Harrisburg – 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania will bestow its prestigious Commonwealth Award on a state representative who advocated for Pennsylvania’s “Elm Street” program and the CEO of a Harrisburg non-profit that has contributed greatly to the capital city’s growth.

The Commonwealth Award for Contribution by a Public Official will go to Pennsylvania Representative Robert Freeman, D-Easton. Freeman wrote and sponsored the legislation that established Pennsylvania’s “Elm Street” project to revitalize existing neighborhoods and compliment the “Main Street” program that assists older commercial districts. Freeman is also being honored for his 20 year-plus legislative career as a strong advocate of “Smart Growth” policies.

The president and CEO of the Harristown Development Corporation, Russell C. Ford, will receive the Commonwealth Award for Contribution by a Citizen for his contributions to the development of downtown Harrisburg, as evidenced by numerous new and rehabilitated structures, including the Strawberry Square office tower, the Harrisburg Hilton, the Harrisburg Transportation Center and the Whitaker Center for Science and the Arts. Ford, a former city planner, is being honored for his visionary leadership.

The event is scheduled for Tuesday afternoon, June 9, at the Whitaker Center in Harrisburg. The winners were chosen for their efforts to meet the objectives of 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania, the state’s leading advocacy group for “Smart Growth” development.

“Russell Ford and Bob Freeman typify the leadership qualities of public officials and individual citizens that are truly making a difference in the quality of life in communities throughout the commonwealth”, said Judy Schwank, President of 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania. She added that “These visionary leaders, through their personal commitment to smart growth principles, have positively impacted the lives of countless citizens.”

Schwank took note that “All of the individual winners hail from rapidly growing areas of the commonwealth and their work reflects an understanding of the need to reinvest in core communities like Harrisburg or Easton making them more attractive to longtime as well as new residents.”
In addition to selecting Freeman and Ford for the Commonwealth Awards, a five-
member panel of the 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania board of directors also recognized
two others with special jury presentations:

- Becky Bradley, the director of planning for the City of Easton, who is being
  honored as a public official for a revision of the city’s zoning and development
  ordinances. The new ordinances, developed after a two-year task force led by
  Bradley, rejects suburban-style development and promotes walkable
  neighborhoods, mixed use of properties and economic growth.

- Christopher Bennick, the CEO of Habitat for Humanity of the Lehigh Valley, is
  being recognized as a citizen for his leadership in acquiring $3 million to
  purchase 17 acres near the top of South Mountain in Bethlehem. On that site, 27
  single homes were constructed at half the market cost thanks to volunteer labor
  and donated or discounted building materials. In addition, 12 of the 17 acres
  consisting of wildlife and woods were preserved as open space in the
  development.

Keynote speaker for the awards ceremony at the Whitaker Center is Christopher B.
Leinberger, an expert on land use strategy and development whose multi-layered career
includes experience as a business executive, professor and author. He is a frequent
nationwide speaker, author of magazine articles, book chapters and books and currently
he is a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institute in Washington, D.C. Leinberger has an
international reputation as a promoter of transforming both urban and suburban
downtowns into examples of “walkable urbanism.”

10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania, which has offices in Harrisburg, Pittsburgh and
Philadelphia, is the leading statewide voice for great places to live and work. 10,000
Friends works with citizens, organizations and public officials to create land use,
infrastructure and governance policies and practices that protect our resources and
strengthen our economy.