

Draft Resolution of Support for a Line-Item Appropriation of \$375,000 for the Historic New Bridge Landing Park Commission

WHEREAS, New Jersey “was the seat of the [Revolutionary] war for several years, during the contest between Great-Britain and America. Her losses, both of men and property, in proportion to the population and wealth of the State, was greater than any other of the thirteen States ... the many military achievements performed by the Jersey soldiers, give this State one of the first ranks among her sisters in a military view, and entitle her to a share of praise in the accomplishment of the late glorious revolution, that bears no proportion to her size.” (English historian William Winterbotham, 1795) And

WHEREAS, as residents of Bergen County, “We stand on Revolutionary ground, hallowed by martial mementos of the past ... New Jersey was battle ground in the war of the Revolution; and our good county of Bergen, though not distinguished by those brilliant though brief successes that gave luster to the names of Trenton, Princeton and Monmouth, was the *constant arena of war*. Tradition has well preserved the story of many a fray, and the sufferings and stout resistance of the Bergen yeomanry, who with a few inglorious exceptions, in the years when the stronghold of the enemy was in our great city, stood shoulder to shoulder in that protracted strife and slept not but on their arms.” (Abraham O. Zabriskie, Esq., of Hackensack, July 22, 1847) And

WHEREAS, New Bridge is home to *The Bridge That Saved a Nation*, which General Washington and the retreating garrison of Fort Lee crossed on November 20, 1776, thus preserving the cause of American independence and the democratic principle of self-government, as immortalized in eyewitness Thomas Paine’s *American Crisis* (December 23, 1776), beginning with the words, “These are the times that try men’s souls....” And

WHEREAS, Thomas Paine specifically noted, “Our first object was to secure the bridge over the Hackensack, which laid up the river between the enemy and us, about six miles from us, and three from them. General Washington arrived in about three-quarters of an hour, and marched at the head of the troops towards the bridge, which place I expected we should have a brush for; however, they did not choose to dispute it with us, and the greatest part of our troops went over the bridge....” And

WHEREAS, Historic New Bridge Landing survived more of the American Revolution than any other spot in America, having served as a battleground, military headquarters, encampment ground, fortification and intelligence-gathering post in every year of the war; and

WHEREAS, American soldiers fought and died upon this ground, leaving future generations with a sacred trust for its stewardship in their honor and memory; and

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey presented the use and income of the confiscated estate of Jan Zabriskie at New Bridge, to Major-General Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, Inspector-General of the Continental troops, on December 23, 1783, in recognition of his “many and signal services to the United States of America,” and

WHEREAS, General Steuben “thoroughly rebuilt” the Zabriskie-Steuben House before selling the premises in 1788, making it the only extant dwelling owned by him in the United States; and

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey, acting through the Steuben House Commission, took title to the historic Steuben House through eminent domain proceedings on June 28, 1928, and opened it to the public as a State Historic Site and museum headquarters of the Bergen County Historical Society on September 23, 1939; and

WHEREAS, the Zabriskie-Steuben House at Historic New Bridge Landing is a cynosure of Jersey Dutch sandstone architecture and one of the most iconic colonial landmarks in Bergen County, the State of New Jersey, and the United States of America; and

WHEREAS, Americans need and desire to experience history in the storied places where it was made; and

WHEREAS, heritage tourism is a clean industry with a large potential economic benefit to the state and the region; and

WHEREAS, tourism is a \$34.7 billion industry in New Jersey; and

WHEREAS, New York City became America's top tourist destination with 50 million visitors in 2011. At \$47 billion a year, tourism has grown to be New York's fifth-largest industry and the fastest-growing sector of its economy, and

WHEREAS, given its location, ease of access, and significant resources appealing to heritage and ecological tourists, Historic New Bridge Landing holds great audience potential; and

WHEREAS, Historic New Bridge Landing promotes "what is uniquely New Jersey." And

WHEREAS, despite the enthusiasm of numerous volunteers and thousands of visitors, the availability of document and artifact collections of the 112-year-old Bergen County Historical Society, and the acquisition of over \$2 million in property, this state historic park remains closed, except for special events; and

WHEREAS, Bergen County taxpayers sent \$1.1 billion more in sales and income taxes (fiscal 2010) to Trenton than the county received in state aid; and

WHEREAS, state assets at Historic New Bridge Landing continue to deteriorate, threatening our irreplaceable heritage with demolition by neglect; and

WHEREAS, the Historic New Bridge Landing Park Commission is a potential public model for a more effective and efficient operation of state assets as well as the expenditure of state funds, not being subject to civil service regulations, which eliminates the public burden of management costs, while providing private professional oversight without compensation from the state treasury; and

WHEREAS, under Public Law 2009, CHAPTER 45, approved April 23, 2009, “the commission shall administer the Historic New Bridge Landing State Park, including but not limited to the Steuben House; and (2) any State funds appropriated to the Department of Environmental Protection or the Division of Parks and Forestry in the department specifically for, or related to the administration of, the Steuben House or the Historic New Bridge Landing State Park shall be reallocated to the Historic New Bridge Landing Park Commission for the purposes of the administration of the Historic New Bridge Landing State Park; and

WHEREAS, under Public Law 2009, CHAPTER 45, approved April 23, 2009, “The commission may, in addition, at any time request the Governor and the Legislature to appropriate funds for commission purposes.”

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the (Name of Endorsing Entity) supports the Historic New Bridge Landing Park Commission’s request for a line-item appropriation in the state budget of \$375,000 for operating expenses in order to take over administration of the Steuben House and

other state lands at Historic New Bridge Landing and to relieve the Department of Environmental Protection and the Division of Parks and Forestry of all its perceived responsibilities over buildings and lands under the Commission's jurisdiction. We also support the commission's request for direct access to capital funds for the care and development of the Steuben House and for all other capital projects on state-owned and operated properties at Historic New Bridge Landing.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT copies of this resolution be forwarded to the following:

Governor Chris Christie

Paul A. Sarlo, Chair, Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee

Brian A. Stack, vice-chair, Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee

John J. Burzichelli, chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee and vice-chair, Assembly Budget Committee

L. Grace Spencer, vice-chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee

Gary S. Schaer, chair, Assembly Budget Committee

Kathleen A. Donovan, Bergen County Executive

The Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders

Michael Trepicchio, chairman, Historic New Bridge Landing Park Commission