APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF EXISTING CONTEXT

TEXT: JUNE 10, 2014
MAPS: JUNE 15, 2015

Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area is preparing a management plan that will guide its initiatives and activities over the next five to ten years. Prepared in accordance with requirements of its federal enabling legislation, the management plan outlines how partners throughout the heritage area will work together to fulfill the vision and mission conceived by the partners and expressed in the legislation’s statement of purpose.

This Summary of the Existing Context provides a brief overview of existing conditions within the heritage area that will shape the strategies and approach to the heritage area’s implementation. It is prepared following an initial round of background review, consultations, and workshops to understand the context within which the heritage will work and the partners that will be involved.

BACKGROUND

Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area was conceived in the mid-1990s by local citizens at the grassroots level concerned about the increasing loss of land and historic sites to unplanned development. Reaching out to adjacent towns, proponents sought a means through which regional identity could be strengthened and local support for preserving sense of place could be encouraged.

With state support, a feasibility study for Freedom’s Way as a heritage area was prepared in 1997 laying the groundwork for review by the National Park Service in 2000 and preparation of an amendment to the feasibility study addressing National Heritage Area criteria in 2001.

Federal legislation proposing the Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area was first introduced in Congress in 2001 but, along with other proposed National Heritage Areas, was not brought to fruition until passage of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 and its signature by President Obama on March 23, 2009.

In the meantime, the non-profit Freedom’s Way Heritage Association continued to grow and develop and work toward passage of state legislation for recognition as a heritage area. Massachusetts passed legislation recognizing Freedom’s Way in November 2006 and New Hampshire followed suit in 2007.

Before federal designation, Freedom’s Way began developing programs to engage communities, partners, and the public. Significant programs included town tours, lectures, publications, events, and promotion of the events and initiatives of organizations and communities within the region. Among its initiatives was participation in the Heritage Landscapes Program developed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) in which 22 Massachusetts communities identified local heritage landscapes in accordance with DCR processes. An enhanced website featuring heritage area themes and communities was brought online in 2007.

With national designation, Freedom’s Way continued to formalize and enhance its programming and regularly promote the events and initiatives of participating organizations and communities. Newsletters were published by email to interested parties three times a year featuring the programs and events of partners. Key Freedom’s Way programs included:

- Paths of the Patriots – organizing research by partners in participating towns;
- Strollin’ and Rollin’ – yearly tours of towns and groups of towns;
- Oral History Project – initially focused on farming and farm landscapes;
- In Thoreau’s Footsteps – lectures and walks featuring living history interaction;
- Harvest Home – presentations by local farm programs and advocates;
- The Story of Nahum – play telling the story of an African American slave; and
- Technical assistance workshops, author presentations, and other events and programs with a variety of local and regional partners.

The 2009 federal legislation outlines the purposes of the heritage area and requires preparation of a management plan for its implementation. Freedom’s Way Heritage Association, Inc. was designated as the heritage area’s coordinating entity. Planning for work on the management plan began in 2011 with the development of a mission and vision. Active work on the management plan began in the spring of 2013. All the while, Freedom’s Way continued to reach out to partners and conduct ongoing programming.
Appendix C: Summary of Existing Context

GEOGRAPHY AND LANDSCAPE

Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area is comprised of 45 communities, 37 of which are in Massachusetts and 8 of which are in New Hampshire. Roughly triangular in shape, the boundary of the heritage area has its point near the city of Boston and widens out to the northwest encompassing a large part of north-central Massachusetts and a portion of southern New Hampshire. The configuration of the heritage area’s boundaries were focused on the towns of Concord and Lexington and the historic road connecting them to Boston along which fighting took place on April 19, 1775, sparking the American Revolution. To the northwest, the heritage area includes many of the towns from which local militias responded on April 19th and engaged in the fighting.

Geologically, this is a landscape shaped by glaciers, specifically the last of the Wisconsin era glaciers to advance and retreat across New England, known as the Laurentide ice sheet, which began its retreat about 12,000 years ago. As it retreated, the ice sheet left a topography of low but varied relief with hills formed as moraines and as glacial outwash. Soils range in their degree of stoniness based upon the conditions of their formation, but they are mostly mixed rocks, stones, and sands of varying size. Low lying areas were lake bottoms or river courses of silt, and many areas do not drain well or at all. There are numerous swamps and kettle holes, and the terrain can be unpredictable.

The resulting landscape is one of low hills, winding topography, with small spaces and short vistas. The heritage area is comprised primarily of three rivers and their tributaries, all ultimately flowing northeast toward the Merrimack River near the border of New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

The largest of these three rivers is the Nashua, once a glacial lake, which drains northeast through the heart of the heritage area and includes its largest area of floodplain (and good agricultural soils). To the west of the river, a series of smaller east-flowing tributaries drains most of the heritage area, its more elevated uplands.
Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area Management Plan

Rivers

Map prepared for the Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area by Heritage Strategies, LLC and Washington College Center for Environment and Society.

Map prepared by Heritage Strategies, LLC and Washington College Center for Environment and Society.
To the east of the Nashua is the smaller but still significant Concord River, flowing northeast, with its southern tributaries, the Sudbury and the Assabet Rivers, joining in the town of Concord. In northern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire, the northeast flowing Souhegan River courses through Ashburnham and Ashby (MA) and New Ipswich, Milford, and Amherst (NH) toward the Merrimack. Smaller portions of the heritage area are drained by the Shawsheen and Mystic Rivers in the east and Millers River in the west.

Both the Nashua and the Concord Rivers are known for their wetlands and wildlife, both having large areas preserved as National Wildlife Refuges. Twenty-nine free-flowing miles of the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Rivers have been designated as Wild and Scenic.

The landscape exists in two broad formations, the Southern New England Coastal Plain in the eastern and central portions of the heritage area and the uplands of the Monadnock Plateau to the far northwest. Each has distinct variations in its plant communities and ecologies.

In terms of land use, Freedom’s Way spans the full gradient from urban to rural. From its southeastern point near Boston to the beltway created by I-95, about 10 miles out, the heritage area is urban/suburban in character and densely populated. Primarily late nineteenth and early twentieth century in character, little of the region’s Colonial heritage, save topography, early road course, and names, remain.

Between I-95 and the beltway created by I-495, another 15 miles out, is the suburban portion of the heritage area. Fully occupied but retaining much of its natural landscape character, this area has been a desirable place to live within the Boston metropolitan area for many decades.
Beyond I-495 is an ever-widening belt of rural/suburban landscape with woodlands, fields, large landholdings, scattered suburban subdivisions, and many single family homes. Commuter railroad lines link this area to the inner suburbs and downtown Boston, establishing commercial centers at many railroad stops. The rural/suburban belt continues to expand as new residents continue to move further north and west into the countryside. But at some point, the extensive woodlands that begin in the suburbs and increase further westward with less and less interruption become dominant and establish the character of rural central Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire.

Interrupting this pattern are the several nineteenth century mill towns established at economically propitious points within the landscape. These towns, small cities really, are densely occupied with urban commercial and industrial cores along rivers and neighborhoods of wood framed residences around them. Most are now struggling economically. Some have their own suburban surroundings extending into the rural countryside.

Beneath all this later development is the landscape structure created by the natural landforms and their ecological tendencies as well as the manmade structure superimposed upon it by the region’s Colonial settlers, which is central to the thematic interests of the heritage area. Colonial village centers and the old roads connecting them are evident everywhere, heavily developed but still extant in the urban southeast, pastoral and fully occupied in the suburbs, and forested and still functioning in the rural north and west. Past changes in land use are clearly visible in remnant features such as stone walls, field patterns, roads, and farm lanes as well as in patterns of successional plant communities that give evidence of previous use. The extensive woodlands of central Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire, a consequence of the widespread abandonment of farmland within the region, are a principal character-defining feature of the landscape.

As a consequence of its geological formation, varied low-lying landforms, small winding rivers, and significant wetlands, the landscape of the Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area is complex. The landscape is rich in its varied detail, intimate spaces, and many possibilities for exploration. Landscape conservation and stewardship have become a principal focus of most communities within the heritage area, as the woodlands, meadows, wetlands, and waterways are recognized as community assets important to local quality of life. They are also historic assets.

The region’s transportation network is characterized by overlapping layers of historic road development and its relationship to the expanding Boston metropolitan region. Beautiful and historically significant is the region’s network of small two-lane roads, many of which connect historic village centers and which dated to Colonial and even Native American times. These roads follow the topography and showcase the intimate scale of the rolling landscape, often revealing new features and spatial experiences every few hundred yards. Historic turnpikes created in the early and mid-nineteenth century were among the first efforts to improve roads and facilitate transportation between towns.

At the opposite end of the scale, Interstates I-95 and I-495 are southwest-to-northeast beltways through the heritage area, providing important access points for entrance and departure at particular locations but not really facilitating travel within the heritage area. I-190 connects Leominster to Worcester and the Massachusetts Turnpike and is an important access to the western portion of the heritage area.
Regional connectors were established and further developed and improved in the early, mid, and late-twentieth century to expedite travel throughout central Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. Many of these regional connectors were created by widening, straightening, and re-grading older historic roads. In some cases, new bypasses were constructed. Today, these roads provide for efficient travel, but they are less appealing as touring and biking routes due to their driving speeds, width, and commercial development. Traffic within the suburban metropolitan area can be heavy during morning and evening commutes with backups along heavily traveled roads in many places.

Perhaps most significant as a regional connector is the Route 2 corridor, which begins in Arlington and has grown to become a divided highway extending west through Fitchburg and Gardener to western Massachusetts. Route 2 creates and east-west spine through the heritage area and facilitates access to many locations.

Massachusetts has long had an well-developed rail system, established in the nineteenth century, and has included an extensive electric railway network serving the Boston suburbs. The railroad network had a strong influence upon commercial and residential development within the region. While some railroad lines have been abandoned, railroads continue to serve the suburban communities and are an important commuter link to downtown Boston.

**Community Organization and Governance**

The organization of Freedom’s Way into distinct towns as the principal form of governance as well as social and economic structure is fundamental to the region’s culture and harkens back to its Puritan antecedents almost four hundred years ago. While this community structure is typical of New England as a whole, it has particular relevance to Freedom’s Way and its central story associated with the events at Concord and Lexington. It was the British threat to local self-government throughout greater
Massachusetts that sparked the events of 1775. And it was this already well developed form of local governance that enabled a rapid and thorough response to that threat. Freedom’s Way is the place to tell that story.

At the core of New England culture is the tradition of self government, local control, and direct democracy. Towns are the organizing unit for that tradition. In 17th and early 18th century New England, towns were established by authorized community groups who set about organizing and managing their jurisdictions with a great degree of local autonomy. Comprised of extended families, homogeneous in nature and belief, and moving in as complete groups, this form of settlement was unique to New England and did not occur in other places.

The town meeting was the means through which communities governed themselves. Broad participation was expected. Through the process of direct democracy in town meeting, residents themselves made decisions about every aspect of community activity and elected representatives of their peers to manage day-to-day affairs on their behalf. Individual liberty within the context of community coordination and activity for the common good was the basis of town governance. Residents had faith in government because they were part of it and had confidence that a frugal, prudent, local government could manage shared assets and accomplish certain things for the betterment of all.

That local tradition still exists today and is the key to successful implementation of the heritage area’s program. Freedom’s Way has the opportunity to implement program by inspiring, incentivizing, and supporting local grassroots action at the town level.

Today, state law in Massachusetts and New Hampshire establishes the primacy of town government as the vehicle for community organization and action. It also sets limits on those actions, helping to preserve individual freedoms. Intermediate units of government, such as counties, do not have extensive powers and, in Massachusetts, are practically nonexistent. At the state level, incentivized programs are offered in which towns may participate to their own betterment, but participation is largely voluntary.

Town meeting is central to local governance. Cultivation of community support is essential to getting anything done. The separate election of bodies with different areas of authority within the town (selectmen, planning board, zoning board, others) broadens responsibility among a number of local officials rather than concentrating it among a few.

A lot happens at the local level in Massachusetts and New Hampshire because of the capacity of local initiative. Local governance empowers engaged residents to undertake projects of their own making and their own initiative for the common good.

**Demographics**

**Population**

Population within the 45 communities of Freedom’s Way has increased about 3.2% in the decade between 2000 and 2010. Current populations range from about 31,000 to 59,000 people in the southeastern urban towns; 13,000 to 20,000 in the suburbs; 5,000 to 7,000 in the outer suburbs, and 5,000 to 10,000 in the northwestern rural towns. The lowest population levels are in New Hampshire’s Greenville (2,105) and Mason (1,382).

The mill towns range from about 10,000 to 40,000 in size, with Nashua the exception at 86,494, the highest population of any community within the heritage area. Mill town populations have stayed fairly steady between 2000 and 2010 with increases for Fitchburg and its suburb Lunenburg and decreases for Nashua and Maynard.
Looking at census figures over the past 80 years, it appears that there has been fairly steady population increase throughout the region with particular spikes in the 1960s and 70s in the suburbs of Acton, Concord, Bedford, Lincoln, and Groton. In the urban core of Medford, Malden and Arlington, population peaked in the 1970s, declined for a decade or two, and is now slowly rising again. In the rural west and north, low populations have risen steadily. In some cases increases appear dramatic due to increases in low overall population totals.

The largest population increases between 2000 and 2010 were in rural New Hampshire’s Mason (17%), Brookline (16.23%), and New Ipswich (15.89%). Bolton in led Massachusetts with an increase of 15.3%. In Massachusetts, increases occurred in Dunstable (11.01%), Groton (10.32%), Ashburnham (8.8%), Littleton (8.29%), Harvard (8.27%), Sterling (7.06%), Lunenburg (6.79%), and Winchendon (6.69%).

Decreases were seen in Lincoln (-26.63%), Greenville (-5.65%), Maynard (-3.24%), Townsend (-3.05), Gardner (-2.68), Leominster (-1.33), and Nashua (-0.13). The large decrease in Lincoln was due to a one-time special circumstance.
Appendix C: Summary of Existing Context

**Income Level**
Median household income, poverty level, and educational level maps for the heritage area illustrate how suburban communities around Boston are among the most affluent in the state. The affluent suburbs continue expanding west and north, even into southern New Hampshire. Rural western towns and mill towns are less affluent by comparison.

**Racial Composition**
Overall, the population of Freedom’s Way is about 89% white. The limited minority populations include African Americans (2.9%), Asians (4.6%), and Hispanic (4.2%).

Larger concentrations of African Americans are located in the larger towns of Malden (8.2%) and Medford (6.1), each of which has over 55,000 in total population. Smaller towns with significant African American populations include Ayer (5.7%), Lincoln (4.8%), Shirley (6.7%), and Harvard (4.5%).

The heritage area’s relatively large Asian population is spread across ten communities, most of which are urban and larger suburban towns. They include Acton (8.7%), Arlington (5.0%), Fitchburg (4.3%), Lexington (10.9%), Malden (14.0), Nashua (6.5%), Westford (4.8%), and Woburn (4.9%). Smaller communities with Asian concentrations include Bedford (5.4%) and Boxborough (8.5%).

Individuals of Hispanic heritage also tend to be located in urban areas, including Malden (4.8%), Clinton (11.6%), Fitchburg (15.0%), Leominster (11.0%), and Nashua (9.8%). Smaller communities with significant Hispanic populations include Ayer (4.7%), Shirley (6.9%), and Harvard (6.1%).
COMMUNITY PLANNING

In keeping with the historical tradition of local governance, community planning in Massachusetts and New Hampshire is undertaken at the local level by individual towns. State law establishes the planning and zoning authority of towns and also its limits, providing protections for individual property and other rights. A variety of state non-profit organizations provide information and support for different planning topics and interests.

Most towns are comprised of **three administrative bodies**, each elected independently and each with roles in community planning and its implementation. The **Board of Selectmen** is responsible for overall town administration. The **Planning Board** reviews proposed subdivision and land development projects and also usually oversees preparation of the local comprehensive plan. The **Zoning Board of Appeals** reviews proposed changes to, or relief from, zoning regulations requested by property owners. Each entity has its own distinct area of authority, none reporting to another, and contested decisions of each are appealed directly to the state court system.

As noted previously, **town meeting** is the most important source of governing authority, the living embodiment of New England’s tradition of direct, participatory democracy. Practically all matters of general administration and governance are put to a vote in town meeting, which takes place yearly (sometimes more often). Perhaps most important are approval of the town budget and any proposed changes to the town code, both of which directly affect planning. Towns with large populations use a form of representative town meeting in which a number of delegates are elected to represent the residents of various districts within the town because the population is too large for direct participation. Gaining approval of measures at town meeting requires extensive cultivation and support of local residents.

Most towns are administered by a **town manager** who reports to the Board of Selectmen. Staff sizes for towns working under the town manager vary based upon the size of the town, however most include at least administrative support, police, and public works staff responsible for road maintenance and public infrastructure. Cities have a slightly different organizational structure and more staff due to their larger size and increased public infrastructure. (See Appendix H for table offering details on town and city structure.)

Town tend to have an array of **commissions and committees** of volunteers appointed by the Board of Selectmen to deal with various issues and aspects of local governance, many of which are planning related. State law authorizes administration over topics of public interest, such as affordable housing, water supply, or wetlands, and also provides incentive programs for public planning and enhancements. Many of these involve appointed commissions and committees. In Massachusetts, Conservation Commissions overseeing publicly owned lands, natural resources, and wetlands; Agricultural Commissions supporting agricultural planning and activities; and Community Preservation Act committees funding public enhancement projects are examples of state-enabled local programs with planning impacts. New Hampshire has similar laws and programs.

Many of the state programs are **important vehicles** for community planning initiatives, and the commissions and committees provide strong, active centers of support for implementing initiatives at the local level.

**Local comprehensive plans** are prepared by each community to establish a vision and to guide policy. Subdivision and land development ordinances and zoning ordinances are two primary sets of local planning regulations and are both authorized and limited by state law. Local ordinances are be tools for the implementation of policies outlined in the local comprehensive plan. Additional ordinances may be
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created to take advantage of other planning mechanisms as inferred through the discussion of commissions and committees above.

Among the entities created at the state level to support local municipalities are regional planning councils. Both Massachusetts and New Hampshire divide their states into regions, each of which has a designated regional planning council or commission whose role is to help coordinate and support planning at the local level. Transportation planning is a large part of their mandate, but they also provide technical assistance for other aspects of planning to communities, many of which have small staffs and rely heavily upon volunteers. The support provided by the regional planning councils is the only source of professional planning services available to some towns. The regional councils also serve as arms of the state to help coordinate planning and growth management between communities on a regional basis.

However, the regional planning councils are not as well funded as they could be and are limited in the services they can provide to towns. Most rely upon fee-for-service projects requested by towns for a portion of the funding needed to support their staffs. They are therefore limited in the amount of visioning and support they can provide to towns and are not able to provide significant incentives to towns to undertake good planning.

Planning is therefore a significant challenge for the communities of Freedom’s Way. Towns vary widely in the quality and extent of their planning and in the state-authorized planning programs they choose to implement. There can be limited incentive for communities to work together, and they can be protective of their own ways or even in conflict with their neighbors.

Nonetheless, towns and cities are the key vehicles through which to accomplish planning, conservation, preservation, and community enhancement goals. Their strength is in the local knowledge they have of their community and its landscape, the strong interest local residents have in the quality of their community, and in the extraordinary degree of volunteerism residents provide through participation in local community organizations and programs.

Key potential partners for community planning include:
- Local towns and cities
- Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NH)
- Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MA)
- Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MA)
- Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (MA)
- Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (MA)
- Southwest Regional Planning Commission (NH)
- WalkBoston
- Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance

**Historic Preservation**

Communities within Freedom’s Way, and New England in general, convey a strong sense of historical identity, particularly with their Colonial history. In part, this is because of the central place that historic town and village centers have within the community landscape and to the preservation of historic buildings and commons in village centers as community icons.

It is also because of the strength-of-story of Colonial times in New England. Metropolitan Boston has grown and expanded enormously, especially in the twentieth century, as have the many mill towns located along rivers in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. But the sense of Colonial history remains
pervasive in the New England landscape, and the stories of the Puritans and the Minute Men are of mythic proportions to the American experience.

In general, **historic resources**, especially buildings, are highly valued and widely recognized. Historical societies are present in almost every town, and most communities participate in some level of historic preservation programming. The need for preservation awareness is not limited to Colonial era resources but relates to resources from the region’s entire history. **Community character** and quality of life is closely linked to the treatment of historic building and landscape resources.

The identification of building and landscape resources that are of historical significance and that contribute to the character of communities is not even or complete across the region. **Historic resource inventories** and surveys have been undertaken at the town level in many communities and tend to emphasize concentrations of 18th and 19th century buildings. Surveys are not complete across the entire area of every town, and they do not always identify significant resources from every era.

Information on local historic resource surveys are kept in town files and are compiled at the state level by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) and New Hampshire Division of Historic Resources (DHR). MHC has an accessible online database called the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) that lists most surveyed resources within Massachusetts communities and provides access to their survey forms. MHC is in the process of mapping its surveyed resources in the MassGIS database and verifying the locations of surveyed resources town-by-town. DHR does not yet have such a database. Examination of local historic resource surveys reveals that completion of comprehensive local surveys and the updating of older surveys is an ongoing need. Each state has only a limited amount of funding and staffing available to assist towns with the survey of resources within their boundaries. The first map on the preceding page shows surveyed historic resources in Massachusetts and New Hampshire from available data. The data for Massachusetts includes 15,584 individual survey sites. Because the data are different in each state, they are displayed in differing colors. [For display in the first chapter of the plan, for the sake of displaying uniformity between the two states, we are endeavoring to create a map of only National Register sites and districts (including NHLs); as seen in the second map, historic district data are questionable (large blue polygons covering thousands of acres), and so we have elected not to display it at this time in the primary document. Research continues during the NPS review phase to endeavor to complete a map of points only.]

MHC and DHR are designated as State Historic Preservation Offices within their respective states. The federal government administers a **nationwide historic preservation program** through the National Park Service in accordance with requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as amended. The National Historic Preservation Act was enacted to establish a process through which federal impacts on historic resources could be appropriately managed in collaboration with states. However, it also provided programs through which each state can offer services and programs to encourage historic preservation initiatives at the local level.

These programs have become the framework for grassroots historic preservation initiatives nationwide. In addition to these federal programs, Massachusetts and New Hampshire have created their own complementary **programs at the state level** that local communities can avail themselves of as well. More state-supported historic preservation programs are available in Massachusetts than in New Hampshire. In combination, however, these state and federal programs can be a very effective means through which local communities can preserve and manage historic resources.

The degree to which towns in Massachusetts and New Hampshire participate in federal and state historic preservation programming varies. A preliminary assessment has been made of preservation related programs and bylaws adopted by towns from information gathered by MHC and other sources.
The information needs to be verified on a town-by-town basis. Nonetheless, it appears to indicate that towns could avail themselves of additional mechanisms through which historic preservation could be encouraged. Examples of preservation related programs and bylaws include:

- Historic preservation chapters in town master plans or local comprehensive plans
- Community Preservation Act (Massachusetts)
- Flexible dimension zoning
- Transfer of development rights
- Local historic districts
- Certified Local Government program
- Design review board
- Demolition delay bylaw
- Scenic roads byway
- Heritage Landscapes Program (Massachusetts)
- Local land trusts

The Heritage Landscapes Program is an initiative undertaken through the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation through which participating communities are given assistance in identifying and prioritizing distinct historic landscapes within their borders. Twenty-two towns participated in a first round of heritage landscape inventories within Freedom’s Way in 2006. How these identified landscapes can then be preserved is addressed in the study for each town. It is an excellent program and approach. The idea that each town is an evolving cultural landscape in its entirety, however, could be strengthened in both how the studies are conceived and how they are implemented.

Bottom line is that historic preservation is most effective when it happens through the grassroots level, through initiatives within individual towns. Due to limited capacity, the dependency upon volunteers, and turnover of personnel at the local level, information, guidance, planning support, and other forms of technical assistance for local communities is and will remain an ongoing need. State agencies do what they can, but are limited by funding and staff resources. Also, while they can be called upon for information and assistance, they do generally play a proactive advocacy role. Regional planning councils, discussed in a previous section, can provide support but do not generally take an active role in historic preservation programming.

Preservation Massachusetts and the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance are state-wide non-profit organizations that provide information, guidance, and technical assistance to local communities. They can also serve as advocates at the national, state, and local levels. They have a unique and important role, but are also limited by funding and staff capacity.

Key potential partners in historic preservation programming include:

- Local towns and cities
- Massachusetts Historical Commission
- New Hampshire Division of Historic Resources
- Preservation Massachusetts
- New Hampshire Preservation Alliance
- Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (heritage landscapes)

**INTERPRETATION AND HERITAGE TOURISM**

Interpretation and heritage tourism within Freedom’s Way are presently concentrated around four primary topics as demonstrated by current tourism promotion:

- Concord and Lexington—events that sparked the Revolutionary War;
- Concord authors;
- Conservation and natural resources; and
- Specialty farms.

Most of the interpretive and heritage tourism activity is found within the Concord and Lexington vicinity. The large majority of heritage area communities have limited heritage tourism ambitions. The regional economy is not dependent upon heritage tourism income. Only a few towns, such as Lexington and Arlington, appear to actively organize and promote themselves as heritage tourism destinations.

Interpretation of the events associated with Concord and Lexington on April 19, 1775 is well developed. Minute Man National Historical Park is the principal attraction, but other attractions such as the Lexington Green and historic houses and Concord Museum are of high quality as well. Minute Man features two visitor centers, historic sites, historic houses, and Battle Road Trail, which extends the length of the roughly four-mile long park.

Minute Man is noted to have a visitation of about 1 million people a year, including about 14,000 students participating in over 300 educational programs. It is among the top ten visitor destinations in the state. With only two regular and three seasonal interpretive staff, the park is overwhelmed and greatly in need of added resources and capacity. Due to government budget reductions, staffing at Minute Man has decreased from about 39 to 27 people in recent years.

The stories of Concord’s renowned authors intertwine with those of the Revolutionary War. Attractions include five house museums (four in Concord and one in Harvard) where various authors lived, as well as Walden Pond, made famous by Henry Thoreau. A guided trolley tour in Lexington and bike tours and step-on guides in Concord add to the interpretive offerings.

The towns of Concord, Lexington, Lincoln, and Arlington have collaborated in creation of the Battle Road Scenic Byway with technical assistance from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. A byway committee has been created to coordinate its initiatives. The byway could undertake roadway enhancements, management, and promotions and could help coordinate interpretation and visitor experience.

Interpretive programming related to conservation and natural resources is undertaken at a number of venues throughout the heritage area. Drumlin Farm, Fruitlands Museum, and Beaver Brook Nature Center are three leading private non-profit venues with interpretive programming. A number of federal and state sites offer a range of programming as well as recreational opportunities. Perhaps this interpretive programming would be better framed as educational rather than heritage tourism related. A great deal of the programming offered is oriented toward students and is of great value and importance to the region. Two National Wildlife Refuges are located within the heritage area and are attractions for birders, walkers, and wildlife enthusiasts, however, they offer limited programming.

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources promotes farms, farm markets, and agricultural production throughout the state. Freedom’s Way has a number of specialty farms that feature farm stands and pick-your-own opportunities. A particular concentration is located along the southern portion of the heritage area from Lincoln to Sterling. Regional farms are a significant visitor attraction particularly in the Fall.

Freedom’s Way attractions are promoted primarily by two state-designated regional visitor bureaus that cover most of the Massachusetts portion of the heritage area. The visitor bureaus serve as brokers of information between the many communities and attractions, which can be a challenge. A key role is to put out information provided to them by communities and attractions to as wide an audience as possible. Despite limited funding support (derived from the state lodging tax), the visitor bureaus work well together and cross-promote when possible.
The Merrimack Valley Conference and Visitors Bureau, based in Lowell, features the attractions in Concord and Lexington as one of its principal marketing initiatives. The Johnny Appleseed Trail Association covers most of the central and western portions of the heritage area and features the country experience of farm stands, orchards, hiking, and biking to leisure travelers.

New Hampshire’s tourism promotion is managed by the state’s Division of Travel and Tourism Development. There are no regional visitor bureaus serving the New Hampshire communities located within Freedom’s Way. New Hampshire designates tourism regions, however, which are thematically based and are promoted by the state and by local organizations, usually chambers of commerce. Most of the New Hampshire’s heritage area communities are located in the Merrimack Valley Region, which is centered in the City of Merrimack. New Ipswich is located within the Monadnock Region, centered in Keene. Neither region features themes or attractions associated with the heritage area. The largest New Hampshire community within the heritage area, the City of Nashua, does not appear to have a tourism program.

Visitor service areas are not a prominent feature of the region’s economy. Concord and Lexington and other urban towns feature shops and fine restaurants in their historic downtowns. Excellent restaurants are located in some other communities as well, most within the affluent suburban and rural suburban areas. Lodging tends to be located along the I-95 and I-495 corridors. However, there are some fine small inns and bed and breakfast establishments, again mostly within the affluent suburbs. Most commercial areas are oriented toward local residents rather than visitors. The central, northern, and western portions of the heritage area have few visitor services.

Historic villages throughout the heritage area tend not to be commercial centers but rather historic religious and community centers. Some feature small general stores. Later nineteenth century commercial town centers tend to be organized around railroad stations, some of which feature local restaurants. Mill towns are potential centers for heritage tourism services but are struggling economically. Heritage tourism does not appear to be a strong local economic development strategy. Some have restaurants, but they are not yet specifically developed as visitor destinations.

Key potential partners in interpretation and heritage tourism include:

- Minute Man National Historical Park
- Lexington Historical Society
- Lexington Chamber of Commerce
- Concord Museum
- Fruitlands Museum
- Orchard House
- Emerson House
- Battle Road Scenic Byway Committee
- Walden Pond State Reservation
- Drumlin Farm – Massachusetts Audubon Society
- Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge
- Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge
- Beaver Brook Nature Center
- Historic New England
- Fitchburg Art Museum
- Museum of Russian Icons
- Local town museums
- Greater Merrimack Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Johnny Appleseed Trail Association
- New Hampshire Division of Travel and Tourism Development
- Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
- Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources

**E D U C A T I O N**

School districts in Massachusetts and New Hampshire are organized by town and city and are another example of local governance and control. Some towns with smaller populations partner with adjacent towns to create one district, sometimes entirely and sometimes just for the upper grades. Schools therefore have strong local affiliation with their communities.

At the state level, the *Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education* and *New Hampshire Department of Education* provide guidance and support to local school districts as well as developing and implementing standards as authorized under state law. Both states have adopted **Curriculum Frameworks** that help educators understand what students should know and be able to demonstrate by providing clear goals for student learning. Both states have also participated in the national, state-led Common Core State Standards Initiative, the purpose of which is to establish a single set of clear educational expectations for English language arts/literacy and mathematics that states can share and voluntarily adopt.

The two content areas associated with state curriculum frameworks most pertinent to Freedom’s Way are *history/social studies* and *science* (including natural history and the environment). Both Massachusetts and New Hampshire have adopted curriculum frameworks for these two content areas dated to 2006, and adaptations that align to the common core standards have recently been made.

**Educational and interpretive sites** within Freedom’s Way that serve school groups have developed their programming to directly support the curriculum frameworks in order to make sure that their programs are as useful as possible. Some provide additional instructional materials that teachers can use to coordinate classroom instruction with field activities. These programs are important to make sure that the sites are as relevant as possible to the needs of students, teachers, and the educational community.

Freedom’s Way is home to three **community colleges** serving residents of towns within its boundaries. Community colleges present an important opportunity to engage with communities regionally and locally. *Nashua Community College* is part of the Community College System of New Hampshire serving the greater Nashua region including the New Hampshire towns within Freedom’s Way. *Mt Wachusett Community College* serves 29 towns and cities including communities within Freedom’s Way west of I-495. Mt Wachusett has campuses in Gardner, Leominster, and Devens. Freedom’s Way has partnered with Mt Wachusett on educational projects in the past.

The eastern portion of the heritage area is served by *Middlesex Community College*, with campuses in Bedford and Lowell. Middlesex Community College was founded in 1970 and has grown to become one of the largest community colleges in Massachusetts.

Education has historically been of great importance to Massachusetts communities and residents. The state is a world leader in educational institutions, many of which are located in the Boston metropolitan region. There is opportunity for the heritage area to partner with educational programs and faculty interested in its historical, conservation, and community focuses.

Freedom’s Way, however, is home to five **colleges and universities**. *Fitchburg State University*, part of the Massachusetts state university system, was founded in 1894 and has about 3,100 full and 4,000 part-time students. Begun as a normal (teacher’s) school, Fitchburg State now offers forty-nine undergraduate degree programs in eighteen academic departments as well as masters and other
graduate degree programs. Tufts University is nationally renowned private research university and is located in Medford in the southeastern portion of the heritage area.

Rivier University is located in Nashua and is a Catholic liberal arts university offering undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees through day and evening courses through 60 programs. The university has a total student population of 2,341. Daniel Webster College, also located in Nashua, is a privately owned college specializing in aviation disciplines as well as business management. Atlantic Union College in Lancaster, MA is a college of the Seventh Day Adventist Church that closed in 2011 due to financial problems and is reopening with degree programs in theology and health sciences.

Key potential partners in education include:
- Historic and natural resource educational and interpretive sites
- Local school districts
- Massachusetts Historical Society
- American Antiquarian Society
- Mt Wachusett Community College
- Middlesex Community College
- Nashua Community College
- Tufts University

CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE

Land conservation is an important topic within Freedom’s Way. A look at the Land Use Map for Freedom’s Way (see Geography and Landscape section above) gives an indication of the large amount of forested land within the heritage area. Most towns have undertaken land conservation initiatives including the purchase of significant amounts of public land with support from state entities, regional planning councils, and non-profit organizations. Almost every town within the heritage area has its own land trust which owns and manages conserved lands within its boundaries. Land conservation and the preservation of open space have received broad public support at the local level.

Historically, central Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire were predominantly agricultural with respect to land use and economy. Throughout the Colonial era, towns were established with cooperative, interdependent local networks supporting a farm economy. In the early nineteenth century as a national and international market economy expanded, farming began to change, with increased production for sale in distant markets, a shift toward specialization in crop production, and regional competition.

By the mid-nineteenth century, New England’s poor glacial soils proved no match for the levels of agricultural production achieved in other regions. The development of a national railroad network accelerated regional competition, and New England’s agricultural decline increased. Widespread abandonment of farmland took place across New England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Successful farm operations adapted to and specialized in orchards, dairy, beef, and other products. The amount of land returning to successional woodland increased.

Today, much of the region has returned to forest. The Harvard Forest of Harvard University in Petersham has studied historic land use in Massachusetts and New England and continues to study its ecological condition and ramifications. In collaboration with other New England partners, Harvard Forest promotes the region’s return to forest as a great natural asset and advocates for community planning and forest management ‘best practices’ that will further strengthen and enhance this asset. A vision for the future of New England forests, the Wildlands and Woodlands Initiative, has been prepared that offers a strong direction for forest growth, management, and integration with local communities.
As mentioned, the conservation of forested lands in local towns has been widespread and has had local public support. State incentives such as the Community Preservation Act in Massachusetts have helped provide funding for conservation actions through purchase of land and/or purchase of conservation restrictions on land. Local land trusts provide a vehicle for \textit{grassroots conservation initiatives}. State and national regulations to preserve wetlands, abundant in New England’s glacial landscape, contribute to the amount of preserved lands and help establish networks and linkages with the goal of creating ecologically sustainable areas of conserved lands.

In addition to the extensive amount of locally conserved lands, large areas of wetland and forest are preserved by the state and federal governments as state forest and national wildlife refuges. \textbf{State and regional organizations} such as the Massachusetts Audubon Society and Nashua River Watershed Association actively work on large-scale conservation initiatives, often in collaboration with state and federal agencies, as well as advocating for land conservation and best practices management at the local level.

All of this conserved land provides extensive opportunities for public \textit{recreation}, especially trail development. Scenic driving, bicycling forested back roads, and paddling on the region’s rivers are also popular activities and are promoted by the regional visitor bureaus. The Montachusetts Regional Planning Commission has mapped trails on local town lands throughout its region, promotes trail usage, and is strategizing on ways to establish regional trail connections.

Trails and other recreation uses of conserved lands help promote the lands as community assets for the benefit of local residents. They are also a means through which to build support for continued conservation initiatives.

From a historical perspective, the Freedom’s Way landscape is a \textit{cultural landscape} that has been influenced and changed by a combination of natural factors and by the hand of man over many
centuries. The stories of the land, both natural and cultural, can be read in the land. This landscape is already being used for educational, interpretive, and recreational programming, and these uses have additional potential.

Key potential partners in conservation include:
- Local towns and land trusts
- Regional planning councils
- Harvard Forest
- Highstead (Wildlands and Woodlands Initiative)
- Beaver Brook Association
- Peabody Mill Environmental Center
- Fruitlands Museum
- Massachusetts Audubon Society
- Nashua River Watershed Association
- Montachusett Regional Trail Coalition
- Oxbow and Great Meadow National Wildlife Refuges
- Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

**AGRICULTURE**

As indicated above, the region’s conservation story is intimately intertwined with changes in agriculture and land use over the past hundreds of years. Native American agriculture, Colonial agriculture, market agriculture, and specialized forms of agriculture have each used the landscape differently and each has their own stories. These stories can be told in towns and on conserved lands throughout Freedom’s Way.

Today’s specialty farms of orchards, beef, garden crops, and farm markets are economic assets that are supported by state agencies such as the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources through its MassGrown program. Many are publicly accessible and are promoted as regional attractions by the regional visitor bureaus. They are an important part of their local communities. Freedom’s Way has recognized the importance of regional agriculture and has conducted workshops and created programming in its support.

Collaborators from several of New England’s leading universities and other organizations have prepared a vision for the future of agriculture in New England building upon New England’s history and the nature of the land. The recently released document, *A New England Food Vision*, analyzes the food needs and capabilities of the region and proposes how sustainable agriculture can be developed over the next fifty years to strengthen the social, economic, and environmental landscape and enhance quality of life.

Key potential partners in agriculture include:
- Local farms and farm markets
- Drumlín Farm
- Land for Good
- New Entry Sustainable Program
- Collaborators in *A New England Food Vision*
- Johnny Appleseed Trail Association
- Greater Merrimack Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources
- New Hampshire Department of Agriculture
ARTS AND CULTURE
At the state level, arts and culture are promoted through the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Both agencies promote the arts through a combination of grant programs, partnerships, and services for nonprofit cultural organizations, schools, communities, and artists. New Hampshire features a special program on folklife and traditional arts. Among its programs is a listing of traditional artists and cultural specialists who can present at schools and community gatherings.

The Massachusetts Cultural Council administers a Cultural Districts Initiative in which specific areas within communities that meet certain criteria may become designated as 'cultural districts,' become promoted, and be eligible for matching grants.

Cultural districts help local arts, humanities, and science organizations improve the quality and range of their public programs so that more local families can benefit from them. They enhance the experience for visitors and support local business. They attract artists, cultural organizations, and entrepreneurs of all kinds, enhancing property values and making communities more attractive.

The Cultural District Initiative makes special note of the history and authenticity of Massachusetts communities as a distinctive attribute. Within Freedom’s Way, only Concord Center has taken advantage of this statewide program by becoming designated as a Cultural District.

The two primary visitor bureaus within Freedom’s Way feature the following leading cultural attractions in their promotional materials:

- deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum
- Fitchburg Art Museum
- Gallery of African Art

Lincoln
Fitchburg
Clinton
- Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton

Significant local arts and cultural organizations are present in a number of communities and may be featured as attractions and centers of local educational and cultural activities similar to historical societies.

Key potential partners in arts and culture include:
- Local arts and culture organizations
- Local libraries
- deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum
- Fitchburg Art Museum
- Gallery of African Art
- Museum of Russian Icons
- Johnny Appleseed Trail Association
- Greater Merrimack Valley Conference and Visitors Bureau
- New Hampshire State Council on the Arts
- Massachusetts Cultural Council
- Massachusetts Humanities Foundation