

**Statement of Freedom's Way Heritage Association to the Joint Commission on  
Tourism, the Arts and Cultural Development Hearing on S1852: The Freedom's  
Way Heritage Area and Commission Act**

*September 21, 2005*

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on the importance of heritage development as an economic development tool. I am speaking on behalf of several chambers of commerce located within the Freedom's Way corridor: they include the Nashoba Valley Chamber, the Middlesex West Chamber, the Gardner Chamber and the Wachusett Chamber. Together we represent over 1700 businesses and a population base of nearly 300,000 people.

We believe that heritage development is good for business. We believe that heritage development gives our commonwealth another tool to help attract and sustain business, increase economic development and improve the quality of life for the people in the communities we serve.

You have heard or will hear testimony today of the many natural and historic resources within the Freedom's Way area. Within Freedom's Way are the towns of Lexington and Concord, known throughout the nation as the birthplace of freedom. Also within her boundaries are places like Groton and Pepperell, which took part in the Shay's Rebellion, and in so doing, convinced the founding fathers of the need for a constitution. Freedom's Way also boasts significant Civil War history, including the military service of Adrastus Hazzard who later died in the All-Black 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment led by Colonel Robert Gould Shaw. Legends like Johnny Appleseed traversed this ground, as did thousands of soldiers at the former Fort Devens military base.

Freedom's Way also boasts numerous mill towns and industrial cities that were the underpinnings of the Massachusetts economy in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

While the tremendous history of the Freedom's Way Heritage Corridor is indeed impressive, that is not the only reason that we as Chambers of Commerce support Senate Bill 1852. I would like to share with you what we feel it can do for our regional economy.

Recent studies have shown that Massachusetts is losing population. And, in *Money Magazine's* most recent list of America's 100 most livable cities, Massachusetts was cited a mere four times. I am sure you are well aware of the challenges that Massachusetts businesses and residents face every day. But what you may not be aware of is the degree to which heritage development can help lessen these problems.

One of the goals of developing the Freedom's Way Heritage Area is to garner our resources in order to preserve our heritage and our culture. By educating people on the importance of the historic buildings, neighborhoods and landscapes that make this area unique, we help to sustain our region's economic viability. By keeping our heritage intact, we preserve the "livability" of our cities and towns. In fact our survival is dependent upon it.

Across the state we have seen "smart-growth" initiatives taking hold. In the Freedom's Way Heritage Area, the combination of a strong economic base, good local and state government, civic minded business communities and a

vibrant cultural life, has given us the opportunity to capitalize on historic preservation as a component of this “smart growth”.

Whether it is an old mill building that is converted into an assisted living facility, acres of land preserved for future generations, or the complete revitalization of a former army base, planning for and working toward historic preservation just makes sense. Keeping the population base and tax revenue it generates in communities that choose to re-invent and re-invest in themselves, is good policy across the board and that is what heritage development is all about.

The economic impact of heritage development has other components. By focusing on the natural beauty of our region and expanding the network of cultural offerings, we help to bring travel and tourism dollars not only into our region, but into the Commonwealth as well. Located within Freedom’s Way are three symphony orchestras, a number of theatre production companies, a ballet company and over thirty-five museums and historical societies. These cultural resources attract people to our area where they dine in our restaurants, shop in our retail establishments, sleep in our hotels, and use our local services. For every dollar we spend in support of travel, tourism and cultural development, we are rewarded four-fold. This in turn enriches the lives of those who live here.

Moreover, when the concept of heritage development is embraced, new jobs are created, and new opportunities for small businesses are encouraged. A less tangible benefit is that it empowers citizens to own the heritage of their area, further strengthening their communities.

For these many reasons the Nashoba Valley Chamber, the Middlesex West Chamber, the Gardner Chamber and the Wachusett Chamber urge you to support Senate Bill 1852.

Thank you.

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