

# CITY OF NEWPORT TREE AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

Annual Report 2023

## ATTACHED TO THIS REPORT ARE AGENDAS AND MINUTES FROM COMMISSION MEETINGS THROUGHOUT 2023. BELOW ARE HIGHLIGHTS BY MONTH

### 1. January 2023

*At the first meeting of the new year the Commission discussed the continuing to work towards a the creation of a landscape ordinance which supports a healthier and safer environment for Newport. Examples of other cities were discussed and a commitment to work with the City Planning and Utilities Department was supported.*

*As reported in January 2022 a year ago, RIDOT continues to say it will work with us on a landscape plan for the realignment but that initial plan has still not been shared with the Commission.*

### 2. February 2023

*The Commission hosted a Public Workshop about park safety and use at the library. Three City of Newport Community Police Officers attended the Workshop. The meeting room was standing room only and an orderly and respectful Q&A as well as comments, suggestions and opinions were shared. All attending agreed it had been a positive and informative meeting and expressed a hope that annual workshops might occur.*

### 3. March 2023

*The State of Rhode Island designated Newport as the official city in Rhode Island for Arbor Day 2023. State celebrations will be held at Miantonomi Park.*

*The Park Ranger program recommended by the Commission in 2022 has been adopted by the city Administration. The Commission will assist in bringing the program online and operational.*

*Neighbors impacted by the Pell Bridge realignment asked the Commission for assistance in getting RIDOT to provide proper landscape and noise mitigation to their area. The Commission voted to assist in any way possible.*

### 4. April 2023

*The Commission was made aware of a Bill before the State House and Senate that would remove current decision-making regarding tree canopy, landscape and environment from the City of Newport and transfer that authority to the PUC and RI Energy. The Commission is taking a leading role in altering or stopping this legislation.*

*The Middle Passage Project presented a revised set of concepts to the Commission based on our prior feedback. The Commission members still had more questions/concerns and requested the group do more revising and return.*

## 5. May 2023

*The status of the RI Energy legislation was reported on. The Commission has taken a leading role in uniting Newport, Middletown, and Portsmouth in opposition to this legislation. The Chair has testified before the Senate subcommittee against the Bill. Activities continue to rewrite or stop the Bill.*

*New and updated plans for 3 playgrounds were unveiled. The public, including some children reviewed the plans – all were very happy with them, and the vote was a resounding, “Aye”.*

*The Beech tree disease which is plaguing the Northeast has hit Newport. It appears unstoppable but actions are being taken to thwart the spread.*

## 6. June 2023

*The RI Energy bill was removed from both House and Senate and they will come back in the next legislative session. The Aquidneck Island team will continue to work with elected officials and together to change the bill or defeat.*

*Peeps for Pups, a group of Newport dog parents presented their request for an additional dog park, as well as information regarding the dog park that will be created from the Pell Bridge realignment. The group will work with the Commission to advance their hope of more and better dog parks in Newport.*

*Requests to RIDOT re: landscape plan continue to be made – no plan provided yet.*

## 7. July 2023

*No meeting due to summer schedules of members.*

## 8. August 2023

*RIDOT project Manager Jody Richards attended the meeting to discuss the landscape plan and its progress. He did not have a plan to share and could not give a timeline on getting the Commission one. The Commission showed him a PowerPoint it had created of other RIDOT roundabout projects in the past few years. He could not answer any questions about the features or scope of work in Newport related to the other projects.*

## 9. September 2023

*The new basketball court in the North End has been completed and opened. The project was funded by DEM.*

*The Middle Passage Project was due to be present but cancelled the day before.*

*The City Council had deferred the pickle ball in Hunter Park ordinance to the Commission for review and research, to result in a recommendation. The Commission will host a workshop on October 4 to get players, abutters and public thoughts and opinions. A recommendation report will be submitted to Council.*

*RIDOT project Manager Jody Richards attended the meeting to discuss the landscape plan and its progress. He did not have a plan to share and could not give a timeline on getting the Commission one. The Commission showed him a PowerPoint it had created of other RIDOT roundabout projects in the past few years. He could not answer any questions about the features or scope of work in Newport related to the other projects.*

## 10. October 2023

*The Commission voted to support the King Park Shoreline Resiliency Project.*

*The Commission members reviewed a Draft of the Pickle Ball report proved by Chair. With two modifications it was approved to send to Council.*

## 11. November 2023

*The Little League appeared with a request for a new equipment shed.*

*The Skate Park project is nearing fundraising completion and will be getting ready to come back to Commission when they meet their goal.*

*Cardine's Field is getting much needed updating and repair.*

## 12. December 2023

*No meeting due to holiday season.*

## NEWPORT TREE AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

31 JANUARY 2023

Present: Ron Currier (scribe) Maureen Cronin, Dennis Bristow, Scott Wheeler, Lauren Parmelee, Stephanie Smyth, Kara DiCamillo. Council Liaison – Angela McCalla

November 2022 minutes were passed by a unanimous vote.

Chair Cronin updated the commission members on the evaluation project with NOSP. She also gave each member a copy. The guide was created to provide an evaluation rating for projects or topics that will impact Newport's open space, greenspace, or environment. The purpose is to rate compliance with the principles of the Newport Tree, Park and Open Space Master Plan.

### Arbor Day:

The Rhode Island Tree Council has designated Newport as the official city for the Arbor Day celebration this year. Dignitaries from around the state will come to celebrate at the ceremony on Friday, April 28. More details to follow.

### Landscape Ordinance:

A landscape ordinance has been on the commission list of projects for a year. It was decided by the group that Chair Cronin would contact the Planning and Utilities departments to speak with them about their efforts to date and working together. She will report back on what she finds out.

### Pell Bridge landscape:

Chair Cronin reported that the first draft of the landscape plan is completed and is making its way through RIDOT before being presented to the city. When it comes to the city we will get a copy for commission review.

### Tree Warden report:

Save the Bay presented to Scott Wheeler a site plan for the new aquarium. Scott was able to provide input and offered critical advice on plantings and technical layout.

Chaffee Boulevard Recreation Area --- project tis going forward with plans for drainage system

Miantinomi Park – Due to debris and obstacles access via Girard Ave was difficult. These obstacles have been removed.

Storer Park – the flagpole that was requested has been erected. However it came to Scott Wheeler’s attention that the Point Association was planning a landscape change and additional stone laid around the flagpole. The Commission was not aware of these additional park changes and asked Scott to reach out to the Association and request they bring drawings of their proposal to a future Commission meeting for review.

Murphy Field – Newport continues to suffer from a lack of sport playing fields. The city is looking for additional spaces to add to the current inventory.

Cardines Field – New netting is being installed as a safety measure for the surrounding neighborhood.

Aquidneck Park – Lighting is being planned in conjunction with the Reading Room. Forestry crews are doing cleanups and stump grindings as weather permits.

#### Resident presentation:

William Ellery Park – Newport resident and Executive Director of Sankofa Community Connection Niko Merritt presented a concept for memorializing the important role the park played in the lives of the black community over the centuries. Her goal is to tell the story and celebrate the black heritage of the park. She asked the commission about moving forward on securing donations and the commission agreed that the project should move forward. Ms. Merritt will update the commission on her efforts and agreed to work with the commission in the future on the actual items for the park.

## **Newport Tree and Open Space Commission**

### **SAFETY WORKSHOP February 8, 2023**

**Present: Stephanie Smyth, Dennis Bristow, Scott Wheeler, Stephanie Szneke, Maureen Cronin, Denis Demers**

- **Sergeant Jason Head:** Commander of the Community Policing Unit
- **Captain Ryan Duffy**
- **Captain Kevin Moreira**

This workshop was a public forum to discuss providing a safe environment for all city parks by discussing solutions for eliminating or controlling unsafe behavior.

Three members of the Newport Police department were in attendance to respond to community comments:

The City of Newport has a Community Policing Unit that is part of the patrol division. The Community Policing Unit has four Community Policing Officers, each of whom is assigned to a specific area in the city and will also perform as School Resource Officers (SRO) in a liaison capacity. Contact info for each officer can be found on City of Newport website:

<https://www.cityofnewport.com/city-hall/departments/police/patrol-division/community-policing>

Community Police work toward solutions, sometimes over a longer time, as compared to patrol officers who respond and report.

#### **The following items were discussed during the workshop:**

##### **Resources for police department:**

Are there enough resources and personnel to police adequately?

The department is currently looking for additional patrol officers.

Last year there was a deployment of 8 bicycle police patrols from Spring-Fall.

This year, the same deployment will occur.

Community Officers patrol parks as often as possible.

##### **Homelessness:**

Community police work to provide resources for homeless and partner with community Mental Health services.

Members of the community mentioned certain areas where the homeless congregate:

Open space near train tracks (Point area),

Community Gardens/Friends Meeting House area.

**Park Closing Time:**

Inconsistent open/close times for parks: The commission will review and classify parks according to type and will recommend a more consistent open/closing time for each park classification.

**Leash Ordinance:**

Non-conformance locations and request for better signage & more police presence:

Morton Park: 4pm

Storer Park: 4:30pm

**Selling without Permit/Noise:**

Non-conformance locations and request for more police presence:

Queen Ann Square

**Public Drinking:**

Non-conformance locations and request for more police presence:

Storer Park

**Community Reporting:**

*Anonymous vs. providing name:*

Enforcement is improved if community will provide their names and/or stay on site when making a complaint.

*Community members can report bad experience with dispatch:*

Online reporting.

**Improve community awareness of the Community Policing Unit:**

Utilize social media:

Facebook, Next Door, Twitter, Off Broadway Association

**Next steps:**

NTOS Commission to report back to Council by beginning of June.

## Newport Tree and Open space Commission 28 March 2023

Present: Bill Willis, Maureen Cronin, Lauren Parmelee, Stephanie Szneke, Denis Bristow, Kara DiCamillo, Stephanie Smyth, and Rob Currier (scribe)

January minutes approved. There are no February minutes, as there was no formal meeting.

Bare-Root program: is underway, and trees tagged. Applications on the NTC site

Arbor Day celebration: Newport is the official 2023 Arbor Day city for Rhode Island. The state Arbor Day event will be on 28 April at 10:30, in Miantinomi Park, remarks from the Mayor and Governor, a tree planting, and a program with students will take place

Earth Day celebration will include the mayor, 1 April at Miantinomi Park, for a clean up time

Park Ranger update: City has approved allocations for a beta run; 2 rangers for a period running about mid-June to end of August. Hours will be adjusted for 7 days a week. Soon to go out will be a job description. Ranger will be informative, engage the public, and watch for potential conflicts.

Ken Snyder, President of the Point Association gave an update on the flagpole installation and a new brick base project. The flagpole has a light shining in it allowing for flag to be flown 24 hours. The Association had a 'buy a brick' campaign managed to raise the necessary funds for the lighting and the memorial bricks at the base. There will be a surplus of funds and Mr. Snyder said that the Association will hold those funds to repair and maintain the lighting and brick area. Commission approved the brick area, in a polymeric base. Vote was 6-1 in favor of presented project with 1 member recusing herself.

Park projects: bids are out for basketball court; new signage, brush clearing at Miantinomi Park; new steps to the tower at MP; Queen Anne Square new 30' section of sidewalk; Murphy, new turf area; Spouting Rock-Almy Pond....working with CRMC; Ballard Park, New trail signage

Neighbors of the Pell Bridge project have expressed concern-to-anger over the effects of the work being done on their yards and can enjoy their yards. The concern is what the neighbors effected will have to deal with after the project is done. NTOS Commission has little ability to act, yet we do understand the importance of listening to the grievances. Neighbors are welcome to the May meeting to express grievances. Depending on what it heard the Commission could it its advisory role send a letter to Council alerting them and asking for help interfacing with the State for a resolution.

Landscape ordinance : Stephanie Szneke has discussed her 2014 work on the issue. We plan to pursue.

Denis Bristow passed out info papers on carry-in-carry-out proposal. Discussion will be for the next meeting.

## Newport Tree and Open Space Commission Meeting 25 April 2023

Present Rob Currier (scribe), Maureen Cronin, Scott Wheeler, Bill Lewis, Lauren Parmelee, Denis Bristow, Denis Demurs, Stephanie Smyth, Kara DiCamillo

Minutes from March meeting accepted.

Motion put forth and accepted to abide by code of conduct in meetings moving further.

Park Ranger: Beta test is underway. Budget is for 2 rangers. Job description soon to be posted for work June-August. \$50,000 is the budget for this season.

Bare-root planting is complete. Moving on to ball/burlap material. Thanks to Newport Tree Conservancy for the 100% of support it gives for trees to the city. Trees will also be going to Mary St. parking lot; 3 trees to be planted Arbor Day, 28 April.

The city has been named official state Arbor Day site for 2023. dignitaries, including the Governor, will be present to cite awards; the 3 -1st grades will offer a presentation, orchestrated by Newport Tree Conservancy education chief Rachel Hurlbert

Four playgrounds will be getting new equipment

ROW Chestnut St. bollards are being installed. Landscaping slated for Fall after review by Commission.

Newport Spring Park – Aquidneck Land Trust to be the conservator and the property given to the City will as a gift. Anticipated October completion

Grave concern over a bill in the State House concerning governance over public trees and vegetation related to power lines. NTOS voted to maintain the status quo, actively advocate against and to watch progress on this bill, carefully.

Middle Passage: architect presented modified plan of lower walls, and more specific drawings on how this will interface with the existing Chinese Elm. Walls to create a space with the intention to promote conversation, and discussion, in a meeting space. Questions from the public on who has the rights to this space, as it has been a recognized space for militia mustering. The City Solicitor will have to have input on this matter. Scott brought up the need for ongoing maintenance, and security. He also advised the formation of an endowment for future stability, and security. Other issues to address include what materials will be used, plan for updating worn, and weathered structural parts. The two markers already onsite will need to be kept there and a plan for the second tree.

Minutes  
Tree and Open Space Commission  
Tuesday, May 31, 2023

Present: Bill Willis, Maureen Cronin, Lauren Parmelee, Stephanie Szneke, Denis Bristow, Kara DiCamillo, Dennis Demers

April minutes submitted and approved.

The status of the RI Energy Tree Warden and Vegetation Bill, which was reviewed at the last meeting, was reported on. The status report highlighted the partnership with Middletown and Portsmouth, the Chair testimony at the Senate Commerce Committee, and the Resolution passed by the Newport City Council.

Halsey Street area residents presented to the Commission photographs and testimony of the negative impact on their neighborhood due to the Pell Bridge Realignment Project. They requested the Commission and its members to help them approach RIDOT and install landscaping and drainage to restore the neighborhood and quality of life for the residents. The Commission members voted to submit a letter to City Council recommending that either a council member or the Commission approach RIDOT and start a conversation about landscape improvement for the area.

Playground plans for Braga, Cardine, Hunter and King parks were reviewed. Playground designs integrate 2-5 and 5-12 recreation to accommodate family. Design has a lot of activity, plus open visibility. The work plan is to remove, prep and install on the same schedule by contracted crews. So, budget is inclusive, and by doing 4, get discounts. This is substantial savings. Using a proven product. Investment in quality lowers maintenance Landscape Structures is proven, universal, easy to maintain. Questions from interested community members were taken.

The Commission reported the following updates:

8 applicants for park ranger program, effective July 1 start. App open for another week.

Pine St. drift way is moving forward.

Beeches are dying in Aquidneck Park due to the spreading disease affecting all Beech trees in the Northeast.

## Minutes

### Newport Tree and Open Space Commission June 27, 2023

Present: Kara DiCamillo; Rob Currier (scribe); Chair Maureen Cronin; Scott Wheeler; Denis Bristow; Denis Demurs; Bill Willis; Stephanie Szneke; Lauren Parmelee

Minutes from last meeting approved, and passed

Rhode Island energy bill in the House is on hold to September, for re-evaluation. In the Senate, members are looking to gather more information and input.

The Park Ranger position has thus far had 8 interviews...with very qualified applicants. This position is funded starting 1 July.

There is now a plan in place for the Pell Bridge project, involving the roundabouts.

Maureen will be introducing the Halsey Street concern (of the State handling of neighbors in Pell Bridge project) to City Council for further consideration of forward movement.

Peeps for Pups; Steve presented us with a handout of a well-organized plan for a dog park. The handout outlined the need, pros, and cons, design points, and possible sites for consideration. The Commission offered numerous suggestions, including past attempts. Certain sites were discouraged, while other sites had favorable discussion. This group is serious, and willing to proceed to conquer the next steps, and consequential obstacles to succeed.

Scott gave a brief update on Beech Leaf Disease (BLD).

Tree plantings were at Rogers. NTC Tree Corps has watering, and maintenance under control.

Update of Spouting Rock; The work be done "in house", in conjunction with Utilities.

Pine Street drift way will be going out to bid, for winter construction. Consideration is focused on bringing in water to the basketball, skatepark area, as well as working on lighting.

More structures are being added to King Park playground, and 4 new playgrounds have been approved.

Concern and confusion was raised about food vendors' licenses giving yield to overnight storage of equipment in parks. The Commission voted to not endorse any change to the current Mobile Food Vehicle/Cart Ordinance. The Chair will share that vote if any action is taken by vendors.

As per custom, there will be no July meeting.

# Newport Tree and Open Space Commission

## 29 August 2023

Present: Rob Currier (scribe), Maureen Cronin, Scott Wheeler, Denis Bristow, Denis Demers., Stephanie Smyth, Kara DiCamillo, Bill Lewis, Jody Richards (RIDOT)

Jody Richards, Project Manager for RIDOT attended and had a discussion that centered on the round-about in the new north end highway re-development. Plant material and hardscape material were primary concerns as far as reflecting an appropriate aesthetic to Newport. The Commission put showed a PowerPoint that photography taken in the past month of the most recent RIDOT round-about projects. Two of those areas had lush and well planted aesthetic design including stonework, multi height year round plantings and ground cover. They included stone walls on the circumference, enclosing some nature of planting.

The Commission reiterated their desire for planting ideas using dwarf conifers, for example, would yield open sight lines to other traffic, as one drives within the round-about and including stonework. Safety and maintenance concerns are primary factors in the selection, and follow-up care for this area.

Without doubt, this is a focal point, and as such requires thoughtful and thorough planning. This includes a pleasing, and meaningful design, sustainable planting, low maintenance, regular maintenance, and safety.

Also on this subject was the issue of who was doing the maintenance on the various parts of the plan upon completion. Seasons Market has agreed to Adopt a Spot on the area close in to their place of business and the round-about.

Thoughts of, perhaps, RK Management, for areas in their proximity. There is concern that the State will not be able to maintain any landscape and environment post project.

Denis Bristow had prepared work to present on 'Bring in, Take out', in reference to park, and open space usage. He will present a more in-depth summary of his work at the next meeting.

## Newport Tree and Open Space Commission

26 Sept. 2023

Present: Scott Wheeler, Maureen Cronin, Rob Currier ( scribe), Kara DiCamillo, Stephanie Smyth, Bill Willis, Denis Demers, Lauren Parmalee

Minutes from last meeting approved, and passed

Pack in- Pack out discussion will be forwarded to next meeting.

The Middle Passage Committee was the primary presenter at this meeting but they cancelled yesterday. They cited the need to complete gathering their information in response to Commission questions.

The Park Ranger initiative has an unofficial thumbs up. This was a beta test on implementation and execution. A more formal review and report will be done before the end of 2023 and presented to City Council and Administration.

Dog Park Updates. Discussions have been had with Potter Shelter for partnership on ideas, placement and amenities funding. The current opinion is that a second park would be an asset to local residents.

The Rhode Island Energy bill was halted, and revised, yet.....much work is needed before any further legislative action can follow.

The new basketball court has been installed. Soon, the court will be painted. Down the road (granting permitted), lighting will be installed.

City Council has deferred the issue of pickle ball to this commission for public review, comment, and for suggested action. The Commission is hosting a public workshop October 4, 2023 at 5pm, in the Friends Room in the library.

The skateboard park is in fundraising mode. Final plans have yet to come to the city for approval, and for insurance approval.

Meeting adjourned

Newport Tree and Open Space Commission

October 24, 2023 Minutes

Attending: Maureen Cronin, Bill Willis, Dennis Bristow, Laura Parmalee, Stephanie Smyth, Stephanie Szneke, Denis Demers.

City representatives: Scott Wheeler and Eric Reis

Twenty members of the public were also in attendance.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm by chair Maureen Cronin. She explained to those in attendance that this was a regular working meeting among commission members, unlike the previous public hearing on pickleball. She reviewed what takes place at a regular working meeting.

Item 1: Letter of Support for King Park Shoreline Resiliency Grant

The background of the grant, the vulnerability of King Park to adverse effects of climate change, prior efforts at remediation and other facts were reviewed. The Commission voted unanimously to approve a letter of support in favor of a grant to engineer, design and construct infrastructure that will assist in the protection of the shoreline and park.

Item 2: Pickleball Recommendation to Council

The chair reviewed the background of events that prompted Newport City Council to request the report and recommendations. She reviewed the research that had been conducted and the work product that was expected. The chair then read the proposed report aloud and commission members engaged in dialogue regarding its contents. It was unanimously agreed to submit the report and recommendations to council as read (two modifications see below), along with two letters from the public received in favor of, and opposed to, pickleball play.

Modifications agreed to were:

- Correcting “yards” to “feet” with regard to the distance of courts from residences; correcting the use of blowers and shovels to “by non-city staff.”

## Newport Tree and Open Space Commission 28 November 2023

Present: Maureen Cronin; Denis Bristow; Dennis Demurs; Kara DiCamillo; Lauren Parmelee; Stephanie Smyth; Stephanie Szneke; William Willis; Scott Wheeler; Rob Currier (scribe)

October minutes approved

We will not be meeting in December. 24 January '24 will be the next meeting.

Little League is funding a new shed for Braga Park. 8' x 18', Hunter green, is the basic plan. This much needed improvement will house sports equipment, maintenance equipment, and other related items. The City will do the demolition. Motion was passed to recommend this to City Council, with approval.

Park Ranger initiative this past summer was essentially a beta test. Very favorable reports are turning in on the success of this. Hours of engagement are typically 10 am to 6 pm. More focus on training, and purpose will evolve as this program matures. This also brings to light the need for a more definitive explanation of all the parks, the hours of use. They had a very good working relationship with the police dept. 2024 Police Community Workshop; there was positive feedback on the last meeting of this sort. Police presence for informative questions, and answers had positive gains for those in attendance. In search for the a site for the next such meeting, Park Holme Senior Center is top of the list.

The basketball court is completed, and a job well-done. Next phase will include lighting, and water. Skate Park fundraising is going very well. Final design work is to be completed; the plan will then go through the channels various departments for approval.

Cardine's Field playground has been removed, in prep for a whole new set-up; same will go for Hunter playground.

23 trees planted; 7 Princeton Elms on Hammersmith road; 6 Arborvitae at Pell School. Storer Park lighting is going through some adjustments. King Park seawall is in planning stages for renovation; also re-surfacing of the harbor walk