



The 2024 Cliff Walk Commission Year End Summary

A. Cliff Walk Commission Meetings

1. The Cliff Walk Commission held 11 meetings in 2024 (no meetings in August or November).

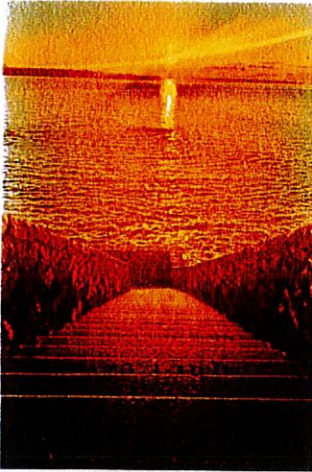


Figure 1: Sunrise at 40 Steps

| Commission Member | Number of Meetings Attended |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Peter Janaros (Chair) | 10 |
| John Hirschboeck (Vice Chair) | 9 |
| Donna Lennox (Secretary) | 9 |
| Kristine Hendrickson | 8 |
| Marc Lewinstein | 8 |

Kristine Hendrickson was appointed as the newest member of the Commission this year. Kristine has been a friend of Cliff Walk for many years and the Commission welcomes her in her new role.

2. 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, City Staff, Volunteers of Cliff Walk, and 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 Events

1. Progress has been made to repair the March 3, 2022, Slope Failure between Webster St. and Narragansett Ave.

Summary:

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. Further damage was sustained in December 2022 in the same area. At the time of the original slope failure in March, a part of the Cliff Walk was rendered impassable and remains closed pending finalization of funding. At that time, the following steps were taken:

- A detour was created between Webster St. and Narragansett Ave. The detour is well marked and there are barriers in place.
- Signage was posted to inform walkers about the detour and information was posted on relevant websites, maps, and apps.
- The City installed a new sidewalk on the ocean side of Ochre Point Ave. to make the detour easier for walkers to traverse.
- A process began for obtaining funding to repair Cliff Walk.

In 2023, the following events moved the process forward:

- A Governor's Declaration of Disaster Emergency was issued June 13, 2023. This declaration was 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.
- The Commission Chair worked with the City to pursue a federal PROTECT grant to fund repairs to the Cliff Walk.

In 2024, significant funding was obtained to repair the slope failure:

- A \$5 million federal earmark was secured in the Fiscal Year 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Law by Senator Jack Reed, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, and Congressman Greg Amo.
- An \$11 million federal PROTECT grant (Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient and Cost-Saving Transportation) was awarded. The PROTECT grant requires that an

agreement be reached between the city and the federal government on how the grant will be executed. The preparation of this agreement is currently on a critical path with the city.

- \$3 million was allocated from the RI Green Bond Initiative passed in the November 2024 General Election.
- \$3.75 million was allocated from the \$98.5 million general obligation bond approved by Newport voters in the 2024 General Election.



Figure 2: Slope Failure March 2022

2. Repair of slope failure at Cliff Walk southern end

In April 2024, a portion of the Walk near Miramar was closed due to the discovery of significant voids beneath the elevated sidewalk. Because of a remarkable effort on behalf of the property owner, the engineer for the property, the city, and the Commission, repairs were carried out with astonishing speed (less than a month between the issue being found and the Walk re-opening).

3. Maintaining, Preserving and Enhancing Cliff Walk

a. Maintenance tasks performed by City of Newport staff in 2024 are:

- Monitoring and remediating damage to the walk from weather events.
- Clearing vegetation, grass mowing, and weed control.
- Maintaining restrooms.
- Maintaining and improving signage.
- Working with the Beechwood management team to come up with a long-term solution to erosion on the Walk in the Beechwood area. A short-term solution was implemented to shunt water away from the walk, but a long-term solution is needed.

b. Volunteer Activities - Many maintenance tasks are done by volunteers including painting, litter pickup, and clearing vegetation. Volunteers are also the “eyes and ears” of Cliff Walk, reporting any issues they see as they are out on the Walk. Our volunteers are Richard Morgera, Michael Fitch, Warren Gray, Dennis Bristow, Peter Rice, and Chris Jones.

- c. The RIPTA bus stop at the end of Ledge Rd. (where people who walk the entire walk catch the bus back into town) was moved from Ledge Rd. to the actual end of the Walk. This provides a better area to wait for the bus and is more convenient when exiting the Walk.

4. The Great Elephant Migration

This yearly report would not be complete without mentioning the Great Elephant Migration. These life size elephants were on display on Cliff Walk from July 4 – September 7, 2024. The project is a traveling public art exhibition and global fundraising initiative that inspires peaceful human and animal coexistence. This exhibition was wildly successful with thousands of extra visitors visiting Cliff Walk.

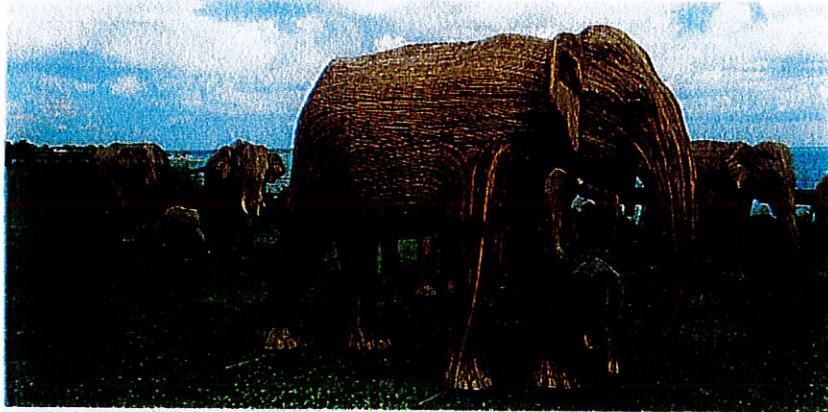


Figure 3: Elephants at Rough Point

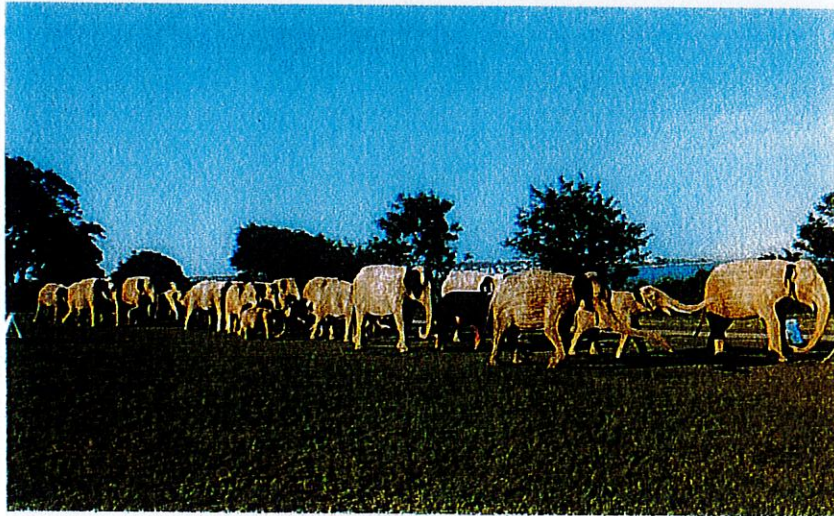


Figure 4: Elephants at Salve Regina University

5. Friends of the Waterfront assume monitoring of the Rights of Way on Cliff Walk

There are six Rights of Way (ROWs) on Cliff Walk. These ROWs were, until recently, monitored by Clean Ocean Access. With the dissolution of Clean Ocean Access, the Friends of the Waterfront, as part of their mission to protect public access to the waterfront, assumed responsibility for

monitoring these ROWs. Information can be found on their website – <https://newportwaterfront.org/>

6. 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 other community organizations, to develop some continuity between projects, extend projects over multiple semesters, and be multi-curricular/disciplinary. The working group includes 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.

A major accomplishment of the group was to establish the Cliff Walk Ambassador Program. The purpose of this program is to have students act as guides on Cliff Walk, engaging with visitors from around the world. Salve Regina University created a for-credit course for the Ambassador program which started in the Fall 2023 semester and continues to the present semester. Students receive training in four modules before becoming Ambassadors. Special thanks to the four Salve Regina University Professors who provide the training:

Professor Jameson Chase (Geology and Environment)
Professor John Quinn (History)
Professor Samuel Sacco (Economic Impact)
Professor Tara Watkins (Theater/Communications)

Thank you also to Michael Semenza, Emeritus Staff, who obtained funding to purchase apparel for students that identifies them as Ambassadors.

This program has been tremendously successful. Ambassadors were exceptionally busy this summer helping the extra visitors who came to Cliff Walk to see the Elephants.

7. Publications and Communications

a. Printed Cliff Walk Maps

The fifth edition of the free Official Cliff Walk Map was produced in partnership with Discover Newport with 77,000 copies printed. The maps were fully funded by Discover Newport, who incurred all the costs for designing and printing the map.

The map is distributed to visitors at the Discover Newport Center. There are also two places on Cliff Walk itself to obtain a map - one at Memorial Blvd. and one at 40 Steps. Map holders were refilled at least once a day during the summer and fall by Cliff Walk volunteer Peter Rice.



Figure 5: Cliff Walk Map - front panel



Figure 6: Cliff Walk Map - back panel

- b. Cliff Walk has a new logo designed by Salve Regina University.

As part of the Salve Regina University Ambassador program, the University designed a new logo that will be adopted by Cliff Walk.



Figure 7: Cliff Walk Logo

- c. Cliff Walk was named one of the Top Ten Hikes in the country by USA today.

<https://10best.usatoday.com/awards/travel/best-hiking-trail-2024>

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

The Maher Center adopted the garden at 40 Steps in 2023, planting a vibrant selection of perennials and annuals in the garden. Volunteers from the Center continue to maintain the 40 Steps Gardens in 2024.



Figure 8: Plantings August 2024



Figure 9: Plantings August 2024

9. Visitors to Cliff Walk

- a. Visit by the Members of the ECOS (Environmental Council of the States)

On September 5, 2024, Members of ECOS (Environmental Council of the States) visited Cliff Walk. This visit was organized by David McLaughlin, a former Commission member. ECOS members represent the environmental leadership of each US state. About 200 people transversed the Walk from Memorial Blvd. to Webster St. Peter Janaros (Chair, Commission) briefed them on the 2022 slope failure and environmental issues affecting Cliff Walk.

b. Visit by Johnson & Wales Students

On November 4, 2024, Cliff Walk was toured by students from Johnson & Wales University. John Hirschboeck (Vice-Chair, Commission) hosted the event.



Figure 10: Johnson & Wales Tour of Cliff Walk

c. Portsmouth Abbey School Day of Service

On May 20, 2024, students from Portsmouth Abbey, as part of a Day of Service, picked up litter on Cliff Walk. Kristine Hendrickson (Member, Commission) hosted this event.

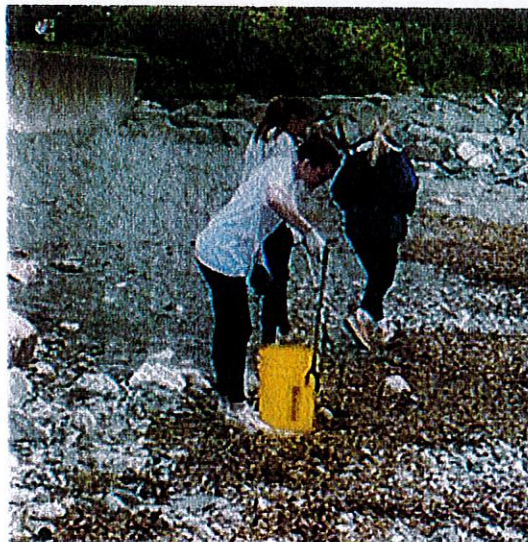


Figure 11: Portsmouth Abbey Students Day of Service on Cliff Walk

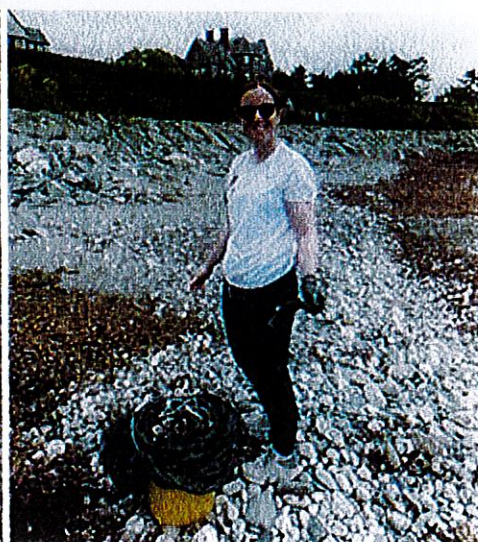


Figure 12: Portsmouth Abbey Students Cleanup on Cliff Walk

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

The Cliff Walk attracts about 1.3 million visitors a year. The economic impact to the City is approximately \$250 million.

- **Parking Revenues generated by Cliff Walk:**

A substantial amount of the parking fees collected on Memorial Blvd. (2024 revenue was \$69,556) can be attributed to people visiting Cliff Walk. For 2024, parking revenue collected from Narragansett Ave./40 Steps was \$138,000. This is a 25% increase from 2023, probably due to the many visitors who came to see the Elephants.

D. Priorities for 2025

1. Continue to move forward with the restoration/repair of Cliff Walk resulting from the 2022 slope failure.
2. Because usage of the Walk continues to increase, the Commission sees the need for additional city resources committed to maintaining and preserving the Walk. The Commission will be working to get additional city staffing dedicated to Cliff Walk.
3. Working with the City manager, identify what part of the funding awarded to the Walk can be used to generate a management plan and detailed engineering study of the entire Cliff Walk. The study would identify issues like erosion and would be used in applying for additional grants to maintain and preserve Cliff Walk.
4. Additional restrooms are desperately needed on Cliff Walk. The current two restrooms at 40 Steps are not enough for the number of people who visit Cliff Walk (over 1 million people per year). Discussions have started between the City Manager and the Commission to address the restroom shortage. These discussions will continue in 2025.
5. As part of the Salve Regina University working group, continue to support the Ambassador program. Also work with the University to increase the number of Trail Markers to include more information about the environmental features of the Walk.
6. 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 to resolve erosion issue.
 - Improvements to safety signage on the southern end of Cliff Walk.

E. Summary and Thanks!

We offer our thanks to former 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 to Bill Boardman, City Engineer, for his continued support of Cliff Walk.

We are very thankful for Professor Samuel Sacco, and Salve Regina University professors and staff for their working group contributions in 2024. Thank you to Michael Semenza, Emeritus Staff, for his support of the Salve Regina University Ambassador Program.

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 their support of the Ambassador program.

Thank you to the Friends of the Waterfront for assuming responsibility for monitoring the six Rights of Way located on Cliff Walk.

The Commission truly appreciates the many volunteers who give of their time to preserve and maintain the Cliff Walk. We are very grateful to volunteer Peter Rice who refilled the Cliff Walk map holders daily. Over 30,000 maps were distributed on Cliff Walk alone thanks to Pete! Thank you to Chris Jones, Richard Morgera, and many others for maintenance of the Cliff Walk and for being the "Eyes and Ears" of Cliff 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 and maintained.

Thank you to the Newport Fire and Police Departments for their support of 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 an 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 2024