



The Cliff Walk Commission Year End Summary 2023



Figure 1: Cliff Walk 40 Steps by Thomas Freeman

A. Cliff Walk Commission Meetings

1. Schedule of Cliff Walk Commission Meetings: The Cliff Walk Commission met 10 times in 2023 (no meetings in August or November).

2. Cliff Walk Commission Members:

Chair: Peter Janaros (attended 10 meetings)

Vice Chair: John Hirschboeck (attended 8 meetings)

Secretary: Donna Lennox (attended 10 meetings)

Members:

David McLaughlin, resigned October (attended 7 meetings)

Christopher Jones, resigned October (attended 8 meetings)

Marc Lewinstein, new Commission member November (attended 1 meeting)

Please note that two Commission members resigned in 2023. The Commission would like to thank David McLaughlin, who completed his two terms on the Commission. We would also like to thank Chris Jones, who moved out of state, and had been a volunteer and Commission member for more than four years. Their contributions to preserving and enhancing the Cliff Walk are too many to mention here, and the Commission is extremely grateful for everything they have done.

We welcome Marc Lewinstein as the newest member of the Commission. Marc has been an active volunteer for the Cliff Walk, and the Commission welcomes him in his new role as Commission Member.

3. Other Meeting Attendees:

- Scott Wheeler, City of Newport Superintendent of Parks, Grounds and Forestry
- Professor Samuel Sacco, Salve Regina University Sitting Commission Representative

Guests, Friends, and Volunteers of the Cliff Walk who attended meetings:

- Salve Regina University Intern Kasha Kazuba
- Peter Rice, Kathy Connerton
- Cliff Walk Society (Russ Johnson, Donna Byron, Peter Slom)

- Newport Irish Heritage Association (Richard O’Neil, Richard Kelly, James Mahoney)
- Eileen Kurtis, The James L. Maher Center
- Members of the media

B. The Cliff Walk Commission Mission

Goal

Protect and preserve the Cliff Walk as a popular and historic National Recreational Trail and an important State and local asset.

Mission

Advise and assist the City of Newport on critical matters pertaining to the Cliff Walk and its proper maintenance while ensuring the natural character of the Walk is protected (to the extent possible) for the public to enjoy, now and into the future.

Purpose

To preserve, maintain and enhance the Walk, ensuring public access and safety.

Tasks

Assist City Staff in identifying maintenance and encroachment issues that require attention.

Ensure the public is aware of important developments, enhancements, accessibility, and environmental issues pertaining to the Walk.

Explore funding opportunities to maintain, preserve and enhance the public’s experience on the Walk.

C. Major Accomplishments and Activities

1. March 3, 2022 Slope Failure between Webster St. and Narragansett Ave.

On March 3, 2022, a section of the Cliff Walk, just south of 40 Steps between Webster St. and Narragansett Ave., suffered a significant slope failure. Due to the slope failure, a part of the Cliff Walk was rendered impassable and remains closed for the foreseeable future. As reported in the Year End Summary 2022, The City of Newport, with the assistance of the Commission, made some changes to keep the Walk open until the slope is repaired.

- A detour was created between Webster St. and Narragansett Ave., so that walkers could continue walking the Cliff Walk, avoiding the area that is closed. The Cliff Walk remains open from Memorial Blvd. to Bailey’s Beach, except for this one small section between 40 Steps/Narragansett Ave. and Webster St. - where the detour is located. The detour is well marked and there are barriers in place.
- Signage was posted to inform walkers about the detour.
- The city installed a new sidewalk on the ocean side of Ochre Point Ave. to make the detour easier for walkers to traverse.

- Information about the detour was posted on the City Website, the Discover Newport Website, on the Cliff Walk general information line, on the 2022 (and 2023) Cliff Walk printed map, and on the AllTrails App.

2023 Updates:

- A Governor’s Declaration of Disaster Emergency was issued June 13, 2023. This declaration is a necessary step that allows RI’s Department of Transportation (RIDOT) to seek federal relief funds from the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), to repair the damage to the Cliff Walk that occurred in 2022.
- Additional signage was added at 40 Steps and Webster Ave. to further explain the detour. This signage was proposed, then designed, and funded by Dennis Bristow, a volunteer on the Cliff Walk.
- Commission is working with the City to pursue a federal PROTECT grant to fund repairs to the Cliff Walk.

2. Charitable Foundation Grant

Major Progress was made in 2023 on this task to obtain funding for a grant for the Cliff Walk. The Commission would like the grant to be used to generate a management plan and detailed engineering study of the entire Cliff Walk. It would identify issues like erosion and how they can be remedied, and would be used in applying for additional grants. Salve Regina students, under the direction of Professor Sam Sacco, completed the grant application needed to obtain the grant in 2022. The grant was submitted on January 14, 2023. The foundation considering the grant has requested further information. This request is currently being updated by Patricia Reynolds, Director of Planning and Economic Development for the City of Newport.

Any grant money received will be deposited in the Cliff Walk Restricted account maintained by the City of Newport.

3. Salve Regina University Working Group

The Salve Regina University working group was established in April 2023. The purpose of the working group is to incorporate a long-term relationship between Salve Regina University, the Commission, and others community organizations, in order to develop some continuity between projects, extend projects over multiple semesters, and be multi-curricular/disciplinary. The working group includes Michael Semenza, Special Assistant to the President, Salve Regina University professors and staff, the Commission, the City of Newport (Scott Wheeler, City of Newport Superintendent of Parks, Grounds and Forestry), Discover Newport, and others.

The first accomplishment of the group was to establish the Cliff Walk Ambassador Program. The vision of this program is to have students act as guides on the Cliff Walk, engaging with visitors from around the world. Salve Regina University created a 3-credit course through the Compass program for the Ambassador program starting in the Fall 2023 semester. There are 6 student Ambassadors for Fall, 2023, spending (in total) about 50 hours a week on the Walk. Students receive training in 4 modules to

prepare them to be Ambassadors: Geology and Environment, History, Economic Impact, and Theater/Communications.

4. Fund raising

In order to support our mission of preservation, maintenance, and enhancement of the walk, the Commission continued to collect funds through the CliffWalkTogether campaign in 2023.

5. Elimination of all barbed wire from the Walk

Starting in 2020, the Commission has been working to eliminate all the barbed wire from the Cliff Walk. We feel the presence of barbed wire is unsightly and unwelcoming. We continued to work on this in 2023 and have made great progress - almost all of the barbed wire has been removed from the Cliff Walk.



Figure 2: Rosecliff Before



Figure 3: Rosecliff After



Figure 4: Seacliff Apartment Before



Figure 5: Seacliff Apartment After

6. Maintaining, Preserving and Enhancing the Cliff Walk

- a. Maintenance tasks performed by City of Newport staff in 2023 include (but not limited to):

- Reconstruction of the Cliff Walk sign on Memorial Blvd.
- Clearing of vegetation, grass mowing, weed control, and work on elimination of trails on the grassy slopes in the Seaview Ave. area
- The Newport Fire Department modernized the emergency response procedures on the Cliff Walk
- Emergency repair of the restrooms July 7-10, 2023 -
 - On July 7th, it was discovered that both restrooms at 40 Steps were not in working order. City staff investigated and determined the sewerage pump station had failed. City staff members were able to get the restrooms open again by Monday July 10 by repairing the pumps.
- Installation of a hand rail for the stairs at Cliff Terrace
- Installation of new signs for parking at 40 Steps and donating to the Cliff Walk
- Installation of the new Wayfinder signs
- Added gravel to the edges of the walk to improve walker safety

b. Volunteer Activities - So much of the maintenance and preservation of the Cliff Walk is done by our volunteers. Volunteer Chris Jones spent time on the Cliff Walk - over 150 days in 2023! His maintenance activities included the following:

- Fixing the pavement in front of the Rest Rooms at 40 Steps
- Cutting back vegetation, picking up litter, removing love locks, stickers, and removing graffiti
- Cleaning swales and gratings to improve drainage
- Repair and painting of the Trail Marker posts
- Generating monthly reports on the condition and status of the Cliff Walk

7. Publications and Communications

a. Printed Cliff Walk Maps

The fourth edition of the free Official Cliff Walk Map was produced in partnership with Discover Newport with 85,000 copies distributed. Discover Newport fully funded the 2023 map, incurring all the costs for designing and printing the map.

The map is distributed to visitors at the Discover Newport Center, and at many of the hotels and venues in Newport and Middletown. There are also two map holders on the Cliff Walk itself, one at Memorial Blvd. and one at 40 Steps.

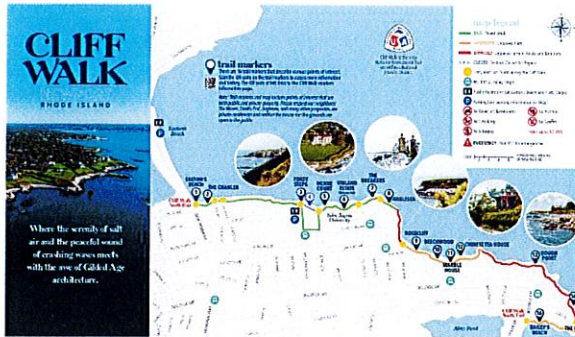


Figure 6: Cliff Walk Map - front panel



Figure 7: Cliff Walk Map - back panel

- b. New Point of Interest web pages are now hosted by the City of Newport.

The Cliff Walk has 16 Points of Interest, marked by a Trail Post with a QR code. When the QR code is scanned with a smartphone, a web page displays with information about the Point of Interest. These webpages were incorporated into the City of Newport’s website in 2023. Go to this link to take a look -

<https://www.cityofnewport.com/en-us/city-hall/departments/public-services/tree-parks-open-space/cliff-walk/points-of-interest>

- c. New Wayfinder signs

The Cliff Walk has 8 Wayfinder signs that provide information to visitors on the Cliff Walk. They were outdated and needed to be replaced to provide information consistent with the new printed maps, and to show the location of the detour at 40 Steps and Webster St. (in place due to the slope failure). The new Wayfinders were fully funded by Discover Newport and installed by the City of Newport.



Figure 8: Wayfinder at 40 Steps

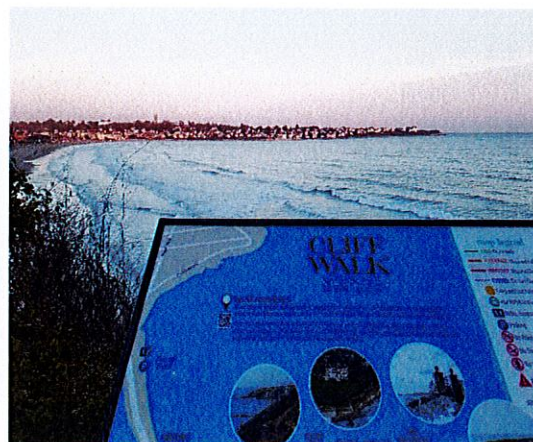


Figure 9: Wayfinder at Memorial Blvd.

8. Adopt a Spot at 40 Steps – the Maher Center

The Maher Center adopted the garden at 40 Steps, planting a vibrant selection of perennials and annuals in the garden. Volunteers from the Maher Center created a beautiful focal point at 40 Steps that will be enjoyed by our visitors for many years to come.



Figure 10: Maher Center garden Volunteers



Figure 11: Garden at 40 Steps

9. Economic Impact of the Cliff Walk on the City of Newport

- a. Based on a 2018 Salve Regina University study, the Cliff Walk attracts about 1.3 million visitors a year. The economic impact to the city is approximately \$250 million.
- b. Parking Revenues generated by the Cliff Walk -

Parking fees are collected for parking at Narragansett Ave./40 Steps. Also, a substantial amount of the parking fees collected from the west parking lot at First Beach and on Memorial Blvd. can be attributed to people visiting the Cliff Walk. Gross parking revenues in 2023 were about \$87,000 from Narragansett Ave. and \$81,000 from Memorial Blvd.

D. Priorities for 2024

1. Continue to move forward with the restoration/repair of the Cliff Walk resulting from the 2022 slope failure by pursuing a federal PROTECT grant with the City.
2. Obtain funding for a grant for the Cliff Walk, to be used to generate a management plan and detailed engineering study of the entire Cliff Walk. The study would identify issues like erosion and how they can be remedied, and would be used in applying for additional grants to maintain and preserve the Cliff Walk.
3. Additional restrooms, as in past years, are desperately needed on the Cliff Walk. The current 2 restrooms at 40 Steps cannot handle the number of people who visit the Cliff Walk (over 1 million people per year). Additional restrooms are needed as soon as possible.
4. Working with the Salve Regina University working group, strengthen the Ambassador program and work toward a more robust social media presence. Also work with the University to increase the number of Trail Markers to include more information about the environmental features of the Walk.
5. Continue to maintain and improve the condition of the Walk. Projects under consideration include:
 - Painting and repair of the railings at Anglesea Estate and Ruggles Ave. area
 - Improve appearance of the Breakers Overlook
 - Redesign slope on the northern side of the walk leading down to the Teahouse Tunnel.

E. Summary and Thanks!

We offer our thanks to Mayor Xay Khamsyvoravong, the Newport City Council, and the City Administration for their support.

- We would like to express our thanks to Scott Wheeler, City of Newport Superintendent of Parks, Grounds and Forestry, and his team for all their time and dedication to the Cliff Walk.
- We are very grateful for the City staff who maintain the restrooms at 40 Steps. As noted above, the emergency repair of the restrooms in July was a monumental effort. Since these are the only restrooms on the Cliff Walk, they are a critical need for Cliff Walk visitors. The Commission is deeply grateful for the dedication and experience of the city staff during this crisis and we greatly appreciate how quickly the restrooms were repaired.
- A special thank you is extended to Thomas Shevlin, Communications Officer, for the creation of the beautiful new Point of Interest pages on the city website and the day-to-day maintenance of the Cliff Walk webpages.
- We are very grateful to Bill Boardman, City engineer, for his continued support of the Cliff Walk.
- Thank you to retired City Manager Joseph Nicholson for his many years of support for the Cliff Walk.
- Many thanks to Patricia Reynolds, Director of Planning and Economic Development for the City of Newport for updating the grant application for the Cliff Walk study.

We are very grateful for Professor Sam Sacco, and Salve Regina University professors and staff for their working group contributions in 2023. Thank you to Mike Semenza, Special Assistant to the President, for his support of the Salve University working group.

We would like to express our gratitude to Evan Smith, President & CEO, Kathryn Farrington, VP of Marketing, and Natalie Manning, Creative Director, of Discover Newport for their support. Most notably we would like to recognize them for their generous support of the Cliff Walk Map, and the new Wayfinders.

The Commission truly appreciates the many volunteers who give of their time to preserve and maintain the Cliff Walk. Thank you to Chris Jones and Richard Morgera for maintenance of the Cliff Walk. We are very grateful to volunteer Peter Rice, who refilled the map holders daily. 40,000 maps were distributed on the Cliff Walk alone thanks to Pete! We would also like to especially thank volunteer Dennis Bristow, who noticed that visitors were confused when they reached the detour at 40 Steps, and who proposed and funded additional signs for the two ends of the detour to help visitors continue past the detour and stay on the walk.

Thank you very much to the Maher Center for Adopting the garden at 40 Steps. We are grateful for the beautiful garden they have created.

Thank you to Newport Fire Chief Donnally for the modernizing of emergency responses on the Cliff Walk.

Many thanks to our Cliff Walk neighbors for their continuing cooperation which is vital to the success of the Cliff Walk mission.

The Cliff Walk is a treasure. It is enjoyed by over 1 million visitors a year.

With the cooperation and dedication of everyone mentioned in this report, the Cliff Walk remains a unique, internationally famous walkway. Thank you again to everyone for another successful year of stewardship of this beautiful walk.

Submitters:

This report respectfully submitted by:

Donna Lennox - Secretary, Cliff Walk Commission

Peter Janaros - Chair, Cliff Walk Commission

December 2023