, and instead provided with the brick wall with a higher parapet that wraps the corner of the building of equal proportion to the spacing of the window units. On the northeast elevation, near the front of the building, a metal canopy of unknown date, extends out to shelter the first and second bays, along with a single-leaf door in the second bay.

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The southeast (rear) elevation is largely devoid of fenestration, separated into two distinct halves. The northeast portion contains a tall garage door located close to the center of the building flanked by a smaller pedestrian door to the side. A one-story, flat-roof brick extension projects from the southwest portion of the rear elevation. The extension contains a restroom and the boiler room. Three original windows are present but obscured by a later metal storage shed and its contents. A segmented terra cotta coping caps the parapet along the top of the wall, obscuring the roof beyond. The brick chimney for the boiler extends a few feet above the parapet to the left. The lean-to shed addition at the rear of the building appears to have been constructed after 1995 since it is not present on the most recent survey.

Two principal pedestrian entrances from South Main Street are located on the façade, flanking the showroom projection. On both sides, a single-leaf door leads into a foyer adjacent to the showroom. The southwest entrance opens into a deep foyer and reception area that wraps around the showroom with windows overlooking and a glazed showroom entrance door. The entrance at the northeast end of the façade enters a smaller vestibule that accessed a parts department window and opens directly into the showroom. Both foyers feature plastered walls and ceilings and terrazzo floors extending beyond into the showroom. All original finishes are in good condition.

The showroom is octagonal in plan, measuring approximately 40 feet by 40 feet, and rising a full two stories. The projecting bays of the showroom originally contained two-story glazing that was replaced in 2000. The replacement stucco infill was subsequently removed in July 2022 and the full-height window bays temporarily covered with plywood. The foyer walls adjacent to

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the showroom are painted brick, but plastered walls wrap around rear of the showroom adjacent to the service area. A three-leaf door centered on the back wall of the showroom looks out into the service department. The large entry door consists of a single-leaf glazed panel door flanked on each side by single-leaf doors with porthole windows. The center single leaf operates independently, but could be swung out with the connecting panel, and all three leaves could be opened to allow the movement of vehicles between the two spaces. An original staircase located immediately to the southwest rises to the second story above the foyer. In early 2000, the original two-story interior of the showroom was divided into two separate levels with the installation of an intermediate floor supported by a steel I-beam resting on two steel columns. Thin steel trusses attached to the central I-beam formed the framework supporting a plywood floor on the upper level and an acoustical tile ceiling with fluorescent light fixtures on the lower level. In July 2022, the plywood flooring, acoustical tiles, light fixtures, and ductwork were removed as the first phase of rehabilitation on the showroom space. While the steel structural framework has yet to be removed from the space, the removal of the intermediate floor and ceiling materials has helped reestablish the interior volume of the original showroom.

On the northeast side of the showroom, an original single-leaf door opens to a service counter and the parts department. The space is partially subdivided front to back, by a bulkhead supported by pilasters on both sides. Interior walls are plastered adjacent the showroom. Painted brick and peg board sheath the walls at the service counter. A dropped modern acoustical tile ceiling extends throughout this area. An original counter wraps the

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Service Department wall with a long, glazed opening piercing the back painted masonry wall.

Another original stair leads to an upstairs level on the left, adjacent to the showroom wall.

Entering the upper-level office from the stair, a wide, open room extends the full depth of the wing. A set of modern steps, added in 2000, led to the floor above showroom, which was subsequently removed in 2022. Originally, this opening may have been glazed and overlooked the showroom below. Plaster walls are generally in good condition, but a few areas indicate where small leaks have been present. The original hardwood floor is painted and in good condition. The opposite wing, on the southwest side of the showroom, is entered from the stairs adjacent to the interior door between the showroom and service area. The elongated plan of this wing is subdivided with an office at the front, a secretarial office, storage room, and a bathroom. The walls and ceilings are plaster, in fair to poor condition.

The service department is entered through the three-leaf door centered at the rear of the showroom. Historically, vehicles entered this vast space from the southwestern corner of the building, through the original garage door mentioned earlier. A reception area was located adjacent to the door, where patrons could be greeted and drop off their cars. This space protrudes into the Service Department, and is painted brick on the lower level, and plastered walls above. The glazed panes, once looked out to the garage door entry. While the original openings are still present the glass and been boarded up with plywood.

An extension of the parts department and service counter was built into the service area on the northeast side of central door between the sales and service areas. The partition walls are covered with brick veneer, while vertical corrugated metal siding panels have been placed as a

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screen around the upper level of the addition. A single-leaf metal door with a large single light is located on the southwest side of the addition and is flanked by a square single-light window. The long service counter and window overlooking the service area appears to have been updated at some point with new double-hung sash providing connection between customers and employees. The exit door for vehicles is located beyond the service counter extension at the northwest corner of the building.

Looking out into the service department, the wide bays of the building are distinguished by deep, long span steel trusses with riveted connections. No supporting columns are present and structural metal panels supported by purlins between the trusses span the ceiling. The expansive glass walls flood the interior space with natural light. A garage door on the rear wall of the service department allowed for easy workflow with the parts storage and body shop facilities at the rear of the site. Single-leaf doors to the toilet and boiler rooms penetrate the otherwise blind brick wall on the opposite side of the space from the garage door.

2. Storage Building, ca. 1946, 1960s – Contributing building

Constructed at some point between 1946 and 1949, the one-story flat-roof storage building was erected near the middle of the City Motor Company site, along its northeastern parcel line. The utilitarian concrete block building has a four-bay façade with the northwest end bay of the building forming a canted corner. This arrangement accommodated vehicles navigating the narrow clearance between storage building and the rear northeastern corner of the main

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building. The remaining three bays of the storage building were all originally identical with roll-up garage doors, but the two bays to the southeast have been infilled with concrete block. A single-leaf eight-panel wood door in the infill wall accesses the interior of the two southeast end bays. The garage bay adjacent to the canted corner contains a modern replacement metal overhead door. A single-leaf glazed-and-paneled wooden personnel door is centered on the corner bay and surmounted by a two-course brick lintel, but the opening has been boarded over on the exterior. An original metal-frame window on the northwest end elevation consists three six-light sash where the upper four lights are operable awning-style sash. The southeast elevation adjacent to the Quonset hut on the site is blind with a brick chimney flue rising from the northeast corner of the building.

The rear (northeast) elevation most likely consisted of four identical bays, each with a single two-pane steel sash window unit positioned two brick courses below the roof edge. Sometime after the mid-1960s, when the three lots on East Horah Street were added to the property, a garage door opening was cut into the rear wall, replacing one of the interior window bays. The bay is accessed through a modern metal overhead door with plywood framing that surrounds the opening.

The interior, which was entirely open at some point, is subdivided bilaterally, from southwest to northeast, by a solid concrete block wall with no interior connection. The dividing wall was added later, as the coursing does not align with the rows on the exterior. The interior mimics the exterior in finish with concrete block walls and pilasters at each interior corner and bay. The interior has concrete floors and an exposed wood rafter ceiling.

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3. Quonset Hut, ca. 1946 – Contributing building

A one-story metal-clad Quonset hut was erected adjacent to the auto parts storage building at approximately the same time. Measuring roughly 40 feet wide and 60 feet long, the utilitarian building is clad with corrugated galvanized steel panels, which are placed horizontally on the arched end elevations and vertically over the building's curved roof. The southwest elevation, facing the interior of the lot, presents a row of windows about three feet above the exterior grade, which gradually slopes to the rear of the parcel. Appearing in groups of two or three, the windows are six-light steel sash where the lower two lights are operable. A louvered metal vent approximately four feet square is positioned at the top of the arch on both the southwest and northeast elevations. The remainder of the northeast elevation is blind.

Sandwiched between the parts storage building and the body shop, only a portion of the Quonset hut's northwest side elevation is readily visible. A shallow, shed-roof bay on the visible portion of the façade contains the entrance bay, which is accessed through double-leaf sliding metal doors carried on an overhead track. A row of four steel-sash windows to the southwest of the entrance are covered by siding panels added later. Four randomly spaced circular ventilation fan hoods protrude slightly along the ridge of the building. The southeast elevation facing the wall of the body shop is windowless.

The concave interior form is an open volume 15 bays wide and constructed of a light gauge steel framework of six-inch bent ribs with an inside radius of twenty feet. The bent ribs that

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define the interior bays are spaced four feet apart. Smaller purlins running perpendicular to the ribs are spaced about six feet apart and support the curved galvanized roof panels that form the exterior surface of the arch. The end walls are then composed with a framework of straight vertical ribs. The repetitive framing indicates the modular nature of the hut.

The Quonset hut, as a building type, was developed in 1941 as a versatile, multi-use structure produced for the United States Navy during World War II. First produced at Quonset Point in Rhode Island, the prefabricated metal buildings were developed for a wide range of applications and could be quickly assembled and disassembled in the field. Roughly 150,000-170,000 Quonset huts were produced during World War.² After the war, Quonset huts were sold as military surplus to the public. Due to the prefabricated nature of these types of structures, the building at City Motor Company was probably intended to serve its function temporarily, with plans to build a larger facility, which proved to be the case. After construction of the body shop in 1954, the Quonset hut was used to store larger car parts, like bumpers.

4. Body Shop, ca. 1954 – Contributing building

A larger, permanent body shop was constructed immediately adjacent to the Quonset hut in 1954, occupying the southeast corner of the property adjoining South Lee Street. The one-story flat-roof brick building measures roughly 60 feet by 97 feet with its long axis running

² David Goran, "Quonset Huts: A Practical Building Solution for the U.S. Navy during WWII," *The Vintage News*, October 20, 2016, <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2016/10/20/quonset-huts-a-practical-building-solution-for-the-u-s-navy-during-world-war-ii/>; accessed March 15, 2022.

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northwest to southeast. The end walls have flat parapets capped by a glazed terra cotta coping.

The northwest end elevation of the body shop is void of fenestration.

The body shop's seven-bay façade overlooks the interior of the lot to the southwest and contains a large garage bay opening at the northwest end flanked by six bays of metal-frame industrial sash windows. The garage bay is accessed through a replacement metal overhead door. The window bays are defined by brick pilasters, and a partial height brick wall almost five feet tall carries the concrete sills. The window units are composed of three tall sections with 16 lights and divided by metal mullions beneath a continuous steel header approximately 12 inches tall. Within each bay, the outer sections of the window have operable two-over-two sash located one row down from the top and one row up from the bottom, while the vertical center section has only fixed sash. A single-leaf personnel door is located within the bay adjacent to the garage opening, and the southeast end window bay has been boarded over. A continuous metal gutter, running the length of the façade, defines the roof edge, and forms a narrow soffit.

The rear (northeast) elevation nearly mirrors the façade with seven nearly identical bays but lacks any access points. Three of the window bays are boarded over, either fully or partially. The northwest end bay, which enclosed the paint booth on the interior has a ventilation fan inserted in the center of the window. Immediately southeast, the adjacent bay has a split sill with the brick base below two sections of the window rising several feet higher than the typical base wall. A two-light steel-sash window pierces this taller base section.

The southeast elevation overlooking South Lee Street consists of four equal bays of comparable window openings that have been boarded over. The brick pilasters defining the

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bays are typically 12 inches wider than the pilasters on the long southwest and northeast elevations. The window sash, however, which is visible on the interior, is similar in configuration and remains in place beneath the wood panels. A painted sign was located on the upper façade below the flat parapet.

The interior of the body shop is accessed through the single-leaf personnel door and garage bay on the façade. The interior is primarily a single open space with a concrete floor and long-span steel joists supporting the roof. The ceiling has exposed galvanized steel decking panels that span perpendicular across the joists. The spacing of the joists is narrower than the exterior bays. The walls are a mix of unpainted clay masonry units with hollow terra cotta blocks under the sills and along the southeast wall of the paint booth. Solid brick is used for the pilasters and where structural load-bearing applications required the use of denser masonry units. A paint booth occupies the northwest corner of the interior opposite the exterior garage entrance. The booth is enclosed by concrete block walls and a glazed-and-paneled roll-up garage door, which appears to be original. A small toilet room occupies a corner adjacent to the paint booth, which is depicted by the raised brick wall section on the rear elevation. A small office near the personnel door was formed by thin partition walls that rise approximately eight feet.

5. Sales Office, ca. 1958 – Contributing building

A small sales office, roughly 20 feet by 20 feet, sits adjacent to the property line on the southwest side of the main building and is surrounded by a fenced and paved parking lot. The

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building appears to have been constructed around 1958, after a side lot, 50 feet wide by 200 feet deep, was acquired in 1955 (DB 388:399). Resting on a concrete slab foundation, the diminutive Modernist building features a full-height glass façade that wraps around the northeast corner of the building to a single-leaf glazed entry door. The remaining side and rear walls are brick veneer with a brick wall panel rising above the flat roof at the northwest corner of the building. A deep roof overhang cantilevers beyond the façade and northeast elevations, sheltering a concrete sidewalk that roughly mirrors the depth of the overhang. The roof and enclosed overhang are supported by a wood header, roughly 12 inches deep, in line with the aluminum-frame glass walls; the header transitions to a frieze board approximately midway across the northeast elevation. A single-leaf door and transom are centered on the northeast elevation with a glazed bay to one side, carrying the transparency of the façade around the northeast corner, and a wall of running bond brick below the frieze board on the other side contrasts the transparency of the building's front. The southeast elevation is punctuated by three equally spaced transom openings, and the southwest elevation is blind. The interior of the structure is entirely open, except for a small room added at the southwest corner with light partition wall framing and T-111 sheathing.

Integrity Statement

The City Motor Company generally retains a high degree of historic integrity as a mid-twentieth century automobile dealership in Salisbury, North Carolina. The property consists of the sales, service, and storage buildings erected to fulfil its function as a modern Ford franchise

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dealership from the 1940s through the 1950s, when the Ford Motor Company entered a period of renewed success with the production and marketing of popular automobiles in the wake of World War II. Site development through the 1960s and 1970s has enlarged the amount of paved surface lots on the property, but the location, setting, and feeling of the dealership in a transitional residential and commercial area on South Main Street just beyond Salisbury's central business district remains largely intact.

The principal building on the site, designed by architect Hall Crews and built in 1946, retains much of its Modernist-influenced design, materials, and workmanship despite specific alterations to its signature showroom space. In 2000, the tall showroom windows were removed from the exterior and replaced with smaller storefront windows and stucco infill panels. Moreover, an intermediate floor and dropped ceiling were installed at the mezzanine level on the interior. The replacement windows and wall panels did not alter the plan and massing of the showroom but were installed within the existing steel framing system as the original showroom windows. The insertion of the intermediate floor and dropped ceiling reduced the height of the showroom interior without permanently altering the original spatial envelope. In July 2022, the window bays were reopened with the removal of the stucco infill, and the intermediate floor and dropped ceiling on the interior were removed to reestablish the full height of the showroom space. Removal of the replacement materials has pared down the showroom to its original structural system, exterior form, and interior volume. The full-height window openings are temporarily boarded over to secure the building and will be replaced with an appropriate full-height window system as part of a proposed adaptive reuse of the property.

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The ancillary sales and service buildings located on the site, erected between 1946 and 1958, embody efficient, functional, and fire-resistant commercial construction. The structures display few alterations, many of which are reversable, and no significant changes to their character defining materials and structural systems. Overall, the property retains sufficient physical and associative integrity to be eligible for the National Register.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture
Commerce/Trade

Period of Significance

1946-1958

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Hall Crews, architect – 1946
John Hartledge, architect – 1947-1958
Bradshaw & Sons, builder

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Built in 1946, the City Motor Company in Salisbury, North Carolina, is locally significant and meets National Register criteria A and C for commerce and architecture. City Motor Company is a well-preserved automobile dealership complex situated on the edge of downtown and reflects the proliferation of automobile ownership and cultural influence following World War II. Designed by Winston-Salem architect Hall Crews, the two-story brick, steel, and glass building has a projecting Modernist style showroom and industrial rear service area along with four ancillary buildings for sales, body work, and storage. City Motor Company, a Ford dealership since 1940, erected the building with a projecting polygonal showroom to display new car models and attract potential customers. Influenced by Modernist design, the building features its glazed showroom, pedestrian entrances framed by curved glass block walls, commodious vehicular entrances, the Ford Motor Company's blue and gray color scheme, and an expansive service department housed in an airy, glass-enclosed volume at the rear. The dealership incorporated the automobile industry's progressive ideas for sales, service, and marketing, guided by reinvigorated corporate strategies and innovations that helped the Ford Motor Company regain primacy in the post-war period. City Motor Company stands as one of the most intact and modern automobile dealerships in Salisbury from an era closely associated with the expansion of car culture in the United States.

The period of significance begins with the construction of the first buildings on the site in 1946 and ends in 1958 with the completion of the exterior sales office. The construction and

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expansion of the complex from 1946 to 1958 coincides with a period of corporate resurgence for the Ford Motor Company in the post-war period. The dealership continued to operate at this location until 1987, when the business and buildings were sold. Additional parcels acquired between 1958 and 1972 enlarged the original site to its present 2.06-acre dimensions. The additional area was paved in the 1970s and does not contribute to the significance of the property as a good example of a mid-century automobile dealership.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Historical Background and Automobile Sales Context

Salisbury, the county seat of Rowan, dates from 1753 and has been from its early days a local and regional center of trade and commerce. Situated between the Yadkin and Catawba rivers, the town served as a gateway to the western part of the state, a position reinforced in the 1850s with the arrival of the North Carolina Railroad (NCRR), which connected Piedmont towns between Raleigh and Charlotte. Salisbury subsequently became the eastern terminus of the Western North Carolina Railroad (WNCRR), begun in 1857 and not completed until the 1890s. The railroad shops in Spencer, a suburb to the north of Salisbury, provided employment along with cotton mills, roller mills, stone quarries, and some furniture manufacturing.³

³ Catherine W. Bishir and Michael T. Southern, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Piedmont North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 423-424.

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As Salisbury was eclipsed by Charlotte as a railroad hub in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the construction of public highways and roads became important to the town's economic progress. An automobile club formed in Salisbury in 1901, although it was largely a social organization at the outset. Over time, as the number of automobiles increased, club members began to advocate for road improvements and undertook projects to aid motorists such as placing street signs around town. Following the Highway Act of 1921, the State Highway Commission assumed control and maintenance of more than 100 miles of roads in Rowan County, including a newly completed major east-west highway (present US 70). The authorization of the federal interstate highway system in the 1950s led to the creation of Interstate 85 through Rowan County, constructed between 1966 and 1969.⁴

The production and sales of automobiles achieved phenomenal growth in the first decades of the twentieth century and effectively transformed the nation over the next century. Experimentation with mechanically powered individual vehicles began in the late nineteenth century and continued to develop to the point where there were four registered automobiles in the United States in 1895. By 1900, however, more than 4,000 cars were manufactured by dozens of different automakers. Growth was exponential and the task of selling automobiles was open to enterprising individuals, who soon became an industry unto themselves. In 1905, cars began to be sold on the installment plan and organizations to represent dealers and service garages were formed. The National Automobile Dealers Association (NADA) formed in 1917

⁴ James S. Brawley, *Rowan County: A Brief History* (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1974), 129-131.

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from these earlier groups and came to represent dealerships across the nation, which numbered 15,000 at the time.⁵

Henry Ford (1863-1947), founder of the Ford Motor Company, oversaw significant advancements in the production of automobiles that contributed to their pervasiveness in the twentieth century. Ford's development of assembly line production transformed the process of building cars and substantially reduced the amount of time needed to produce completed automobiles. As production increased, prices came down, and the Model T, the first truly mass-produced car, leapt in popularity as it became affordable to the masses. Ford further improved mass production through the use of standardized parts, larger manufacturing plants, and integrated moving assembly lines. In 1914, Ford significantly increased daily pay for his workers, which not only helped the company retain employees but also elevated its workers into the consumer class.⁶

Another Ford innovation was the development of franchise dealerships. William "Billy" Hughson of San Francisco, through a chance meeting with Henry Ford, opened the first official Ford dealership, purchasing 12 automobiles to sell. Hughson's business soared following the devastating earthquake of 1906, and Ford granted Hughson the entire west coast territory as part his franchise, which ultimately grew to include more than 120 dealerships.⁷ Becoming an

⁵ Robert Genat, *The American Car Dealership* (Osceola, WI: MBI Publishing Company, 1999), 17.

⁶ Ross Banham, *The Ford Century: Ford Motor Company and the Innovations that Shaped the World* (San Diego, CA: Tehabi Books, 2002), 37-42 and 240-242; Amy Krigman, "History of the Ford Dealership in America," *Car Life Nation*, January 13, 2018, <https://carlifenation.com/history-of-the-ford-dealership-in-america/>; accessed March 15, 2022.

⁷ Genat, 20-21; Ford Motor Company, *The Ford Dealer Story 1903-1953* (Dearborn, MI: Ford Division, Ford Motor Company, 1953), 4-9 (hereinafter cited as *Ford Dealer Story*).

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authorized dealer required entering into an agreement with the automaker to sell their cars, stock spare parts, offer service repairs, possess a suitable sales and service facility, and display official signage. In the 1910s, Ford contracts required dealers to always keep at least one new model car on hand and maintain a parts inventory of at least \$20,000. The money paid by dealers to the Ford Motor Company for cars and parts helped keep the automaker flush with capital in the early years.⁸ As one Midwestern Ford dealer remarked, “People who talk about progress always credit mass production of cars, Ford’s great contribution to this century. They seldom realize that mass production would be impossible without mass sales.”⁹

The growth of automobile ownership and associated businesses in Salisbury followed national trends in the twentieth century. The introduction of the first automobiles was almost immediately followed by a need for auto garages and repair shops to fix and maintain the new technology. Bicycle dealers were among the first mechanics because of the similar drive system shared by bicycles and early automobiles. Blacksmith and machine shops also evolved as repair garages due to their size and ability to service metal frames and auto body parts. Based on their familiarity working with the new vehicles, these businesses frequently became early dealers for automakers.¹⁰ The 1907 city directory for Salisbury lists only one automobile dealer, Charles Arey, who was also one of two bicycle dealers in town. Arey owned a hardware store on South Main Street that sold sporting goods, firearms, fishing tackle, cutlery, tools, and gasoline

⁸ Genat, 18-20; Douglas Brinkley, *Wheels for the World: Henry Ford, His Company, and a Century of Progress* (New York: Viking, 2003), 76-79.

⁹ *Ford Dealer Story*, 104.

¹⁰ Genat, 39.

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engines.¹¹ Eugene Thompson, manager of Eugene Machine Works, which sold 'Jack Rabbit' engines, claimed to specialize in automobile repairs.¹²

By 1920, the number of automobile dealers in Salisbury had grown to seven, with an eighth, Rowan Motor Company, operating in Spencer. Salisbury's early dealerships included the McCanless Motor Company, doing business in a former livery stable at 118 E. Council Street, and the Salisbury Motor Company, owned by Harold A. Rouzer. In addition to his auto dealership on West Fisher Street, Rouzer operated a service garage on West Innes Street, served as president of the Chamber of Commerce, and was treasurer and general manager of the Rowan Hardware and Machinery Company. Eugene Thompson became a dealer for Overland and managed Thompson's Garage at the corner of Fisher and Lee streets. Holshouser Bros. operated on East Liberty Street as blacksmiths, carriage and wagon builders, and automobile painters. Arnold Kirk owned City Automobile Station across from the railroad depot where he offered autos, auto supplies, repairs, and cars for hire. Associated businesses included tire sales, batteries, painting, and body work. The Pilot Insurance and Realty Company was one of several companies offering automobile insurance in 1920.¹³

To house the scale and type of production envisioned by Henry Ford, the Ford Motor Company turned to Detroit architect Albert Kahn (1869-1942) to design manufacturing plants that would accommodate new technologies and the easy flow of materials and products

¹¹ Ernest H. Miller, ed., *Salisbury-Spencer, N.C., City Directory, 1907-1908* (Asheville, NC: Piedmont Directory Co., Inc., 1907), 19 and 292.

¹² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³ Ernest H. Miller, ed., *Salisbury-Spencer, N.C., City Directory, 1919-1920* (Asheville, NC: Piedmont Directory Co., Inc., 1920), 105, 166, 214-215, 225, and 305-306.

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throughout the space. Kahn, a German immigrant who began experimenting with reinforced concrete framing at plants for automakers Packard and Pierce Arrow, used gridded concrete frames and steel truss roof systems to enclose large, open spaces and allow for flexible expansion. Kahn introduced the use of steel sash windows to illuminate the voluminous interiors. Kahn designed Ford's massive manufacturing plant at Highland Park, organized around a four-story factory that opened in 1910. The multi-story plan proved to be less efficient than expected for moving assembly line production and led to the creation of a new facility at River Rouge in Dearborn, Michigan. Kahn designed a series of one-story interconnected manufacturing buildings between 1917 and 1928 on a 2,000-acre site along the river that produced nearly every component used in Ford vehicles. The two plants at Highland Park and Dearborn employed tens of thousands of workers and became indelibly linked with Ford automobiles and the Ford brand.¹⁴

The successful application of Henry Ford's production innovations led to the tremendous growth of the company and widespread acceptance of the automobile. The price of a Model T, Ford's most popular automobile, continued to drop as Ford streamlined its production process. After producing 82,000 Model Ts in 1912, the company's production increased to more than 189,000 vehicles in 1913, which was more than all other manufacturers combined.¹⁵ The company produced more than 585,000 cars in 1916 and passed 700,000 the following year. By

¹⁴ "Albert Kahn, 1869-1942," Michigan Modern, <http://www.michiganmodern.org/designers/albert-kahn>; accessed March 14, 2022; Steven Watts, *The People's Tycoon: Henry Ford and the American Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 137-138; Ralph J. Christian, "Highland Park Ford Plant" National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, TN, 1977; Ralph J. Christian, "Ford River Rogue Complex" National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, TN, 1977.

¹⁵ Watts, 135.

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the mid-1920s, after nearly two decades of industry dominance, more than half of all automobiles on the road were Model Ts. The Model T was so prevalent Ford advertised it as “the Universal Car.”¹⁶

The Ford Motor Company established a presence in North Carolina beginning as early as the 1910s. The company built a number of factory stores and branch assembly plants for constructing and selling the Model T in select cities across the country, including Charlotte. With Kahn engaged on the major Detroit plants, the company engaged Seattle architect John Graham to design the Model T assembly plants. Ford first erected a service office and parts center at 222 N. Tryon Street in 1914, which was soon converted to an assembly plant to keep up with demand. The company built a second four-story plant at 210 E. Sixth Street in 1916 (both locations no longer standing).¹⁷ Harold Rouzer, who started as a mechanic, was Salisbury’s Ford dealer, selling Ford, Lincoln, and Fordson vehicles through the Rouzer Motor Company formed in 1921. Rouzer sold Buicks through the Salisbury Motor Company, which he also owned. Rouzer erected a three-story building at corner of North Main and Liberty streets to house his Ford dealership. In the manner of Ford company buildings, the front block had a brick exterior, large storefront windows and transoms, one-over-one double-hung windows on the upper stories, decorative parapet with a central medallion, bracketed cast stone cornice, and decorative cast stone accents. The Liberty Street elevation containing the service

¹⁶ Banham, 37-39; Mark S. Foster, *A Nation on Wheels: The Automobile Culture in America Since 1945* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2003), 8-11.

¹⁷ RK Motors, “The Houses that T Built (and that Built the T),” RK Motors, December 13, 2018, <https://www.rkmotors.com/blog/T-built-houses>, accessed March 16, 2022; Kendra Waters, “Ford Motor Company Assembly Plant” Charlotte-Mecklenburg County Local Landmark Designation Report, MacRostie Historic Advisors, Washington, DC, August 16, 2019.

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department included seven bays of concrete frame structure with infill panels of brick and multi-light metal-frame industrial sash windows.¹⁸

The number of dealerships throughout the state continued to grow in the 1920s. Salisbury claimed 12 automobile dealers in the mid-1920s, while more than two dozen dealers were operating in Greensboro and more than 40 in Charlotte.¹⁹ Charles C. Coddington of Charlotte became one of the state's top promoters of the automobile industry and an influential dealer representing Buick in both North and South Carolina. Coddington, who served as president of the NADA, hired Albert Kahn to design a new headquarters for his dealership, which surpassed \$6,000,000 in annual sales. Completed in 1925, the five-story building contained 125,000 square feet of space including an accessible sixth floor on the roof for automobile testing. The edifice was built of reinforced concrete and finished with granite and Bedford stone with tan brick panels.²⁰ During the same period, Kahn designed a new assembly plant for Ford located two miles north of Charlotte. Built between 1924 and 1925, the \$1.25 million Ford Motor Company Assembly Plant was a massive one-story brick and steel facility with a spacious showroom and offices, as well as an assembly line and factory operations. The plant came

¹⁸ Rouzer transferred the Buick dealership to Don Clement Sr. in the early 1920s but retained the Ford dealership into the early 1930s. It appears that Rouzer sold the Ford business to Burl Hedrick in the 1930s and organized the Rouzer Motor Parts Company in 1934. Burl Hedrick served as president of the Hedrick Auto Company, with A. D. Dorsett as its general manager. (From city directories and Sanborn maps.)

¹⁹ Ernest H. Miller, ed., *Salisbury-Spencer, N.C. City Directory, 1924-1925* (Asheville, NC: Commercial Service Co., 1924), 343; Hill Directory Co., *Greensboro (N.C.) City Directory 1920* (Greensboro, NC: Hill Directory Co., 1920), 70-71; Miller, *Charlotte, North Carolina, City Directory 1921* (Asheville, NC: Commercial Service Co., 1921), 714-715.

²⁰ "New Brick Building Here Is Among Finest of the Section," *The Charlotte Observer*, August, 1925, 4; "Hundreds of Millions in Automobile Sales Annually," *The Charlotte Observer*, March 13, 1927, 1; "C.C. Coddington's Death Closes Colorful Career," *The Charlotte Observer*, December 4, 1928, 1.

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online around the time sales for the Model T began to slow and Ford entered a lengthy slump lasting until the 1940s.²¹

On August 1, 1940, Salisbury businessmen A. D. Dorsett Sr., J. P. Mattox, Walter H. Woodson, and W. M. Elliott entered into a sales agreement with the Ford Motor Company to represent the automaker locally. Doing business as City Motor Company, the new enterprise was housed in the three-story building erected by the Rouzer Motor Company in 1921 on North Main Street, on the northeast corner of the block containing the Rowan County courthouse.²² The timing for the dealership was auspicious with the Ford brand lagging behind General Motors and Chrysler in sales and looming military conflict in Europe.

The Ford Motor Company suffered from a lack of innovation and leadership during the 1930s that caused the business to lose money through stagnation and inefficiency.²³ As World War II got under way, Ford temporarily stopped producing cars for civilians and focused its attention and resources instead on jeeps, aircraft engines, tanks, transport gliders other products valuable to the war effort. The company's wartime motto, "Full Production for Victory," reflected its position as the first automaker to offer the full capacity of its manufacturing capabilities to the United States government, for which the company received over \$4.5 billion in contracts for its efforts during the war.²⁴

²¹ Waters, n.p.; Thomas W. Hanchett, "Kahn, Albert (1869-1942)," North Carolina Architects & Builders, 2017, <https://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000623>, accessed March 21, 2022.

²² Ford Motor Company sales agreement, August 1, 1940. Copy in the possession of the owners.

²³ Foster, 44-46; *Ford Dealer Story*, 95-99.

²⁴ Ford Motor Company, *Forty Years 1903-1943* (Dearborn, MI: Ford Motor Company, 1943), 39-43 (hereinafter cited as *Forty Years*).

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While the auto manufacturers converted to military production during World War II, local dealerships subsisted on repair services and selling used cars in the absence of new models rolling out of Detroit in the early 1940s. City Motor Company contributed to the war effort by helping to sponsor an ordnance company composed of 165 men from within the industry. The War Department assigned the 811th Depot Company to the North Carolina Automobile Dealers Association, who presented applicants for interviews with ordnance officers and the selected individuals became members of the enlisted reserve corps until called for duty.²⁵ Two local Salisbury boys and best friends—J. C. Ritchie and A. D. Dorsett Jr.—left to serve during World War II. John Calvin Ritchie (b. 1925), the youngest of seven children, graduated from Boyden High School in Salisbury and became a pilot and an officer in the U.S. Air Force. A. D. Dorsett Jr. (1922-1995), son of City Motor Company manager A. D. Dorsett, served in the U.S. Army Air Transport Command. The two friends became brothers-in-law when Ritchie married Dorsett's sister, Sybil Martha Dorsett, in 1944.²⁶

Coming out of the war, automakers like Ford, which had converted its plants to military production, needed to retool and return to building automobiles. The Ford Motor Company produced its first post-war civilian passenger car in July 1945, only five days after it built its last Liberator bomber. Henry Ford II replaced his grandfather as president of the company in September and reorganized the management with energetic young men fresh out of military service. Henry Ford II hired former War Department statistician Charles B. "Tex" Thornton to

²⁵ "Men! Here's Opportunity!" *The Charlotte Observer*, November 1, 1942, 6.

²⁶ John Calvin (J.C.) Ritchie, interview with Lisa Pope, August 20, 2020; "Ritchie-Dorsett Vows Are Spoken," *The Charlotte Observer*, July 9, 1944, 8.

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help lead the company's rebirth, and Thornton, in turn, recruited a number of young officers to modernize Ford's managerial systems, everything from accounting to design. The "Whiz Kids," as Ford's new senior managers became known, brought about a swift recovery that saw Ford introduce new model cars and more than double sales at the end of the decade. By 1950, Ford surged to the number two position among automakers, selling more than 1,000,000 cars.²⁷

When Ritchie and Dorsett returned home to Salisbury following the war, the United States was in better economic condition than any other country in the world and automobiles had become a necessity rather than a luxury. The City Motor Company embraced the hopeful outlook by hiring Winston-Salem architect Hall Crews to design a new dealership complex several blocks south of central Salisbury. Although the block where the new facility was built was primarily residential, two filling stations were located at the two South Main Street corners flanking the dealership. Local contractors and building material suppliers L. S. Bradshaw and Sons constructed the new complex for City Motor Company. The new building aided in creating greater exposure and visibility, along with ample space to conduct sales and service for the rejuvenated brand. Crews' design drew upon the concepts of modern merchandizing and emphasized the showroom by placing it within a projecting octagonal space at the front of the building, effectively creating a three-sided façade with large windows to display new model cars and attract customers. Ford promoted the idea of constantly improving its facilities as essential

²⁷ Foster, 49-50; *Ford Dealer Story*, 105-107; Booton Herndon, *Ford: An Unconventional Biography of the Men and Their Times* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969), 212-218.

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in the modern economy and pushed for the contemporary dealership to be a light and airy showplace.²⁸

The owners of City Motor Company recruited Ritchie and Dorsett to work for the dealership. Dorsett attended the newly formed Ford Merchandising School in 1947 to learn the latest automotive merchandising methods. The five-week course covered the history and present organization of the company, along with instruction in advertising, public relations, business management controls, dealer accounting procedures, financing, and more. Dorsett was one of 33 men in the Merchandising School's first graduating class.²⁹ Dorsett and Ritchie eventually became business partners as General Manager and Assistant General Manager at City Motor Company.

In the post-war era, with the end of rationing and an accumulation of wartime savings, Americans had a pent-up demand for new automobiles that resulted in record numbers of cars being produced and sold. According to J. C. Ritchie, there was a backlog of citizens wanting cars after the war. The City Motor Company's owners maintained a "waiting list" of citizens, especially doctors and salesmen, who were often given top priority because of their all-important "house calls" and travel.³⁰ The growth of the suburbs, extensive advertising, easy credit, and cheap gasoline led to an automobile-buying boom. By 1950 there were almost 40 million cars on the road—a 40 percent increase from 1941. Three out of five families now

²⁸ *Ford Dealer Story*, 99 and 102-103

²⁹ Ford Merchandizing School, *Forum*, No. 7052-6-47, 12.

³⁰ Ritchie interview.

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owned or were looking to buy a car.³¹ Rowan County's population exceeded 75,000 in 1950 as birthrates increased.³² New industries opened in the county and brought new jobs. The rapidly growing number of automobile registrations spurred the federal government and state highway departments to construct roads. Between 1937 and 1974, \$58 million in federal and state funds was spent for road construction and maintenance within Rowan County, both municipal and rural.³³

The opening of a Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital in 1953 provided a major economic boost for Salisbury and Rowan County. President Franklin D. Roosevelt formally approved the new VA medical center in Salisbury in 1945, but work did not begin until 1950. By 1951, the hospital was under construction on 155 acres with 18 buildings connected by underground tunnels. The construction project employed 1,000 workmen, and local businesses benefitted from its impact.³⁴ J. C. Ritchie stated that the hospital, maintenance, and associated medical services were good year-round jobs, rather than just seasonal work. The steady incomes provided by these jobs made a significant impact on local citizens and automotive sales during this time.³⁵

The unprecedented growth of the automobile industry in the 1940s and 1950s saw the three major automakers—Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler—claim a greater share of the

³¹ Kim Kenney, "History of 1950s Cars," It Still Runs, www.itstillruns.com/history-cars-5039048.html, accessed March 14, 2022.

³² Katherine Sanford Petrucelli, *The Heritage of Rowan County, North Carolina*, Vol. 1 (Salisbury, NC: Genealogical Society of Rowan County, 1991), 27.

³³ J. F. Hurley, ed., Religion/Hospital Section, The Salisbury Evening Post Bicentennial Edition 1776-1976, *The Salisbury Post*, April 29, 1975, 3R

³⁴ Hurley, 3R.

³⁵ John Calvin (J.C.) Ritchie, interviews with Lisa Pope, August 20 and September 23, 2020.

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market and push innovations in automobile design and technology. Americans wanted big, stylish cars and automakers responded with powerful V-8 engines, three-tone paint schemes, extensive chrome accents, tail fins, and streamlined designs that tapped into a collective interest in rockets and space travel. In 1947, the NADA had 32,000 members, and the design of dealerships reflected the new car designs—bigger, more stylish, and more modern. Suburban dealership locations began to gain favor and offered more room for display, service, and storage. Brightly lit signs, large glass showrooms, modern materials, and sleek designs worked to attract customers and provide a suitable space for promotional activities and revealing the latest models. During this period, Ford introduced the popular 1949 Ford, the first-generation F-series trucks, and the Thunderbird. It began producing convertible models of its popular cars. Lincoln, Ford's luxury nameplate, introduced the Cosmopolitan to complement the Continental.³⁶ The new models helped cast aside Ford's stolid image with stylish cars and powerful trucks.³⁷

The resurgence of the Ford Motor Company continued steadily into the mid-1950s when it suffered a significant misstep. In 1955, Henry Ford II announced plans for a new line of cars—the Edsel—with bold styling and state-of-the-art engineering. To market the new car line, Ford offered exclusive dealership opportunities and supplied successful applicants with management, marketing, and merchandising ideas, as well as a 35-page book dedicated to setting up and decorating a dealership. Despite its extensive preparations and promotions, Ford's rollout of the Edsel was an unmitigated flop, barely selling 110,000 cars through three

³⁶ Genat, 25-29 and 44-57; Foster, 69-73; Herndon, 219-221.

³⁷ Brinkley, 562-579.

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years of production.³⁸ During the same period, the Ford Motor Company became a publicly traded company, with Henry Ford II stepping down as a president in 1960. Congress passed a truth-in-advertising law in 1958 that led to the introduction of the Monroney label, a price sticker affixed by manufacturers to circumvent some of the deceptive pricing practices employed by auto dealers.³⁹

J. C. Ritchie retired from City Motor Company in 1987 because the Ford Motor Company required that dealerships relocate from downtown locations to areas outside the city closer to interstate traffic. The signature Ford sign that towered over the building was a patented product provided by the automaker to its franchise operations. Ford Motor Company removed the sign when the downtown franchise closed. As new Ford franchises were established and built near the interstates, Ford required the dealers to use standardized blueprints provided by the company. The consistency and familiarity achieved through the standardized appearance and functionality across its network promoted brand recognition and helped reinforce Ford's legacy in the nation's automobile history.

Architectural Context

The City Motor Company Building followed the nationwide trend of new dealership construction and expansion immediately following World War II. With pent up demand for new cars and a strong economic forecast, automobile manufacturers and dealers felt confident

³⁸ Genat, 30-37; Foster, 74-75; Banham, 114-115; Brinkley, 576-579.

³⁹ Genat, 34; Banham, 115.

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building new facilities to market, sell, and service the latest makes and models. In 1946, the owners of City Motor Company turned to architect D. Hall Crews (1895-1966) of Winston-Salem to design their new showroom and service facility. A Forsyth County native, Crews joined his father's contracting business and at a young age assumed designed responsibilities, advertising himself as an architect as early as 1911. He studied at Columbia University in New York for a year and worked in Athens, Georgia, before re-establishing a practice in Winston-Salem. Crews worked extensively on commercial, industrial, and educational buildings, and won the North Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Architects Honor Award in 1931 for the Ardmore Elementary School in Winston-Salem. He designed schools in other counties, as well as libraries for the Ford Motor Company at their plants in Highland Park and Dearborn, Michigan.⁴⁰ Prior to designing the City Motor Company building, Crews completed designs for the Auto Spring Company in Charlotte, which opened a new facility at 2401 W. Morehead Street in June 1945. The two-story, 15,000-square-foot brick building features three garage bay entrances on the façade and broad areas of multi-light industrial sash windows to illuminate the interior. The Auto Spring Company serviced heavy-duty truck and bus springs, brakes, and frames.⁴¹

Following his work for the City Motor Company, Crews designed a notable International style showroom for Modern Chevrolet at 800 W. Fourth Street in Winston-Salem. For the two-story block at the front of the building, erected in 1947, Crews specified porcelain-enameled-steel panels for the curved corners of the façade, an aluminum-frame glass curtain wall for the

⁴⁰ Heather Fearnbach, *Winston-Salem's Architectural Heritage* (Winston-Salem, NC: Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission, 2015), 653; "D. Hall Crews Architect to Open Office Monday," *Twin-City Sentinel*, December 9, 1911, 7.

⁴¹ "Auto Spring Housed in New Structure," *The Charlotte Observer*, June 26, 1945, 5.

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first-story showroom, and a continuous horizontal band of windows and glass block across the upper story of the façade. A projecting marquee and vertical sign tower advertised the dealership name and brand affiliation. The walls of the one-story service wing at the rear of the building were composed extensively of metal-frame industrial sash windows. The dealership eventually outgrew its location and moved to a new suburban site in 2004; the Crews-designed building was demolished in 2005.⁴²

In the late 1940s, Salisbury claimed more than 15 automobile dealerships for both new and used cars. Many of the dealerships were well established with showrooms and service garages located downtown. The majority of Salisbury's dealerships in business in the 1940s operated from buildings erected before 1930.⁴³ The McCanless Motor Company opened a showroom in 1917 at 118 E. Council Street in a one-story brick building constructed in 1902 as a livery stable. The façade of the long building features a heavily corbelled brick cornice and segmentally arched central entrance bay flanked by single windows on either side. McCanless sold Dodge and Plymouth cars and Dodge trucks until 1980, when the owners retired. The Council Street building was rehabilitated for offices in 1996.⁴⁴

The one-story brick commercial building with three storefronts at 130-132 E. Innes Street was constructed around 1919 and served a number of different automobile dealers. The Motor

⁴² Fearnbach, 133; "Our History," Modern Automotive, <https://sites.hireology.com/modernautomotive/about.html>; March 12, 2022.

⁴³ A number of these resources have been demolished in recent years including the A. C. Menius Motor Company at N. Main and E. Liberty streets, Oakes Motor Company at 212-214 E. Fisher Street, Haynes Motor Company at 204 W. Innes Street, and Standard Motor Company, a used car dealer, at 126 E. Fisher Street.

⁴⁴ Laura A. W. Phillips and Langdon Opperman, "Salisbury Historic District (Boundary Amendment and Additional Documentation)" National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, L&L Associates, Winston-Salem, NC, 1999, 4-5.

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Sales and Service Company appears to have been the first of several dealers to occupy the building before the Salisbury Motor Company operated here during the 1930s. In 1941, a fire destroyed much of the building, which was later rebuilt and used by grocery businesses for the next several decades. Later remodeled for offices, the building has been recently rehabilitated for apartments.⁴⁵

Two of the earliest buildings erected specifically as auto dealerships are located at 211 and 215 E. Innes Street. The structure at 215 E. Innes Street was built for M-Y Autos around 1927, which sold Hudson, Essex, and Packard automobiles. The one-story brick commercial building features a three-part façade with two storefronts and a garage bay opening that accessed the service areas at the rear. The relatively plain façade has a flat parapet of rowlock course brick, soldier course window openings, and decorative bricks in the upper façade arranged in diamonds, squares, and panel borders. In 1935, Crescent Motor Company acquired the building and opened a Pontiac dealership. Owner O. C. Godfrey and general manager Clyde H. Harris, Godfrey's son-in-law, added an auto financing department and sold used cars from the lot on the southeast side of the building. Crescent Motors remained at this location through the 1950s.⁴⁶

The Foil Motor Company occupied the handsome one-story brick building at 211 E. Innes Street, beginning around 1928. Built with concrete floors and a steel roof trusses, the building has a three-part façade with a stepped parapet, name panel in the upper façade, and concrete

⁴⁵ Ibid., 12-13; Samuel Motley, "High-End Apartments To Come To Salisbury's City Center," *The Salisbury Post*, June 23, 2019, <https://www.salisburypost.com/2019/06/23/high-end-apartments-to-come-to-salisburys-city-center/>; accessed March 9, 2022.

⁴⁶ Phillips and Opperman, 20.

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accents. The two storefronts have large two-pane display windows topped by luxor prism transoms, and the garage entrance in third bay provides access to the service area at the rear. Ernest L. Foil opened a Nash dealership in the mid-1920s only a year or two before erecting this showroom. Foil later became Salisbury's Chrysler dealer and operated here until 1974. After closing Foil Motor Company, three of Foil's associates formed an auto parts business that occupied the building until 1993.⁴⁷

Charles F. and Beulah Raney, owners of the Raney Motor Company, purchased a lot on South Main Street in 1926 for the construction of Chevrolet dealership (DB 189:19). The two-story brick commercial building at 531 S. Main Street has a five-bay façade, which continues for another two bays on the southwest side elevation, with three storefront bays separated by narrow entrance bays. Vertical pilasters define the corners and entrance bays and contrast with the large window groups on both stories and glass block transoms above the storefronts. The southwest side elevation also displays large metal-frame industrial sash windows, a garage bay entrance, and one-story garage wing at the rear. The building continued as a Chevrolet dealership until 1987, when the property was sold to the Rufty family (DB 635:69). The building has since been remodeled and converted for use by a wholesale plumbing supply company.

A wave of new construction immediately followed World War II as dealerships built or expanded showrooms and service centers in Salisbury. McCanless Motor Company enlarged its property by erecting two new buildings on East Liberty Street that were connected to the showroom on Council Street by a paved walkway beneath the elevated Wharton Arcade, which

⁴⁷ Phillips and Opperman, 19.

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was completed in 1922. McCanless first built a filling station facing Liberty Street but replaced the structure around 1930 with a two-story brick commercial building at 123 E. Liberty Street to serve as the dealership's service department. In 1946, the company built a one-story brick service building at 125 E. Liberty Street with large garage doors centered on the front and rear elevations and a monitor roof running down the center of the structure. Upon completion, the neighboring two-story building became the main sales showroom. After the owners retired, the McCanless Motor Company facility on East Liberty Street sat vacant for a number of years before being remodeled and rehabilitated for offices and event space in 2001-2002.⁴⁸

Hedrick Motor Company, a Cadillac and Studebaker dealer, constructed a new complex at 120 N. Church Street around 1946. The facility consists of a two-story front-gable commercial building with a three-bay façade, storefronts and multi-light transoms, and nine-over-nine double-hung second-story windows, as well as a one-story front-gable building with a central garage entrance and flanking storefronts. The Hedrick Motor Company buildings are notable for their exterior finish of irregularly coursed ashlar stone. The rustic quality of the stone exterior seems contrary to the modern image that many automakers sought to convey in the post-war period.

In contrast to Hedrick's stone buildings, the Salisbury Motor Company moved from downtown to new showroom at 700 W. Innes Street around 1947 that better captured the refined modern sensibility of post-war showrooms. The two-story brick building is restrained in plan but features a first-story showroom defined by an aluminum-frame glass curtain wall that

⁴⁸ Phillips and Opperman, 24-25.

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wraps around the corner of the building. First- and second-story windows at the front of the building are metal-frame casements, while the windows on the side and rear elevations are large metal-frame industrial sash illuminating the dealer's service department. A glazed-and-paneled wooden garage door accesses the building on the center of the southeast elevation facing Craige Street. A metal canopy has been added at the rear, and a one-story concrete block body shop stands in the northwest corner of the property. Harold A. Rouzer founded the Salisbury Motor Company in 1919 as a Buick dealership before transferring ownership to Don Clement Sr. The company operated in the central business district through the 1930s before moving a little further out in the 1940s.⁴⁹

The Walker Motor Company, an Oldsmobile dealer, built a large one-story brick commercial building with a distinctive bowstring truss roof at 205 E. Council Street around 1946. A lower, flat-roof showroom with an angled corner projects from the front of the main structure and its curving parapet. The flat parapet of the showroom has a concrete coping punctuated by low peaks accenting small diamond-shaped panels. A one-story three-bay service wing was added to the southeast side of the building in the 1950s, but a filling station located to the northwest no longer stands.⁵⁰ Since 2000, the building has been remodeled and rehabilitated into offices with new reflective glass windows installed throughout.

The City Motor Company Building stands among the post-war dealerships in Salisbury as the most modern and innovative in its design. The commanding two-story facade and projecting

⁴⁹ Mark Wineka, "'Impeccably Honest' Clement Knew How To Sell A Car," *The Salisbury Post*, July 14, 2015, <https://www.salisburypost.com/2015/07/14/impeccably-honest-clement-knew-how-to-sell-a-car/>; accessed March 9, 2022. The Clement family sold the dealership in 2009, and the company now sells and services used cars.

⁵⁰ Phillips and Opperman, 7.

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octagonal showroom with full height windows served to highlight the longer, wider cars of the 1950s. Horizontal vectors of blue highlighted the painted brick and glass façade, while the pedestrian entrances have glazed single-leaf doors framed by curving glass block walls. The reception areas feature interior windows that look onto the showroom floor. The original showroom had a 30-foot ceiling and was overlooked by office windows at the mezzanine level. Triple-leaf doors with porthole windows open from the showroom into the capacious service department, which was a large, open area created by steel roof trusses and expansive multi-light steel sash windows for the walls.

The design concepts, structural systems, and materials of the service department wing appear to be heavily influenced by Albert Kahn's design for the Detroit Arsenal Tank Plant, built to efficiently manufacture tanks for the military. The United States government contracted with automaker Chrysler to produce the armored fighting vehicles in response to Germany's use of tanks in its *Blitzkrieg* offensives, and Chrysler hired Kahn to design a massive structure of steel and glass the length of five city blocks, which was constructed during the winter of 1940-1941 in a suburb of Detroit. The long side elevations of the Tank Plant, in particular, exhibited a low brick base surmounted by bands of steel sash window units rising to the roof eave that bears a striking similarity to the side elevations of the City Motor Company Building, although on a much larger scale. While Kahn had died by the time the dealership was designed, his work for the automobile industry and innovations in industrial architecture were well known.

The City Motor Company is one of the few surviving facilities in Salisbury that attempted to embrace modern design ideas for its purpose-built automobile dealership in the mid-

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twentieth century. The Salisbury Motor Company building on West Innes Street retains good integrity but lacks any distinctive massing or features beyond its typically rectangular form. Renovation of the Walker Motor Company on East Council Street has removed or obscured much of its distinctive character as an auto-related facility. The City Motor Company Building continues to possess many of its character-defining features from the golden age of the automobile industry.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency

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Rowan County, NC
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Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): RW2240

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.28 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

A. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

B. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

C. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

D. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Zone: 17 | Easting: 547636 | Northing: 3946834 |
| 2. Zone: 17 | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: 17 | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: 17 | Easting: | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The 1.28-acre boundary of the City Motor Company complex is a portion of current 2.06-acre parcel [Rowan County PIN 5669-05-29-4843] associated with the former automobile dealership. The boundary encompasses the original acreage associated with City Motor Company, consisting of parcels acquired between 1943 and 1955. The boundary is indicated by the heavy dashed line on the enclosed map. Scale approximately 1" = 100'

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nominated tract encompasses the acreage historically associated with the City Motor Company, comprising of parcels assembled from 1943 to 1955 for the dealership. The boundary contains all of the functionally related buildings and provides an appropriate

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setting. Additional parcels acquired from 1958 through 1972 on the northeast side of the property were not paved and integrated into the site until after the period of significance. The acquisition and paving of these parcels for parking and inventory storage do not contribute to the significant function and development of the business as a modern mid-century automobile dealership.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: James Maynard, Lisa Pope, and Clay Griffith
organization: RedClay Design
street & number: 4400 Park Road, Suite 320
city or town: Charlotte state: NC zip code: 28209
e-mail: james@redclaydesign.com; cgriffith.acme@gmail.com
telephone: 980-585-4998
date: July 31, 2022

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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Photographs

The following information pertains to each of the photographs:

Name of Property: City Motor Company
Location: 419 South Main Street, Salisbury, North Carolina
County: Rowan
Name of Photographer: Clay Griffith / Acme Preservation Services
Date of Photographs: March 8, 2022 (unless otherwise noted)
Location of Digital Master: Historic Preservation Office
North Carolina Division of Archives and History
109 E. Jones Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601-2807

Photographs:

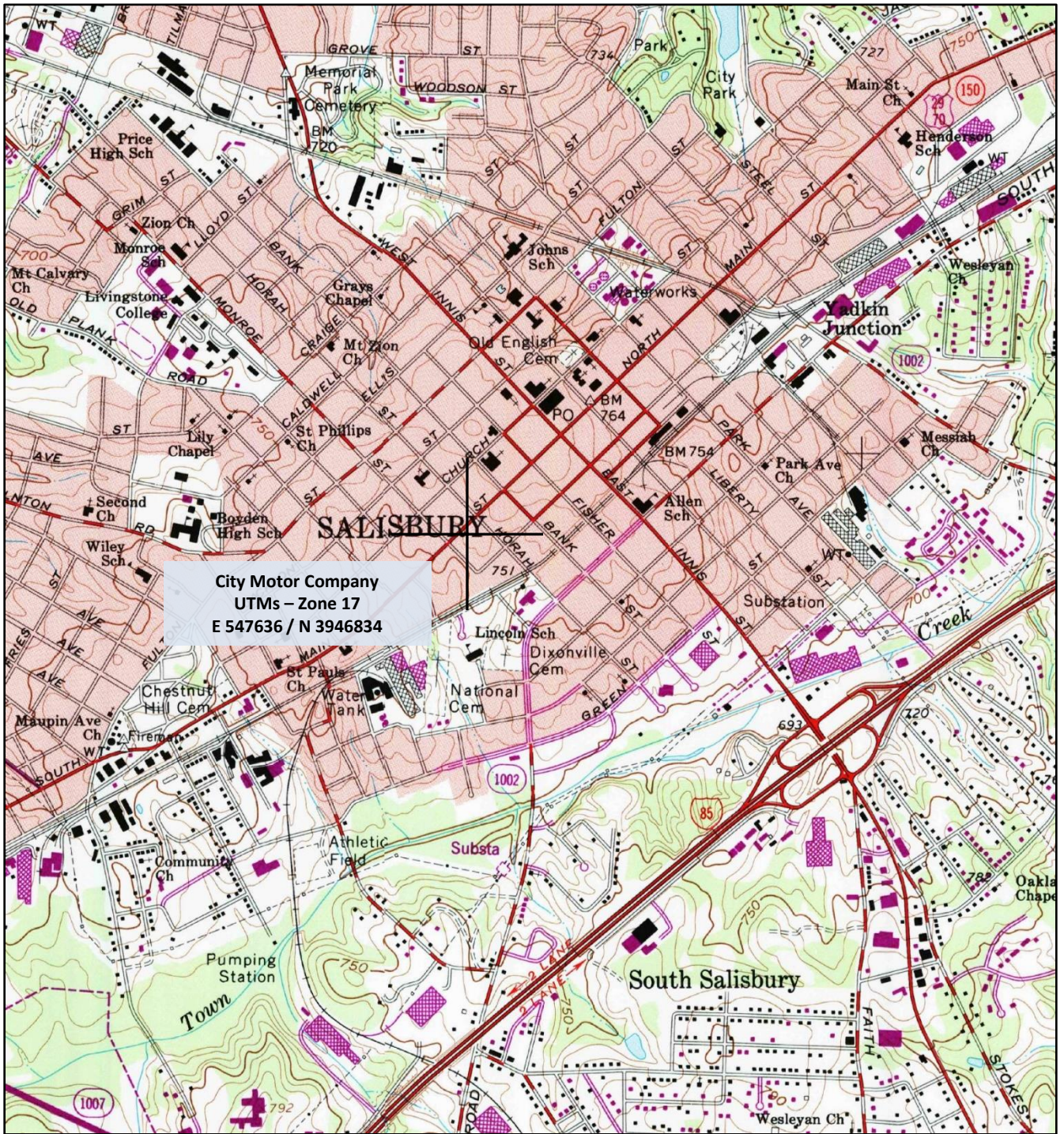
1. City Motor Company Building, façade, view to southeast
2. City Motor Company Building, oblique front view to east
3. City Motor Company Building, sales office entrance, view to southeast
4. City Motor Company Building, southwest elevation, view to north
5. City Motor Company Building, northeast elevation, view to south
6. City Motor Company Building and Auto Parts Storage Building, view to southwest
7. City Motor Company Building, showroom, view to southeast into service area
8. City Motor Company Building, showroom, view to southeast (before intermediate floor removed)
9. City Motor Company Building, service area entrance door, view to northwest
10. City Motor Company Building, service area, view to southeast
11. Auto Parts Storage Building, northwest bay interior, view to north
12. Quonset Hut, interior, view to southwest
13. Body Shop, oblique front view to east
14. Sales Office, oblique view to south
15. City Motor Company Building, oblique front view of showroom to east, July 18, 2022
16. City Motor Company Building, oblique front view of showroom to southwest, July 18, 2022,
17. City Motor Company Building, showroom, view to northwest (after intermediate floor removed), July 18, 2022

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



City Motor Company
 UTMs - Zone 17
 E 547636 / N 3946834

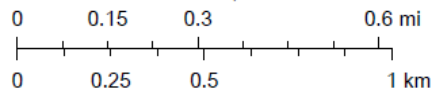
National Register of Historic Places Nomination

City Motor Company
 419 South Main Street, Salisbury
 Rowan County, North Carolina

Location Map + UTMs

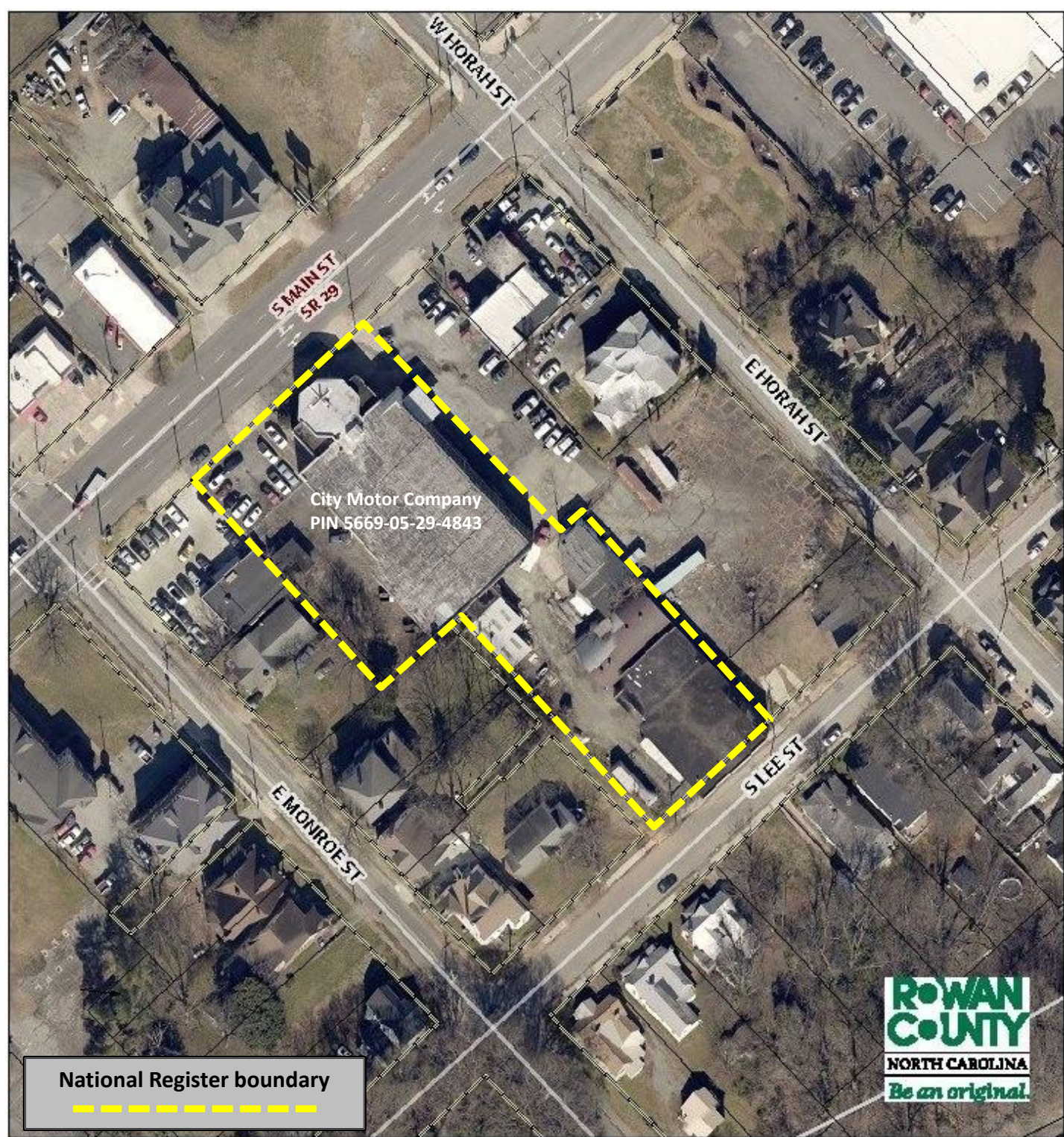


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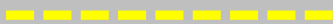
Salisbury, N.C. 7.5' USGS topographic quadrangle map
 (1962; photorevised 1987)
 Scale 1:24,000

Map created by C. Griffith/Acme Preservation Services, March 2022

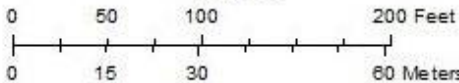


City Motor Company
PIN 5669-05-29-4843

National Register boundary



1:1,200



National Register of Historic Places Nomination

City Motor Company

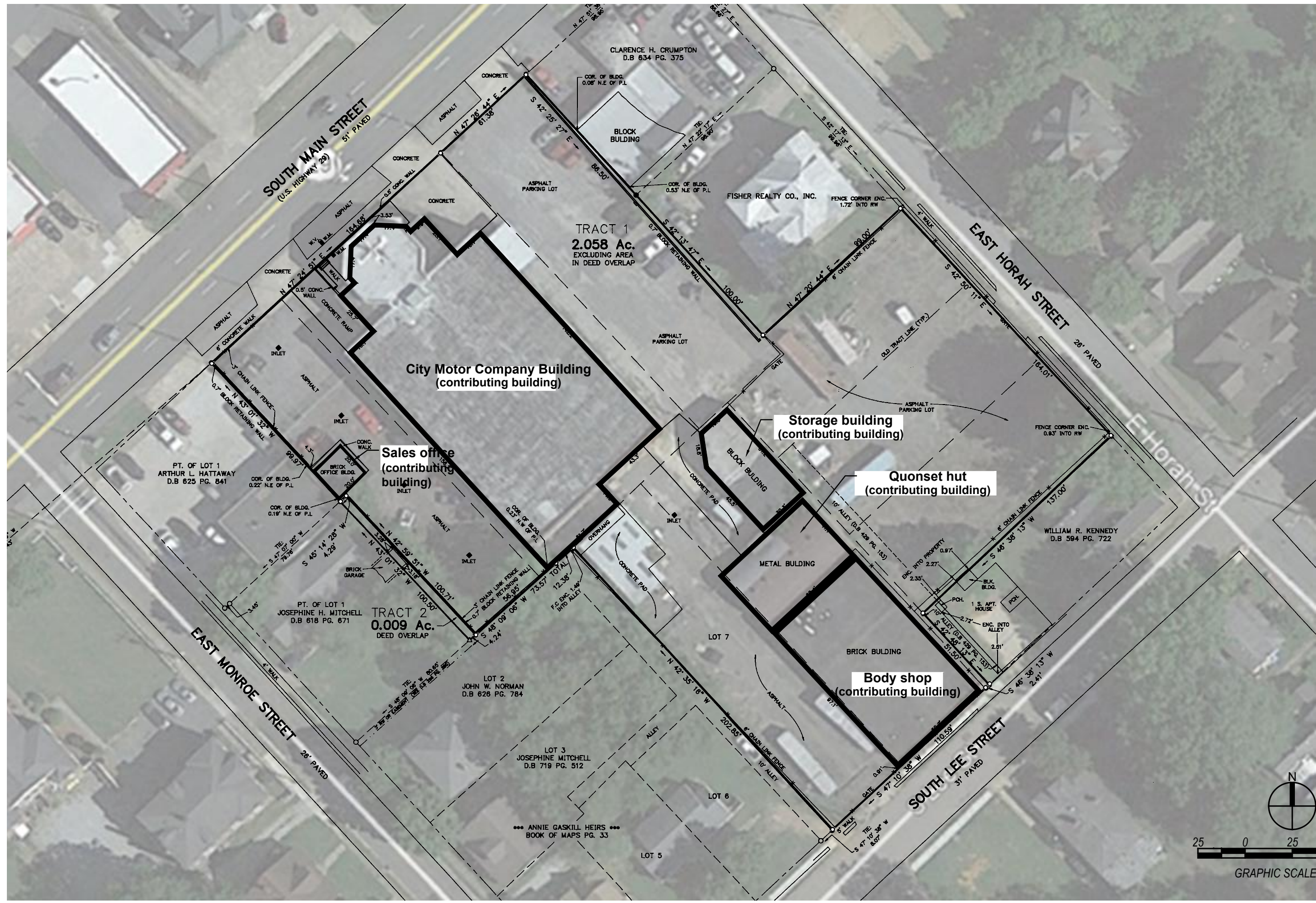
419 South Main Street, Salisbury
Rowan County, North Carolina

National Register Boundary

Base map: Rowan County GIS, aerial imagery 2021
Map created by C. Griffith/Acme Preservation Services, March 2022



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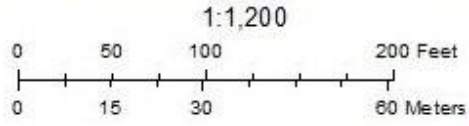
Photographs 7-12 are interior views; relative locations for interior views shown on appropriate building footprints

National Register of Historic Places Nomination

City Motor Company
 419 South Main Street, Salisbury
 Rowan County, North Carolina

Photo key

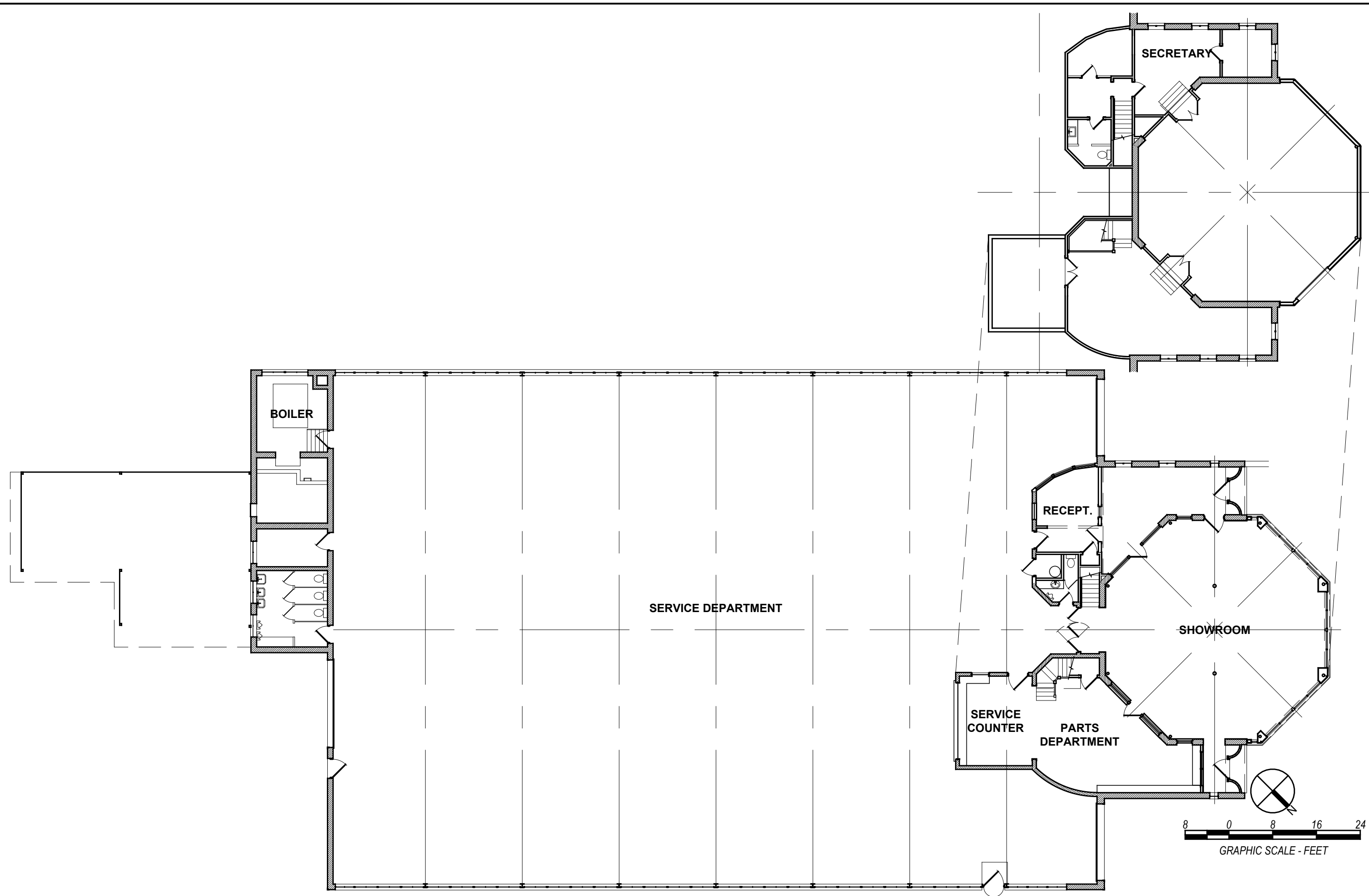
Photo number and direction of view 



Base map: Rowan County GIS
 Map created by C. Griffith/Acme Preservation Services, March 2022



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Sales & Service Building (1946) - Main level

www.RedClayDesign.com

SITE NUMBER
RW2240

SHEET
NR-11

PROJECT
CITY MOTOR COMPANY

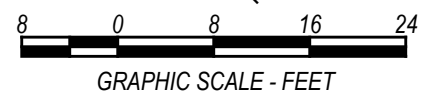
ROWAN COUNTY

NORTH CAROLINA

SALISBURY

419 SOUTH MAIN STREET

TITLE
**FLOOR PLAN
SALES & SERVICE
MAIN / UPPER LEVEL**



GRAPHIC SCALE - FEET

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