



Top of the Hill Newsletter

Summer 2025

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President's Letter by Laurie Love

Hello Friends and Neighbors,

There's much to report since our last newsletter in the Fall, so I would like to begin with the good news that we are restarting our quarterly Top of the Hill Newsletter thanks to Sandy Neville and Kathy Kronholm. Kathy and Sandy are now taking the lead to gather the submissions, edit and publish the TOH newsletter each quarter. Please let them know if you have something to contribute, an idea for a new topic or would like to help them!

I hope many of you, especially our newest members, have enjoyed some of the recent events. Over the last few months, we've had multiple Community Concerts, a new neighborhood Walking Tour, the Luce Park Spring Clean Up, and our Annual Community Forum in addition to movie nights, pickleball and wine tastings to name a few of the activities. If you have suggestions, please let us know – we are always looking for new activity ideas. Lastly, please save the date our **Summer Garden Party** which will be held on **Saturday, August 9th**. It's a highlight of the year and sure to be another fabulous day!

Thanks to all those who completed our recent survey. All communities change over time and Newport has experienced dramatic changes over the last five years. The Board, therefore, held multiple strategy sessions examining our strengths and weaknesses and preparing a survey to seek our member's perspectives. Hank Kniskern, our Community Chair, has prepared a summary of the strategy sessions which he guided along with a summary of the exchange at our Annual Community Forum for this edition of the newsletter. Anne Marie Biernacki – Smith, our Membership Chair, has prepared a summary of the survey and posted the full summary to the Association Materials Group on the website. Our goal is to ensure that the association remains an important community asset. We rely on all those in the Top of the Hill to help us achieve that objective so please share your ideas and thank you for your engagement!

Great Neighbors – Wonderful Friends – Strong Community

On the note of engagement, there was a wonderful movie about the importance of community connections and organizational involvement recently shown at the JPT. The documentary about the work of Harvard Professor Robert Putnam illustrates that people who take part in community organizations benefit greatly. It's a very interesting and positive film.

Here's the link to the film trailer for those interested:

<https://youtu.be/4oDVf8sOG9w?si=uYQ2PxWojlOF2jh>

As always, thank you for being part of our special neighborhood association. I look forward to seeing you at our next event as we continue to celebrate our 40th anniversary!

Happy Summer!
Laurie Love

TOH Annual Community Forum by Hank Kniskern

The 2025 TOH Annual Form was held at the Library on May 22. The panel members were City Council Chair (Mayor) Charlie Holder; our Ward 2 Council Rep Lynn Ceglie; and Teresa Brean, the Director of the city's new Department of Resilience and Sustainability. The panel members -- Charlie, Lynn and Teresa -- were very informative and candid. A BIG Thank You. About 45 members attended. In preparation for the forum, community members submitted questions that were categorized as Safety, Planning or Updates:

Safety: Traffic speed and volume were concerns, especially on Rhode Island Ave, Ayrault, Kay Street. Response: There are several tools available to mitigate speed – speed screen, cameras (majority of attendees said they would like these deployed) and police radars. The city has conducted a city-wide traffic study. A suggestion was made that TOH form a small ad hoc group to work with the city traffic experts to get more data, assess the tools available and support the City for trial sites. Teresa Crean also presented the methodology the City uses in determining the sequence of road repairs.

Planning: There are several planning initiatives underway, many under the direction of the Resiliency and Sustainability Department. Major ones are the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Easton's Beach, Cliff Walk and Perrotti Park renovation. The Navy Hospital and the Bridge Realignment land have run into complications but are still active. The new Ann Street pier is nearly completed. The budgets for these initiatives have not been finalized. The City has hired an experienced full-time grant writer to seek ways to obtain grant funds for the city.

The Comprehensive Land Use Planning Commission will begin later this year, with a lot of resident participation. A detailed demographic analysis will be done to characterize our population base, housing, income, commercial base, etc. There will be some comparative studies of communities like Newport, the intent being to uncover unique solutions and best practices. This Plan is another opportunity for TOH residents to actively participate. More information will be forthcoming later this summer as the city pulls together its advisory committee.

Staying Informed: The city has improved its proactive communication to residents.

Online monthly newsletter: You can sign-up for the City's monthly online newsletter, **The Current**, using the link if you are not already receiving it. The newsletter is very good, you'll find it interesting.

<https://www.cityofnewport.com/city-hall/departments/communications/wavelengths>

In addition, the city started publishing a quarterly online magazine called **Wavelengths** in March. You can access it at:

<https://www.cityofnewport.com/city-hall/departments/communications/wavelengths>

Another city-sponsored informational website is for the new Department of Resilience and Sustainability, which is tasked to enable the city to prepare, respond, and recover, from rapid social and environmental change:

<https://www.cityofnewport.com/en-us/city-hall/departments/resilience-sustainability>

Updates:

- **Newport for all Ages** is a program designed to influence municipal planning to improve the safety of all individuals, such as more visible cross walks and sidewalk leveling. The city is now looking for a person to manage this program.
- The City has approval for 1,000 residents for a **trial project to expand composting**. This is not only worth trying for environmental reasons but also to reduce the increasing cost of trash hauling.
- Other updates were on the Open Space Initiative, Easton's Beach and Cliff Walk repairs. For these, check the City's web site for meetings and updates since these are very active right now. Teresa reminded everyone that the city has an array of **GIS digital maps** that can be downloaded.
- There are important **workshops taking place in June for "Easton's Beach: Planning for a Resilient Future"**. For more information please see the beautifully detailed website at:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/cc75f3e9a1f04f889b5b16327ac74abb>

Finally, as a neighborhood association, we will try to actively engage with the city as ad hoc volunteers and participants. This is especially important for the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. TOH members have always been and remain active on important City commissions and committees such as the Energy & Environment, Trust & Investment, Beach and Waterfront Commissions to just mention a few.

Please contact me if you have any questions or suggestions.

Hank Kniskern
TOH Community Chair
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401-225-2885

Admiral Luce Park Revitalization by Wayne Glazier

Sunday April 26, 2025, a hardy crew of members to complete the annual Luce Park Spring cleanup. We were able to clean up debris, weed, and edge the beds, and then spread several cubic yards of mulch. We even had time for coffee and doughnut holes! The Park looks great, and I hope everyone will have a chance to visit and enjoy the little gem in the middle of The Top of The Hill.

You may have noticed the city is doing a lot of work around the park. They are installing new, wider sidewalks, which means a small portion of the area around the memorial stone has been dug up. The repairs/renovation should be over by early summer.

We will be continuing to maintain the park and welcome any suggestions anyone has to improve the Park. In the Fall we will be having a Fall clean up and look forward to welcoming anyone who would like to help out. Please contact me or Laurie via Member message on the website or email us at tohnewport@gmail.com with any comments or suggestions for improving the park, or with any offers to help out with some routine maintenance between our scheduled cleanups.



Membership by Anne Marie Biernacki – Smith

It's been a busy start to the year in terms of communication with our membership!

In February of 2025, the Board and Committee Chairs assembled an online survey that was emailed to our membership. We had a response rate of about 25% of the membership, which is a not atypical and quite acceptable number for this kind of thing.

Questions and selected responses included:

- how people found out about our neighborhood association – ~84% were neighbor recommendations,
- what kinds of activities and benefits of membership were most appealing - ~66% responded with the main social events (holiday party, garden party etc) and ~49% cited the general interest events (walking tours, landmark tours, boat trip etc.),
- what has been of most benefit – more than 63% of the membership reported new friendships and social activities,
- whether they've recommended membership to anyone else – 75% have done so (keep up the good work!),

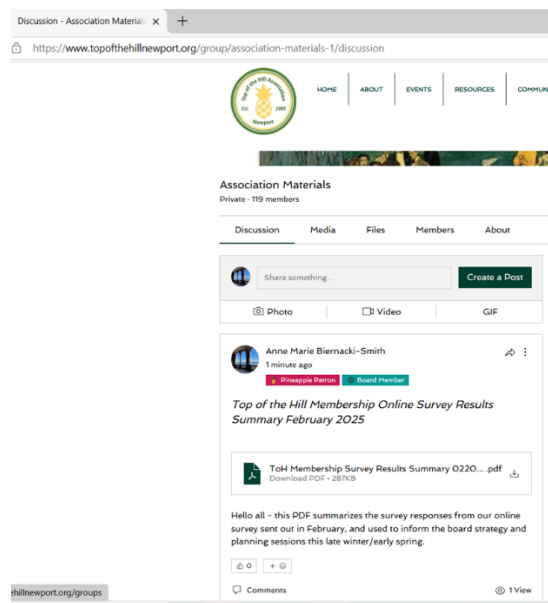
- what opportunities to get more involved or volunteer might be of interest,
- what kinds of member communications are most impactful, including the website, and lastly,
- how the organization can serve member needs in the best way possible.

We are grateful for the candid and thoughtful responses, and – as noted in our Community Chair’s update - spent considerable time discussing these results and how we can apply them to maintaining a strong and active neighborhood association.

An overview of the results of the survey can be found behind the member login on the Top of the Hill website, at:

<https://www.topofthehillnewport.org/group/association-materials-1/>

on the Groups Page: Association Materials – see the screenshot below to assist you in locating the file. We encourage a read!



Additionally, a new welcome letter has been drafted to be shared with newly-joined members that provides a concise overview of the benefits and activities associated with their membership. This alerts them to the kinds of activities that they can look forward to over the coming months so that they can make the most of their membership and opportunities to meet and connect with others via the association.

Lastly, we always welcome those new members! If you have a friend or neighbor who might be interested, or know of someone new, we always appreciate word of

mouth! Bring any prospective members to one of our wonderful coming events, or let them know that any new members who join in the final quarter of our association fiscal year (July-September 2025) will be getting 15 months membership for the price of 12, paying for fiscal year '26 and the remainder of fiscal year '25 – what a bargain for membership in such an engaged and engaging group.

We welcome the following new and renewed members, for 2025 year to date:

Scott Andersen
Vince Cruz and Carolyn Cruz
Mary De Pinho
Jacob George
Karl Landgraf
Karen Mancini
Joe Mattison and Kerry Hudson
Nancy Parsons
Michelle Plaud
Stephen Santos and Maria Nelson
Kim Soo Joy Seawell

We look forward to seeing you this summer at our upcoming events!

Warm regards,
Anne Marie Biernacki-Smith
Membership Chair

(Guest) Historian's Corner

A historical nugget about our neighborhood, provided by a (very) longtime neighborhood resident: The area now occupied by Luce Park at the corner of Kay Street and Rhode Island Avenue was open space until around 1910. For several years between 1905 and 1910, a baseball team called the Newport Trojans used the area as their practice field. The Trojans were a semi-pro team that played major and minor league teams from other cities, especially from “blue law” New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts, which did not allow Sunday play at that time. Those teams, with sizable numbers of fans in tow, would take a train or steamship to Newport, play a game, and leave that night (after suitable festivities, no doubt). The Trojans played in Wellington Park into the teens and 20's, and then Cardines Field when it was built.

Charting A Strategy for TOH's Future by Hank Kniskern

The TOH Board is developing strategies to increase membership and engagement, focusing on community connection and participation.

The demographics of our neighborhood have changed since 2020; For example, the average member age has gotten older, and new house purchases have often been for summer residency or by investors. As noted in the Membership section above, the online member survey provided helpful feedback and suggestions.

The TOH Board had several demanding half-day sessions as they worked through the process. The guiding concept for the Board involved assessing strengths and weaknesses, external factors affecting the organization, and its mission statement and by-laws. The group focused on the concept of *TOH's Value Proposition*: Why would a resident want to join (and remain in) the TOH? The answer tended to center on a feeling of “connectiveness” not only with neighbors, but also with the larger Newport community -- a sense of safety, of belonging, participating, being informed, helping others, learning, and contributing to a greater good.

The following is a summary of recommendations and implementation:

- Keep the Summer Garden Party, Holiday Party, TOH City Council Annual Forum, and the Annual Membership Meeting and all the other recurring Events. Make these more personal by reaching out to immediate neighbors. Encourage all members to use the Forum on the TOH Website to add events they see of interest or wish to lead – such as a movie night.
- Create a “TOH Welcome Letter” from the Membership Chair which articulates the benefits of belonging to the TOH. (That is in addition to the Introduction Letter from the President on the About Page of the Website.)
- Encourage more interpersonal engagement rather than defaulting to the convenience of texting.
- Re-energize the “TOH Historic Committee”
- Continue the Beautification projects (e.g. Luce Park) as an event and think about other beautification ideas.
- Increase neighborhood connectedness by utilizing member “concentrations” (groups of several members clustered in a one or two block area). This can be facilitated with the Membership Directory that is sorted by Street Address – found in the Association Materials Group on the TOH Website.

- Look into supporting an area non-profit on a multi-year basis.

If you would like to become more involved with TOH, there are several volunteer opportunities available. We invite you to join one of our committees or volunteer to help develop our quarterly newsletter. For more information and/or sign-up, please contact one of the representatives below:

Newsletter Publishing Support:

Sandy Neville – santiago.r.neville@icloud.com

Committee Chairs

Community – Hank Kniskern

Events – Susan Kelleher & Denise Pelle

Membership – Anne Marie Biernacki-Smith

Welcome – Susan McCoy

Beautification – Wayne Glazier

Website & Communications – Laurie Love

Email us at tohnewport@gmail.com or send a chat message on the Members Page of the website to a specific member.

Events by Denise Pelle and Susan Kelleher

The Events Committee has been hard at work to host a number of activities throughout the year to bring our community together. We are increasing our efforts to get the word out on our events as well as encouraging all members to post to the Forum on the TOH website when they hear about other activities. There's always so much going on in Newport!

We are off to a great start this year! We have reviewed the feedback from the recent Member Survey and are looking at ways to incorporate additional events into our schedule including some standing events like a monthly happy hour. Please continue to share your ideas – either for an event or a new group. We are also looking into a TOH Book Group – any interest??

Recently, many of us participated in the **May 3rd Walking Tour with TOH Historian, Mike Margonis, on “Top of the Hill Houses Lost, Rediscovered and Relocated.”** It was a fascinating look at the transformation of our Top of the

Hill neighborhood over the years including the history of many of the homes in our neighborhood and included an appearance by prominent Newport historian Mike Franco.



TOH group in front of the Viking Hotel, former site of the house where prominent architect Richard Morris Hunt's family lived.

We've also enjoyed multiple community concerts with the Newport String Project and Newport Classical as well as our Spring Clean Up at Luce Park and our Annual Community Forum.



Newport String Project, May 18 at Newport Craft Brewing & Distilling

Highlights of Upcoming Events:

We invite you to join us at these upcoming events. More detailed information on the event (event description, location and sign-up) can be found by going to our website <https://www.topofthehillnewport.org> under the Events header.

You will receive a promotional email for each posted event, but if you wish to look ahead, you may RSVP to any upcoming event.

- **Norman Bird Sanctuary Guided Bird Walk – Saturday June 22nd , 8:00 AM – 10:00 AM**

Enjoy a guided bird walk through the beautiful trails of the Norman Bird Sanctuary.

- **Hello Summer – Cheers to our Veterans! – Saturday June 28th, 4:00 PM – 7:00 PM**

Since our garden party is scheduled for August, we wanted to have an earlier backyard gathering, and as this is the 250th Anniversary for our incredible Army and Navy, it gives us an opportunity to say thank you to all our member veterans!

- **Newport Classical Community Concert – Patriotic Pops – Friday July 4th 8:00 – 10:00 PM, King Park**
Gather for an evening of patriotic celebration at King Park followed by magnificent fireworks!
- **Summer Garden Party – August 9th **Save the Date**, August 10 Rain Date**
Our annual Summer Garden Party will be held on August 9th. We will be sending out more information on this event in the near future. We hope to see many of you there!

We will keep you posted on upcoming events and activities. Again, we encourage your participation. These events are a great way to meet neighbors, make new friends and learn more about the wonderful Newport neighborhood we live in. Please visit our website <https://www.topofthehillnewport.org> for information about our neighborhood and city. There's a wealth of information for reference...including some wonderful articles and videos on the History Page!

Useful Links and Contacts

City of Newport - <https://cityofnewport.com> City website

City of Newport Clean City - <https://cityofnewport.com/cleancity> Contains information about trash pickups, holiday and storm delays, recycling, scheduling trash pickups, dropping off garbage at waste management, etc.

City of Newport Newsletter “The Current” -

<https://www.cityofnewport.com/en-us/city-hall/departments/communications/newsletter>

City of Newport Quarterly Magazine “Wavelengths” -

<https://www.cityofnewport.com/en-us/city-hall/departments/communications/wavelengths>

Child and Family RI – childandfamilyri.com.

Report It - https://seeclickfix.com/newport_2 (requires registration) You can report problems such as potholes, litter, missed or uncollected garbage, snow covered sidewalks, graffiti, unsafe sidewalks, streetlights, etc.

Second Ward Councilor Lynn Ceglie – Go to city website <https://www.cityofnewport.com> and look her up by name in the Staff Directory tab (upper right, next to the “City of Newport” banner. You will then be able to email her through the City email system.

Top of the Hill (TOH) Neighborhood Association
<https://www.topofthehillnewport.org>

NextDoor Top of the Hill – NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH OUR ASSOCIATION!
<https://nextdoor.com/neighborhood/topofthehillri--newport--ri/> NextDoor, in conjunction with H&R Block, is providing us with the \$10,000 grant for the revitalization of Luce Park.

NewportThisWeek- <https://www.newportthisweek.com> Informative weekly newspaper with useful local-event calendars, advertising including restaurants and businesses, and reporting on local issues.

What’s Up Newport - <https://whatsupnewp.com>

Newport Daily News - <https://www.newportri.com>