



## The 2025 Cliff Walk Commission Year End Summary

### A. Cliff Walk Commission Meetings

1. The Cliff Walk Commission held 10 meetings in 2025 (no meetings in July or November).

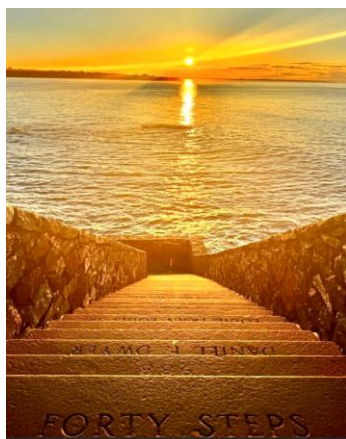


Figure 1: Sunrise at Forty Steps

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

2. Other Meeting Attendees:

- Scott Wheeler, City of Newport Superintendent of Parks, Grounds and Forestry
- Professor Samuel Sacco, Salve Regina University Sitting Commission Representative
- Representatives from other community organizations - Lynda Stevenson, President, Friends of the Waterfront, and Tanya Kelley, Landscape Curator, Newport Restoration Foundation
- Guests, Friends, City Management & Staff, Volunteers of the 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 fund the repair of the March 3, 2022 Slope Failure between Webster St. and Narragansett Ave.

Summary:

All funding is in place except for the PROTECT grant. Most of the PROTECT grant documentation is done. The city is actively completing the remaining documentation requested by the Federal Government.

History:

On March 3, 2022, a section of the Cliff Walk, just south of Forty 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 and repair. At that time, the following steps were taken:

- A detour was created between Webster St. and Narragansett Ave.
- 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.
- A process began for obtaining funding to repair the 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 allowed the RI Department of Transportation (RIDOT) to seek federal relief funds from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).
- 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.
- A \$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.

- \$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.

In 2025, progress continues with the following actions taken:

- The scope of the repair work was expanded. In addition to fixing the slope failure itself, the scope was expanded to include protecting the entire section of the Cliff Walk between Webster St. and Narragansett Ave.
- The City’s Director of Resilience and Sustainability worked with the state and DOT to synchronize the timing for the \$3M RI Green Bond funds and the \$5M federal earmark funds. Both sources now have the same beginning and end date.
- The city has prepared and submitted additional paperwork for the PROTECT grant application as requested by the federal government.
- Webster St. was improved so that the pedestrian walking area (part of the detour) was easy to identify.

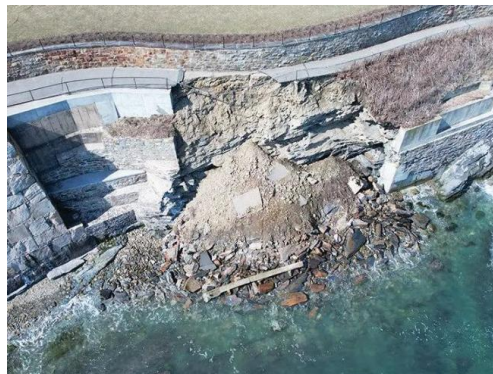


Figure 2: Slope Failure March 2022

## 2. Funding the Cliff Walk

- a. Funding was received in December, 2025, from the van Beuren Charitable Foundation. The grant (\$200,000) will fund the Cliff Walk Master Plan and a baseline geographical survey and analysis of the existing conditions of the entire Cliff Walk.
- b. Other funding is being pursued for maintenance of the Walk
  - Wind Turbine Mitigation Funding – the city has identified four projects that could be funded by the Wind Turbine Mitigation Funds:
    - Replacing asphalt surface in some areas
    - Installing concrete cap on a large pipe near Belmont Beach
    - Replacing old fencing in some areas
    - Webster St. access sidewalk

## 3. Additional Restrooms at Forty Steps and south of Forty Steps

- a. There are currently two restrooms at Forty Steps. Two more restrooms will be added as part of the Capital Improvement Program for 2025/2026. This capital project was approved at the council meeting on March 12, 2025.
  - b. At the same March 12th council meeting, the council empowered the City Manager to act for the Commission, and coordinate with Salve Regina University and the Preservation Society of Newport County, to explore options for additional restrooms south of Forty Steps. This effort is on-going.
  - c. Additional temporary restrooms were placed at Forty Steps during the summer months.
4. Maintaining, Preserving and Enhancing the Cliff Walk

- a. Maintenance tasks performed by City of Newport staff in 2025 include, but are not limited to:
  - Monitoring and remediating damage to the walk from weather events.
  - Clearing vegetation, grass mowing, and weed control.
  - Maintaining (including painting) restrooms.
- 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 the Cliff Walk, reporting any issues they see as they are out on the Walk. Our volunteers are Chris Jones, Pete Rice, Richard Morgera, Michael Fitch, Warren Gray, and Dennis Bristow.
- c. The city is working with the Miramar estate to resolve an erosion issue.
- d. The city, working in conjunction with the Beechwood estate, resolved a storm water drainage issue that was affecting the Walk.
- e. Additional Signage was posted at the southern end of the Walk to improve awareness of the rugged terrain. The design and placement of the signs were completed in conjunction with the Newport Fire Department.



Figure 3: New sign – Rugged Terrain

5. Salve Regina University Ambassador Program

History:

The Salve Regina University Ambassador program was founded by the Salve Regina University working group, which 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, to develop some continuity between projects, extend projects over multiple semesters, and be multi-curricular/disciplinary.

The purpose of the Ambassador program is to have students act as guides on the 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 (Geology & Environment, History, Economic Impact and Theater/Communications).

2025:

This program continued in 2025 with the generous support and coordination of Professor Samuel Sacco. The program had two students in the Spring 2025, and one student in the summer. All students reported very positive experiences as Ambassadors on the Cliff Walk.

## 6. Publications and Communications

### a. Printed Cliff Walk Maps

The sixth edition of the free Official Cliff Walk Map was produced in partnership with Discover Newport with 85,000 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 the Cliff Walk itself to obtain a map - one at Memorial Blvd., and one at Forty Steps. Map holders were refilled at least once a day during the summer and fall by Cliff Walk volunteer Pete Rice.

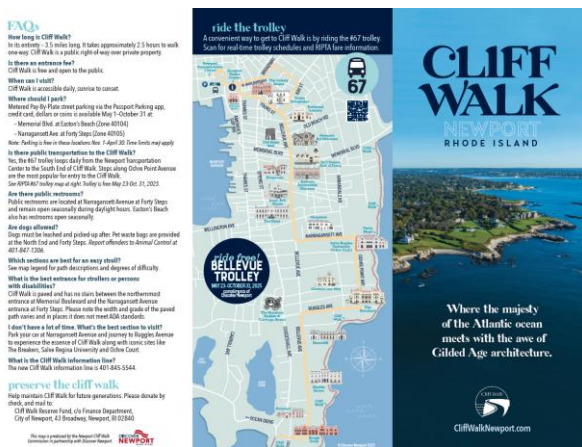


Figure 4: Cliff Walk Map - front panel



Figure 5: Cliff Walk Map - back panel

## 7. Economic Impact of the Cliff Walk on the City of Newport

The Cliff Walk attracts more than 1.3 million visitors a year. The economic impact to the City is approximately \$325 million annually.

2025 Gross Parking Revenues generated by the Cliff Walk:

- Narragansett Ave. - \$131,000
- Memorial Blvd. - \$106,000
- A substantial amount of the parking fees collected from the beach parking lots (\$1.3 million), especially on the shoulder months of the summer season, can be attributed to people visiting the Cliff Walk.

#### **D. Priorities for 2026**

1. Continue to move forward with the restoration/repair of the entire section of the Cliff Walk between Webster St. and Narragansett Ave., resulting from the 2022 slope failure.
2. Advise the city on the end-to-end Engineering Study and Management Plan for the Cliff Walk (recently funded by the van Beuren Charitable Foundation).
3. Significant progress was made to increase the number of restrooms on the Cliff Walk in 2025 (two additional restrooms will be added to the existing restrooms at Forty Steps). The city's completed construction of the two additional restrooms will remain a top priority. The Commission will also continue to work with City Managers to locate additional restrooms south of Forty Steps.
4. Given the ever-growing number of visitors to the Walk, the Commission sees the need for additional city resources committed to maintaining and preserving the Walk at a level that is acceptable and welcoming to the public. The Cliff Walk Commission will continue to recommend that the Newport City Council add a staff person to the Public Services Department's Parks, Grounds and Forestry Division (the division that maintains the Walk).
5. Continue to support the Salve Regina University Ambassador program.
6. Continue to maintain the overall condition of the Cliff Walk using available funds.
7. Continue to support the effort to install a sidewalk on Narragansett Ave. from Bellevue Ave. to the Ochre Point Road.

#### **Summary and Thanks!**

We offer our thanks to Council Chair Charles Holder, the Newport City Council, and the City Administration and Management 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 the Cliff Walk.

Thank you to the owners of the Ochre Point Estate for their incredible cooperation and generosity, which is essential in the effort to restore the area of the Walk affected by the slope failure.

Many thanks to the van Beuren Charitable Foundation for their generous funding of the Cliff Walk Master Plan and a baseline geographical survey and analysis of existing conditions on the Walk.

We are very thankful for the contributions of Kelli Armstrong, President, Salve Regina University. We are also very thankful for the efforts of Professor Samuel Sacco, Salve Regina University professors and Salve staff for their contributions to the Ambassador Program in 2025, for their preparation of materials for the van Beuren Charitable Foundation grant application, and for their general support of the Cliff Walk.

We would like to express our gratitude to Discover Newport. We would like to recognize them for their generous funding of the Cliff Walk Map, and for providing funding for the Ambassador program.

Thank you to the Friends of the Waterfront for continuing to monitor the six Rights of Way located on Cliff Walk. Information can be found on their website – <https://newportwaterfront.org/>

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 many others who maintain the Walk and are the “Eyes and Ears” of the Cliff Walk. We are very grateful to volunteer Pete Rice who refilled the Cliff Walk map holders daily.

Thank you very much to the Maher Center for continuing to care for the garden at Forty 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 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 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 2025