Executive Summary

Constitution Hall is like no other historic building anywhere in America. Here in the 1850s were principal events of the important American era, the nation’s “Prelude to Civil War.”

For today and tomorrow, those historic events have brought a rare and beneficial distinction by the National Register of Historic Places, that of National Level importance. By continuing to restore Constitution Hall, this valuable tourism advantage will be fully promoted.

Heritage tourism is travel that includes the “experience” of authentic sites in a unique story of place. Topeka — in particular the 400 block of S. Kansas Avenue — is the authentic home of two unique freedom actions that are also nationally important among valiant battles for Freedom in the United States.

The very name Constitution Hall attests to its importance. From the 19th century town of Topeka this landmark hosted Topeka’s accomplishments under the Topeka Constitution and Free State Legislature. Nearly a century later, a second nationally important Topeka initiative culminated in arguably the most important U.S. Supreme Court case ever decided. This was the 20th century’s Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, of which Federal case trial occurred across the street from Constitution Hall in the Old Federal Building. These two compelling stories fully promoted together, and with other Topeka attractions, will drive visitors to stay here longer to see, learn and experience this unique historic setting.

However, another wonderful benefit exists. Convention and tourism planners strive to locate seminars, gatherings, conferences and summits in cities that provide cultural opportunities for families of attendees and when it comes to nationally important historic sites, Topeka has no real match in this part of our Country. When completed Constitution Hall will be an ideal setting for convention receptions and

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1 Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places listing statement, National Park Service.
frontier-style dinners catered by the host hotel. Events and tours held here in Topeka’s storehouse of the Underground Railroad route northward into Canada will be among the most memorable a visitor can have. Inside this historic hall, colorful Free State leaders James Lane and railroad builder Cyrus K. Holiday stood up for freedom, both social and economic. This exceptional opportunity will make Topeka a particularly captivating city for regional and national planners of conventions and sporting events.

The National Park Service invested in Topeka for the National Historic Site at the Monroe School. Topeka has invested some funds in stabilization of Constitution Hall. There is no other funding than proposed transient guest tax funding to complete its structural stabilization, provide a secure building facade and install basic visitor amenities. While Constitution Hall continues irregularly open to the public, its power to increase economic development and sales tax collection through Topeka tourism is untapped.

Friends of the Free State Capitol Inc. requests $935,000 in Transient Guest Tax funding. Matching funds of $235,000 will be raised privately as matching funds in this phase of the project costing a total $1,170,000. An additional $200,000 will be privately raised to complete the surrounding park and exhibits designed to serve overnight visitors.

Topeka’s Intersection of Freedoms on S. Kansas Avenue

The Constitution Hall project received significant community boosting when the Topeka Downtown Rotary Club and Brown v. Board of Education National History Site joined with Friends of the Free State Capitol Inc. for a new pocket park in the site’s open green space. This commemorates Rotary’s first 100 years in Topeka. About 100 Rotarians gave an average of nearly $300 for what has been called “Freedom’s Crossroads at Topeka’s Intersection of Freedom.” The park is across the street from the Old Federal Building, site of the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka trial. Outdoor signage will help tell the Freedom story of both sites and encourage visitors to explore Topeka’s historical sites. A Wi-Fi accessible “hot-spot” and video board will stream messages that encourage touring of all Topeka heritage sites.

This major commitment by Rotarians was made with the belief that its visitors will be treated to a fully-functioning capital city landmark, not the yet unfinished project at such a critical junction of the refurbished downtown, vibrant NOTO and future riverfront recreational area.
Tourism and Economic Benefits

Constitution Hall, centrally located in the city’s historic core, is the capital city’s historical anchor connecting the restored Kansas Statehouse, commercial district, Kansas riverfront, North Topeka arts district, future Oregon Trail park project and the Great Overland Station. Constitution Hall is the only downtown building surviving from the route of the Oregon Trail (and likely in all of Topeka.)

A primary economic feature of Constitution Hall is attraction of Civil War related heritage tourism, of which studies show this form of tourism is consistently popular. A leading national study shows:  

- Unique historic sites result in longer stays by out-of-town conventioneers and travelers.  
- These sites bring more money spent locally than by other focuses in travel,  
- Help make private investment in commercial property viable, and  
- Increase local sales tax collections and help attract new residents.

**Historic Heart of S. Kansas Avenue a Pre-Civil War Battleground**

The 1854 Kansas Nebraska Act provided settlers the vote on their state’s slavery status. In March 1855, free state men laid the foundation for what became Constitution Hall when just days earlier, pro slavery forces had plundered their federal voting rights. Kansas had become a prize of contention by the abolitionist North and proslavery South. Both sides understood that future Kansas leaders would—one way or the other—tip the long-standing balance of Congressional power and spread slavery across the West.

On July 4, 1856, soldiers from Forts Riley and Leavenworth marched on Topeka under proclamations by President Franklin Pierce. Colonel Edwin V. Sumner’s 400 troops thundered down Kansas Avenue on horseback. The long fuses of cannons alight and aimed at Constitution Hall, Sumner stood before the Free State legislature to announce it the “most painful duty of my life” to disperse them. Surrounding in front were 500 free state settlers prepared for a battle. A horrified Eastern press looked on as military forces took up arms against American citizens exercising their Constitutional Rights to Freedom of Assembly and Freedom of Speech. Had calm not prevailed, the Civil War could have started on Kansas Avenue in 1856 and not as it did five years later at Fort Sumter.

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2 Downtown Topeka Historic Resources Survey by the City of Topeka. Rosin Preservation, Kansas City, MO.  

Why Constitution Hall in Topeka Tourism?

This principal historic site will substantially assist in the attraction of conventions and special events, and result in attendees staying longer in Topeka. “Civil War sites are Tourism magnets:”

- Civil War site visitors stay in town longer and are repeat visitors,
- Form a U.S. market of more than 72.2 million eager affluent adult travelers,
- Civil War related tourism brings stays twice as long and thus expenditures double the average.

Constitution Hall will help generate increases in sales and surrounding property tax revenue:

- At 20 Civil War sites, each visitor’s expenses brought in an average $2.92 to local governments.
- Civil War sites spur investment and the boosting of property values and
- These heritage site visitors flock to anniversary and special events.

Subject-specific research finds that cultural and heritage tourists are:

- More frequent travelers, making 5.01 leisure trips vs 3.98 for non-cultural/heritage travelers,
- More frequent business and international travelers,
- Prefer that their leisure travel be “educational” and travel farther for experiences they seek.

New Visitors

Constitution Hall compares in scale and primary significance with the First Missouri State Capitol, which was also a Territorial Capitol. This building in St. Charles, once blighted and near demolition, attracts 80,000 day visitors and an additional 60,000 for special events annually.

Those who take Kansas Statehouse tours total 60,000 annually, not including self-guided tours believed to twice-exceed this sum. Annual downtown events attract 100,000 area residents. High School and Little League sports events attract many out-of-town visitors to Topeka.

The Freedoms Frontier National Heritage Area provides heritage tourism support for 41 counties in Kansas and Missouri, including Topeka and Shawnee County. Many travelers focus on tourism of active and historic capitolts nationwide. Brown v Board of Education National Historic Site hosts about 30,000 visitors annually. Based on support for heritage tourism and the capital city location, convenient access for hundreds of thousands of Kansas Scenic Byways travelers on Interstates 70 and 35, and wide interest in Civil War heritage sites while attending conventions and events:

- Constitution Hall may draw upon a motivated segment of 250,000 passing travelers annually.
- Initially, 10 percent of this projection may add one overnight stay in Topeka or stop overnight to tour Topeka’s two nationally important historic sites along with the Kansas Statehouse.
- By availability of area parking, motor coach access, amenities and volunteer staffing by local partnership including the Oregon Trail project, a restored Constitution Hall could readily accommodate up to 100,000 visitors annually (initially, attendance would compare with area attractions while new visitors add overnight stays in response to new marketing.)

However, of the 60,000 recorded annual Kansas Statehouse visitors, an estimated 40 percent or nearly 25,000 are believed to be out-of-town adult travelers who would specifically extend their Topeka stay by one night to also see the Free State Territorial Capitol and Brown v Board of Education anchor sites. From other considerable sources cited, an estimated additional 10,000 new visitors would add an overnight stay for the same purpose. This potential 35,000 more overnight visitors would add–applying the standard of .7 room nights per person–24,500 new room nights.

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5 Ibid.. Note: Based on site questionnaires and data reflecting subject sites in Missouri and other states
6 The Cultural & Heritage Traveler Study. Laura Mandala, Mandala Research. Washington, D.C.
7 Telephone discussion with Mike Bell, director of sales, Visit Topeka Inc.
8 This theoretical “reach” may in fact be higher by twice, however; the applicant is not versed in travel analysis.
9 To reach this potential, a Topeka heritage tourism marketing program will be necessary.
Local Return on Investment

*Increase in room nights and transient guest tax income:*

Topeka room nights in 2014 totaled 551,216, which provided TGT income of $2,890,486, or an average of $5.24 TGT per room night.  

- Discussed above is how the fully opened Constitution Hall will add new and extended visits for an initial total of 24,500 room nights annually. These additional room nights would thus provide nearly $128,500 per year in new local transient guest tax income annually.

*Increase in Sales Tax Income:*

State collection of applicable 2014 sales taxes totaled $146 million in Topeka.  

Per capita, this sum in balance of trade is a very positive factor of 1.32, which is indicative of the high draw of Topeka among those making out-of-town trips to purchase goods and services in Kansas. A break-out of data sufficient to estimate a tourism related increase is unavailable.

However, an applicable guide is the sum of our local sales tax, or typically 2.65%. An estimated average daily expenditure by tourists is $140.

- It is reasonable and conservative to estimate that that Constitution Hall will extend and bring new stays of convention visitors by 35,000 annually, not including day trippers numbering 20,000, for a total 55,000 visitors annually when the building is restored and heritage tourism marketing is created. Added local sales tax revenue, based on a daily total average expenditure of $100—more than a third less than the average per-person costs of dining, shopping, entertainment, sales tax on lodging and other travel costs incurred locally, would provide nearly $145,750 in new local sales tax annually.

*Summary of Potential Return on Investment in Fully Opening Constitution Hall:*

Note: A margin of error cast 25 percent downward is included in each sum (from above) and the total sum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summation</th>
<th>Sum</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Transient Guest Tax Income</td>
<td>$96,500 annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New General Sales Tax Income</td>
<td>$109,250 annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Projected Return of Income</td>
<td>$205,750 annually</td>
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</table>

*Area Organizations in Support*

- Leading organizations support fully opening this anchor historic site for heritage tourism. Among these are Topeka Heartland Visioning, the Kansas Historical Society, Downtown Topeka Inc., Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site, Freedoms Frontier National Heritage Area and many other local individuals and groups.

![Before](before.jpg) [Left, near total collapse in 1999 and after initial Transient Guest Tax funding, in 2011](after.jpg)

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10 Data provided by VisitTopekaInc.
12 Ibid.
13 This and related sales tax data provided by the City of Topeka. Nikki Lee, Administrative Services.
Project Budget

Current (2013-2014) transient guest tax funding of $236,000 and private match funding is committed for urgent repair of original second floor and roof framing. The requested 2016-2028 funding will allow other urgently needed work.

Competitive federal historic site funding is long discontinued by the Congress. The State of Kansas' typically one-time award fund has been utilized. Limited local transient guest tax funds, intended in 2002 for Constitution Hall and several specific projects, have instead been more widely expended. Continuing thorough investigation into approach reveals no other applicable funding sources.

Funding herein requested will substantially open Constitution Hall as a Topeka attraction sustained independently by sufficient site income and local partnership cross-management (see page 7.)

Dedicated transient guest tax funding is critical to attract and assure private donors. Options for state or federal management are dim. Jennie Chinn, Executive director of the Kansas Historical Society, states;14

In the past, the Kansas Historical Society has provided an $1,800 grant to assist in the nomination of the Free State Capitol to the National Register of Historic Places and a $35,000 grant to fund an essential Historic Structure Report, the project’s 154 page intensive research document. Historic events at Constitution Hall in Topeka are significant in both state and U.S. history. . . . The Kansas Historical Society has no pass-through funds for restoration of Constitution Hall. The Historical Society receives only a small amount of money to cover the cost of preserving its own state-owned properties across the state, so there is no money available to take on outside projects. For this reason we hope the City of Topeka will be able continue its support for Constitution Hall.

Constitution Hall must be restored under the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Restoration. While this ensures authenticity necessary to visitor experiences and protection of National Register properties, restoration costs are greater than for most construction. The project budget follows an opinion of probable costs by Slemmons Associates Architects, consultation with area contractors and preservation guidelines review.

Budget Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transient guest tax funding request</td>
<td>$935,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private restoration match</td>
<td>$235,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privately funded exhibits and landscape</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unrequested Completion Budget</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,370,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Requested Project Budget

**BASEMENT**

- Fire suppression, utility lines, lighting $45,000
- Front and rear foundation repairs $25,000

Subtotal: $140,000

**FIRST FLOOR**

- Joist repair and lighting ADA qualified toilets, major flooring/wall repair $110,000
- $85,000

Subtotal: $195,000

**SECOND FLOOR & ROOF**

- ADA qualified toilets, major flooring/wall repair $85,000
- $90,000

Subtotal: $175,000

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14 Ms. Chinn noted that after project completion, limited site management partnership might be possible should the Kansas governor and state legislature approve.
PROVISION OF BUILDING FAÇADE

Brick removal, stone on masonry backing, seven large windows and two front doors, foundation and roof connections 355,000

BASIC HEATING, VENTILATION, COOLING 80,000

FIRE EGRESS

One ADA qualified elevator and stair on the west side in accessory structure 225,000

Total Private / Public Funds $1,170,000

Project Timeline and Sustainability

Site restoration will be complete in 24-30 months after bond proceeds become available. Future guest bookings will be accepted accordingly. Funding will commend a larger community board in project oversight and volunteer tour leaders. Additional tour scripts are now in progress.

Constitution Hall is independently sustainable. Building leasehold income, from partial retail or office rental of first floor space, is in today’s market valued at $24,000 per annum. (This floor area would likely return to city tax rolls. Federal tax credits may be applicable by tenants.) Special events rental income is valued at $50,000 based on 100 paid events annually, averaging $500 per event. Visitor tour fees of $2.00 per adult, based on initial total visitors and free admittance to children, would add at least $50,000. Total income is thus at least $124,000, which sum will afford a strong maintenance fund and contribution to a salaried staff shared locally.

Floor Plan for Tourism Use

Diagrams below display tourism site usage. This program compares with the authentic original use of the building in the 1855-1860 period of National Register of Historic Places significance.

Tours by appointment: tour@oldkansascapitol.org

END OF DOCUMENT