

# The Campaign for a Public Park



AT THE  
Birthplace of Newport



## Mission Statement

To recognize and celebrate the Spring as the birthplace of Newport and the important role this place had in sustaining the life and growth of this town, the birthplace in the United States of religious freedom and separation of church and state; and to make this place, once again, a gathering place for all people to commemorate Newport's pivotal role in the development of our nation's values.

*Newport Historic Spring Leadership Committee, 2017*





## Opportunity of Historic Significance

Founded in 1639 by people seeking religious freedom, the City of Newport became the first colonial government based on the separation of church and state. A fresh water spring served as the town center and the birthplace of America's first secular democracy. Over 375 years later, the opportunity to preserve, interpret and share with the public this historic site has come.

### **A \$3.5 million capital campaign is underway to realize the vision for the Newport Historic Spring.**

When this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity arose to purchase Coffey's gas station, so inappropriately situated on this historic site, we took a bold step to eliminate the threat of future commercial development. Next, community members, preservation experts, and the City of Newport began collaborating on a plan to create a public park on the site of Newport's founding. This will be the first new city park in 30 years.

This project incorporates the exciting discovery of an 18th century spring box, an early engineering structure that provided an essential water supply to Newport's earliest residents.

Now the spring site, that served as the nexus of community life in Newport's pioneering early years, will once again become a public gathering place to commemorate Newport's pivotal role in the development of our nation's values.

This public space is thoughtfully designed to be a source of intellectual inspiration and quiet reflection. Saving this crucial space will provide new historical and cultural context to surrounding structures such as the Colony House (1741), the Touro Synagogue Historic National Site (1763), and numerous neighboring historic buildings.

Extensive groundwork has been completed to realize the vision for the Newport Historic Spring. Your charitable investment into this legacy project will fulfill this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create a place of national historic significance, deep educational value, and perpetual public benefit.

ABOVE: The property has been purchased and cleaned, and is now ready to become an incredible public park.

LEFT: The threat of future commercial development will not be over until the park is installed.

# Core Goals and Public Benefit

## CULTURAL

Newport Historic Spring commemorates the pivotal role of Newport in pioneering the values of religious freedom, tolerance and the separation of church and state. This new park is at the heart of colonial Newport and will provide a visual and physical connection to neighboring cultural sites and institutions.

## EDUCATIONAL

Newport Historic Spring will serve as an educational resource and destination for students, teachers, residents, historians, and visitors with an interpretive story of Newport and its founding principles. The spring will be celebrated as the nexus of colonial life. The spring box is preserved as a remarkable example of an early public water system.

## ECONOMIC

As a new park of immense local and national historic significance, Newport Historic Spring will further enhance the City’s tourism experience, while adding value to surrounding commercial and residential properties.

## ENVIRONMENTAL

The park-like setting will replace urban blight and pollution with open space augmented by native trees, improved natural views, birdlife, and air quality in this densely developed area. Once completed, the park will be donated to the City with a conservation easement granted by the Aquidneck Land Trust to protect the site as open space in perpetuity.

## QUALITY OF LIFE

Newport Historic Spring will be a visual and physical oasis. The park will promote public gatherings, rest and relaxation, and diverse forms of creative expression related to equity, inclusion, and diversity, as well as Newport’s founding principles.



## SUSTAINABILITY

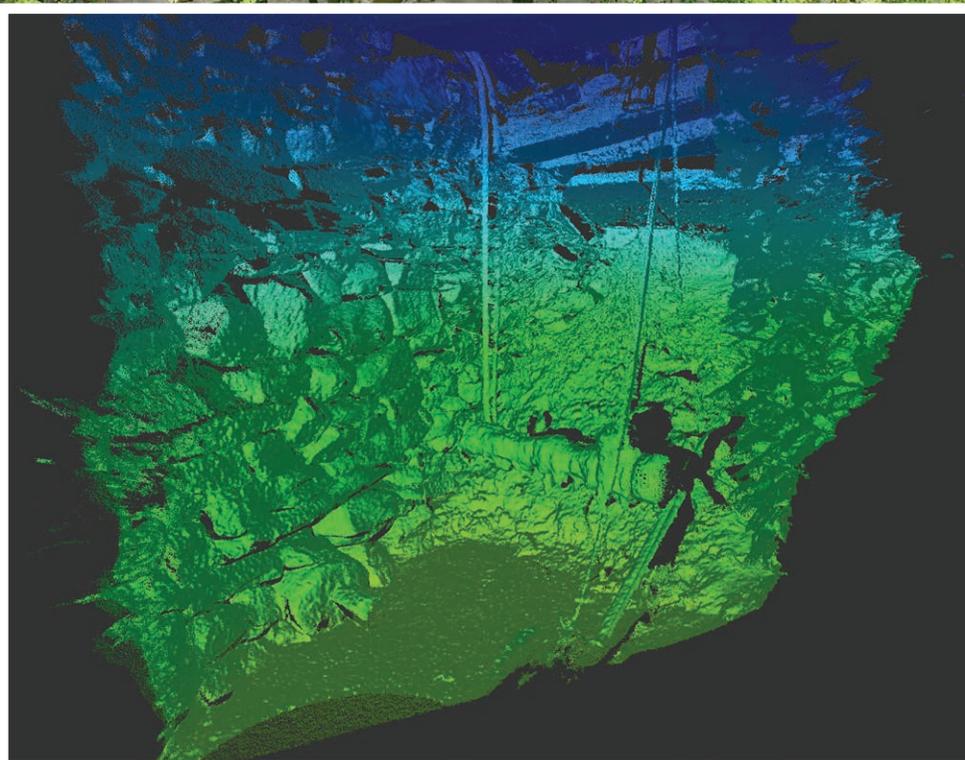
Design details, materials, and engineering of the park have been carefully worked out in collaboration with the City. Environmental enhancement and mitigation of storm water runoff, which can be considerable in the area, and low-cost maintenance, are prime design elements for sustainability.

## SAFETY

Vehicular traffic and pedestrian circulation will be greatly enhanced to improve safety in this complicated intersection.



RIGHT: An archaeological investigation of the spring box has been completed. State-of-the-art imaging using LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) fully documents this historic structure.



## Design Inspirations

Overwhelming public consensus is that Newport Historic Spring should express the founding principle of religious freedom and tolerance. There was also a great desire for the inclusion of a water feature.

Newport Historic Spring is configured around three distinct spaces:

The **Gathering Place** is a central open area that affords long views into, through, and across the park to orient and connect visitors to adjacent historic sites. This area around the historic town spring maintains the spirit of the site as a place for people to gather – as it had centuries before.

With a modest water basin, the **Spring Grove** establishes a geological, hydrological and botanical space that orients people to this profound natural history of Newport. The perimeter of the Spring Grove will provide generously scaled sidewalks, crosswalks and corner thresholds into the park.

The **Charter Grove** enlightens visitors to Newport’s unique role in the history of our country, and provides a shaded respite in the south-facing park. Native trees and movable seating establish a social area for people to pause and observe the history and life of Newport.

The original town spring emerged from a location where underground water flowed downhill through a gradual glacial till and rose to the surface when it encountered the bedrock known as the Jamestown Formation. A water element will be a passive feature, reflecting the natural origins of the site with a low rocky ledge and a small water rill that courses across the rocks and terminates in a shallow water basin.

The spring box, an 18th century water infrastructure artifact discovered during environmental remediation, will be preserved and protected. Water still flows through this fragile structure. The spring box will be protected by a stone cap with a slight recess that matches its shape. The cap is removable to provide access to the structure for future research.

A passage from the founding documents of Newport will be carved by Nick Benson of the John Stevens Shop on the stone wall that defines the east edge of the Gathering Place. As one reads the Newport Founding Inscription, the view is oriented uphill toward the Loeb Visitor’s Center and Touro Synagogue.





GATHERING PLACE

CHARTER GROVE

“The Rhode Island Historical and Preservation Commission agrees that the adaptive reuse of this area as thoughtfully designed, low-impact, historically compatible, and educational open space can serve as a beneficial modern amenity within the core of the Newport National Landmark Historic District.” — J. Paul Loether, Executive Director and State Historic Preservation Officer



## Our Accomplishments

- \* The Newport Spring Leadership Committee was formed in 2013 as a community-based group determined to save this historic site and shape the vision of this space as a public park.
- \* \$1.5 million has been raised in public and private contributions as evidence of early strong support. These funds were used to purchase the gas station property and start remediation.
- \* The property was purchased in 2015 by our nonprofit partner, Church Community Housing, to reduce the threat of commercial real estate development and further degradation of the site until the park can be installed.
- \* With funding from the RI Department of Environmental Management, the gas station building, pumps, pavement, and underground gasoline storage tanks were removed along with contaminated soil. An additional \$185,000 remains available to cap the site and complete the remediation.
- \* A Cultural and Historical Landscape Report by the Newport Historical Society documented the history of the site and its invaluable relationship to the founding of Newport.
- \* Extensive, multi-faceted community outreach has taken place to receive public input into the design of the park. This fully transparent, best practice includes regular written and social media communications, public meetings, events and presentations, and media coverage.
- \* Final design plans are now being completed for a construction bid process, contracts and permits.



“It has been a wonderful inspiration to witness our entire community come together and work to preserve the birthplace of our city as a shared space for all citizens and visitors to enjoy. We are thankful that you will join us in bringing new life to a space so unique in the history of our city and country.”

— *Lilly Dick, Chair,  
Newport Historic  
Spring Committee*



## Our Request

- ✧ We are raising \$3.5 million in contributions and grants with a time-sensitive deadline of June 30, 2022.
- ✧ On the strength of a \$300,000 van Beuren Charitable Foundation grant, we seek leadership gifts of \$50,000 or more to be permanently recognized on an inscribed Donor Wall.
- ✧ In addition to leadership gifts we welcome wide community support with contributions of all sizes.

**We invite you to become a contributor to this extraordinary project that enhances our American history!**



## Our Partners and Contributors

1772 Foundation

Alletta Morris McBean Charitable Trust

Amica

Aquidneck Land Trust

Bardoff & Bardoff

Church Community Housing Corporation

City of Newport

City of Newport Tree and  
Open Space Commission

de Ramel Foundation

Bernard and Sarah Gewirz Foundation

Hamilton Family Foundation

Hope Foundation

Hope Goddard Iselin Foundation

The Edward W. Kane &  
Martha J. Wallace Family Foundation

Kirby-Perkins Construction

Lirio Landscape Architects

Loebs Family Foundation

Newport Environmental

Newport Historical Society

Prince Charitable Trusts

RI Department of Environmental  
Management

RI Historical Preservation &  
Heritage Commission

Salve Regina University Department of  
Cultural and Historic Preservation

van Beuren Charitable Foundation

More than 100 donors who moved this  
project to "shovel ready" status



“ It is agreed and ordered that the Plantation now begin at this South west end of the island, shall be called Newport ... and that the Towne shall be built upon both sides of the spring, and by the sea-side Southward. ”

*Records of the Colony of Rhode Island  
& Providence Plantations;  
Volume 1 – 1636 to 1663;  
16th March, 1639*



[www.newportspring.org](http://www.newportspring.org)