

WASHINGTON SQUARE ADVISORY COMMISSION

VISION FOR THE RESTORATION OF EISENHOWER PARK

March 2012

Historic Overview of Park: In the mid 1600's Charles I granted a large swath of land at the southern part of Aquidneck Island which became known as Newport, founded in 1639. The area in the heart of Newport is known as Washington Square and the green space at its center, is today known as Eisenhower Park. The entire land grant was known as "commonage" for the use of the settlers for their dwellings, farms, pastures, roads, and common areas. As the settlement grew and Newport developed as a town part of this land eventually became known as Washington Square and functioned as Newport's town common. Over time Washington Square developed as the economic and social center of town, with buildings around the perimeter of the Square and a green space in the center. This green space was originally used as a temporary holding area for livestock such as sheep and cattle brought into town for purposes of trade, and then was the site of several small dwellings and a shop. The area was serviced by a spring at the top located behind the Colony House.

General Overview of Park: Eisenhower Park located between the Court House and the Brick Market in the geographic center of Washington Square functions is an integral element of overall historic square. With the exception of the adjacent sidewalks on the exterior of the park, the restoration of the park itself did not qualify as an inclusion in the Transportation Improvement project. The restoration of the park remains to be addressed as the final phase of the Square's restoration.

A quick observation of pedestrian behavior reveals that the walkways within the park itself are utilized as much if not heavier than those surrounding the park in the daytime. A large volume of this traffic is due to the fact that the County Courthouse has its only public access through the park and most people traveling from the court to Touro or Thames Street choose the more direct route through the park. In the evening, however, while many pedestrian frequent the Square either because of the Jane Pickens Theater, the restaurants, and stores or because of parking, very few pedestrians enter the park to traverse to their destinations. This is because of the substandard lighting in the Park and subsequent concerns about pedestrian security.

The general condition of the park, including the fence, pathways, statues, fountain, lighting, is fair to poor. All are in need of restoration and/or upgrading.

To maximize the positive results of a park restoration a comprehensive Design and Implementation Plan is recommended. It should include:

1. **Paved surfaces within the park:** Existing pathways are of mixed materials, most are old and patched. Surface material selection for current should be compatible with exterior Washington Square walkway materials wherever possible. A needs assessment and design plan for the restoration of the paved surfaces within the park and access points into and out of the park is needed to meet a standard that is safe, functional, ADA acceptable and historically compatible.

2. **Fountain:** The existing fountain basin leaks and the water fountain display is inadequate and not historically appropriate. At best the replacement of the fountain with a more historically appropriate fountain is desirable. At minimum, restoration of the existing decorative fountain is needed to increase water circulation and conserve water by the installation of an upgraded circulation and filtration system with commercial grade fountain display components. Repairs to existing basin or total replacement to reduce current chronic leakage problems are a priority. The final desired result is increased aesthetics, improved water conservation and minimum maintenance.
3. **Park and pedestrian amenities,** included but not limited to:
 - a. **Fence:** Eisenhower Park is surrounded by a cast iron fence of considerable vintage. The fence suffers badly from rust, vandalism, and physical damage from motor vehicles. During Phase 1 of the Washington Square modest emergency repairs were made to the fence, with funding from an insurance claim (which allowed for a fence pattern mold) and iron work done and funded by the Preservation Society of Newport County. An up to date needs assessment for fence repairs is needed. Funding is needed to have more replacement segments cast, have existing segments professionally painted and rust proofed, to obtain replacement posts, and other design elements.
 - b. **Benches:** Evaluation study of current locations and styles of park benches is needed prior to a design plan for optimal bench design and placement.
 - c. **Water fountain:** A supplemental water fountain is needed to meet newly mandated compliance for ADA accessibility.
 - d. **Oliver Hazard Perry Statue and George Washington Monument:** Specifications to repair and clean these two important features are needed. The Oliver Hazard Perry Statue in particular is in need of evaluation and stabilization.
4. **Trees and landscaping. A design plan is need and should include:**
 - a. **Trees:** Eisenhower Park is a cool green oasis in the center of downtown Newport. It contains about 16 trees, some are historic specimen, some are commemorative trees others a mixture or more or less importance. A design and long term maintenance plan is needed to begin a transition to a historically appropriate urban park landscape with a high canopy as characterized by the American Elm.
 - b. **Greenscape:** Grass, shrubbery, and flowers. An assessment of existing landscape plants is needed to evaluate historic and site appropriateness and meet low maintenance requirements of City. A design plan should follow and should include identifying and locating a portion of the park for Adopt a Spot for annuals.

5. **Lighting:** Appropriate lighting for a historic park must also serve to make pedestrians feel safe after dark. Existing lighting in the park consists solely of 22 authentic gas lights in the park. There is no additional lighting in the park, such as lighting of the statues, trees, fountain, or sidewalks. There is no exterior lighting on the court house, which has a dominant position at the top of the park. As a result, lighting in the Square is woefully inadequate to meet the basic safety standards of pedestrians at night. Before implementation a lighting study and design plan is needed to determine what and how much lighting is required to meet safety standards, as well aesthetic and historical appropriateness. Installation of improved lighting should at the same time include upgrading of electrical service in the park to allow for additional lighting if needed, and a small number of strategically placed exterior grade outlets for special annual events such as Christmas Tree Lighting, and sound amplification for special events. The installation of electrical services and lights must avoid negative impact of the trees and tree roots must be approved by the Newport Tree and Parks Supervisor.
6. All park improvements and installations should also allow for low maintenance and vandal resistance.
7. **Methodology:** In the same fashion as the restoration of the streetscapes in the Square, the park restoration should be as comprehensive and as period appropriate as possible and still meet the exigencies of 21st century safety and economic considerations. As with the restoration of the street and sidewalks of the square, historical accuracy is the springboard for decision making with regard to design. The design should match that of the restored Square. The Commission will work closely with the Newport Historical Society on the history of the park, with particular emphasis on its layout and park surfaces, landscaped features and accoutrements such as statues and the fountain.

Eisenhower Park is a public park, therefore all planning and decisions for the restoration of Eisenhower Park will be made in accordance with the all laws governing the City of Newport including the Open meetings law. The Commission will work closely with the City and have the approval of the City Council for all design, methodology and installations. The Commission will assist in raising the funds necessary for the park restoration.

8. **Suggested Membership of the Commission to include but not be limited to representation from:**

The Newport City Council

The City of Newport:

Newport Tree Warden and Buildings and Grounds Supervisor

City Planner

Newport Tree & Open Space Commission

The Newport Historical Society

Newport Restoration Foundation (abutter)

The Preservation Society of Newport County
Downtown Merchants Assoc. (abutter)
Downtown Christmas Decorations Committee
BankNewport (abutter)
Citizens Bank (abutter)
Newport Tree Society
Northeast Collaborative Architects (abutter)
Church Community Corporation (abutter)
Jane Pickens Theater (abutter)
Washington Square Roots Initiative
2-3 general public representatives

Conclusion:

The restoration of Eisenhower Park is long overdue. It has lost its appeal and historic identity and security is a grave concern. The proper restoration of this historically significant public space will secure its rightful place as an important element in historic downtown Newport and as a park designed and equipped for the full enjoyment of the general public for generations to come.

CITY OF NEWPORT

RESOLUTION
OF THE
COUNCIL
No. 2012-045

WHEREAS, on May 14, 1997, the Newport City Council adopted Resolution No. 97-71, thereby establishing the Washington Square Advisory Commission; and

WHEREAS, the Washington Square Advisory Commission, through arduous work over the past fifteen year, has seen come to fruition a comprehensive upgrade of Washington Square with the construction of a new roadway and sidewalks; and

WHEREAS, challenges still remain, particularly with regard to Eisenhower Park improvements. NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED: that the Council deems it beneficial to continue the mission of the Washington Square Advisory Commission, which shall be reconstituted with representatives of the following to be appointed by the City Council:

Newport City Council
Newport Tree & Open Space Commission
The Newport Historical Society
The Newport Restoration Foundation
The Newport Tree Society
Washington Square Roots Initiative
Newport Businesses
Newport Residents-at-Large

AND BE IT FURTHER

RESOLVED: that the life of the Commission shall cease its existence six months following the completion of the project.

IN COUNCIL
READ AND PASSED
April 11, 2012

NAOMI NEVILLE
STEPHEN C. WALUK
HENRY F. WINTHROP
JUSTIN S. MC LAUGHLIN
JEANNE-MARIE NAPOLITANO
KATHRYN E. LEONARD


Kathleen M. Silvia
City Clerk

Washington Square Advisory Commission: 3.15.12