

New Bedford Celebrates Unveiling of Fredrick Douglass Statue and Opening of Abolition Row Park

On Friday, June 23rd, Mayor Jon Mitchell, along with elected officials and the New Bedford Historical Society held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for Abolition Row Park. The ceremony featured the unveiling of the much-anticipated statue of Frederick Douglass.

Located on Seventh Street, the park has been over a decade in the making, spearheaded by the New Bedford Historical Society. A combination of state, local, and private funding made the park's creation possible, including over \$250K in Community Preservation Act funds, and a \$295K PARC grant from the state, as well as receiving donations from several foundations.

"I want to congratulate the work of the Historic Commission and the residents who came together to develop this historic park in collaboration with my Administration and the Council," said Mayor Jon Mitchell. "Abolition Row Park will exalt in the City's leading role in the anti-slavery movement. Its central feature is a long-overdue statue of Frederick Douglass, who would become America's conscience on the issue of slavery in the anti-bellum era. That Douglass sought refuge in New Bedford is a testament to the values on which the City was founded, and his statue will serve as an enduring source of pride and inspiration for City residents and visitors alike."

Coinciding with the park design and planning, the City began preparing for the establishment of a local historic district along Seventh Street to help tell the unique story of the neighborhood and to ensure that the properties along that

street be recognized for their historical and architectural significance and protected from changes that could irreversibly alter their architectural integrity.

“Abolition Row Park is a wonderful example of a successful partnership between the City of New Bedford and the New Bedford Historical Society,” said the President of the New Bedford Historical Society, Lee Blake. “Together we weathered the challenges of Covid and used state and City tools for community development, like the Community Preservation Act and other state funding. We were able to develop an overgrown lot to create a new City attraction that tells an important story about the Abolition Movement and the Underground Railroad.”

The term “Abolition Row” and its association with Seventh Street can be attributed to the New Bedford Historical Society, which began utilizing the designation as a means of placemaking, promoting the location as being significant in New Bedford’s role in the Abolition Movement and the Underground Railroad. In recent years, Seventh Street and Abolition Row have become synonymous with the story of the Underground Railroad and Frederick Douglass.

Between 1790 and the Civil War, New Bedford became known not only as the whaling capital of the world but also as one of the greatest asylums for fugitive former slaves. From the 1830s to the Civil War, the period of greatest abolitionist activity, nearly every one of the most active abolitionists in New Bedford lived within or directly abutting the Abolition Row District. The City is home to 15 Nationally Registered Districts and seven National Historic Landmarks, three of which exist within the Abolition Row Local Historic District.