

## 2013 Community Forum Notes

Approximately 40 Top of the Hill members attended the 2013 Community Forum. The speakers this year were Mayor Harry Winthrop; 2nd Ward Councilor, Justin McLaughlin; Councilor-at-Large, Mike Farley and Community Oriented Police Officer, Robert Spellman. Also, City Manager, Jane Howington was in attendance in the audience and was helpful with her contributions during the conversation.

Mayor Winthrop opened with some comments regarding the benefit of face to face, give and take meetings such as this as opposed to communicating on city affairs through the media.

Officer Spellman talked about the purpose of Community Oriented Policing, to be a visible contact with the community and to work with the community to address issues and concerns. His contact information is on our website.

The issues covered were as follows:

### **Broadway Streetscape Project**

Infrastructure work has started with water and sewer lines. This should be done before the summer tourist traffic. Traffic is being alternated to avoid rerouting through the neighborhoods although there is some of that by people who try to avoid waits. Impact to Top of the Hill neighborhoods should be minimal.

Fall 2014 is the projected time for the whole project to be completed. Effort to keep dust down is being made by use of pellets with oil in them.

All yellow curbing should be remarked upon completion of the project. It was pointed out that the intersection of Rhode Island and Broadway has lost its yellow markings and cars are parking too close to the intersection. The possibility of repainting it now will be looked into.(subsequently done)

Charles Street and Ayrault Street, from Kay to Broadway, were mentioned as candidates for repaving. There is a schedule of 2013 repaving work on the city web site and Charles Street is on it.

### **New Budget**

The budget has been submitted by the City Manager and public workshops have been scheduled. This is an extremely tough budget this year.

The budget calls for 3.87% increase in tax rate or close to \$2 1/2 million increase in revenue in order to balance. All of this increase is used up by the \$1.9 million in increased payments to the Police and Fire pension funds and in the \$1.4 million debt service payment which begins this year on the construction bond for the new Pell School.

There was considerable conversation regarding the condition of the school budget and the fact that the \$800,000 savings from the new school hadn't reduced the school's financial needs this year. There was a

contention among the council members that they were having trouble getting hard numbers from the School Committee.

City Council is working with the School Committee to find ways to produce savings through combining services. Eventually, the old schools will be sold and the proceeds applied to the debt service.

It was mentioned that Providence and Cranston had renegotiated their pension obligations resulting in savings. Newport isn't in the same level of distress as those towns and cutting promised benefits, especially to retirees, is something to be taken seriously. There is, however, a very high percentage of the city budget that goes to salary and benefits for Police and Fire and that needs to be discussed.

PILOT, payment in lieu of taxes, was discussed as a possible source of additional revenue. There are ongoing negotiations with Salve Regina, Newport Hospital, Newport Housing Authority and Newport Preservation Society for possible increase in revenue.

Pay-as-you go trash collection, similar to what is done in Middletown, was a proposal to save money but the general consensus was that it is unworkable for Newport due to the large number of part time residents and the many tight streets.

### **Cliff Walk Restoration**

This is back on track. New plans recognizing the need to preserve the unique surf conditions around the Ruggles Avenue area are to be presented to the council on May 2nd.

### **Easton's Beach and Memorial Blvd**

Progress has been made on repairs from the storm last fall. Sand dunes have been reconstructed and Save the Bay is replanting beach grass. The offices at the Rotunda are under repair and will be completed in the summer.

The bike lanes on Memorial Blvd will be evaluated this summer during the beach season. There was discussion regarding the disruption they may cause for traffic entering Memorial from Rhode Island, Gibbs and Eustis. If it's a problem, it can be changed. "It's only paint". It is felt that this reconfiguration will have the beneficial effect of slowing down traffic on Memorial.

### **Speeding and Noise Issues**

First and foremost inform the Police directly as opposed to emailing city officials which only delays the response. Persistent speeders, loud motorcycles, loud car radios should be reported with location, and plate number and time of day if it a recurring thing. The police can then react accordingly. An officer can be stationed to observe. The information can be submitted anonymously. Useful contacts and contact information will be posted on our web site.

### **Plans for Newport's 375 Year Anniversary**

A committee has been formed headed by ex-mayors Steve Waluk and John Trifero to pursue an agenda of events to commemorate the founding of Newport. More to follow on that.