

# **Top of the Hill Newsletter**

## **Winter 2023**

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## Co-Presidents' Letter

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Happy New Year 2023 to everyone! In this edition, we have a new feature: Newport's newly elected Mayor Xay Khamsyvovravong and our 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward Councilor Charlie Holder collaborated on an article that explains how to apply for the resident rate in Newport's two-tier real estate tax system, and also discusses the new Council's policy priorities going ahead. In addition, we have a photo gallery following the very successful Holiday Party (thanks to a lot of work by our new Events Committee co-chairs!), and an update on the revitalization of Luce Park. Claire O'Donnely has some excellent gardening advice (yes, even in Winter), and Mike Margonis provides us with historic background on the occupants of 16 Catherine Street.

A lot of the revitalization work at Admiral Luce Park has been completed, but we will still need to perform routine periodic maintenance (weeding, watering, mulching). See the article for details, and if you're interested contact Beautification Committee Chairman John Hirschboeck.

Laurie Love is creating a brand new website for TOH. We will launch the new site in the very near future. It will be more current, attractive, informative, interactive and much easier to use! Preview it here: <https://tohnewport.wixsite.com/topofthehill>

We'd like to remind everyone that this year there are a lot of opportunities to help lead our organization, by running for office. In addition to the mandatory term-limit expiration of our terms as Co-Presidents, several Board and Committee chairs may be vacated. We are actively looking for and encouraging volunteers to fill the ranks. If you're interested, please let us know! Per the bylaws, a nominating committee will be established in late August or September to seek out new officers; nominations will also be taken from the floor at the Annual Meeting. Please consider giving TOH your time and talent to make our neighborhood a better and a welcoming place for all of us.

We hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter. As always, we encourage any feedback on current content, and ideas about future content. Please contact us at [TOHinfo@topofthehill.org](mailto:TOHinfo@topofthehill.org) or [santiago.r.neville@icloud.com](mailto:santiago.r.neville@icloud.com).

Stay safe and stay tuned!  
Maureen and Sandy Neville

## City Council Corner with Mayor Xay and Councilor Holder

The 2022-2024 City Council has hit the ground running with an ambitious agenda. To this end, we wanted to update you regarding an important deadline on March 15<sup>th</sup> and to give you some insight as to where the Council is headed.

First, residents have until March 15<sup>th</sup> to apply for a resident tax rate. The Council recently approved changes to city ordinance 4.08 to provide owner-occupied homeowners with a break in their real estate taxes. Importantly, this also includes owners of properties with three units or less that rent all the units to year-round Newport residents.

Did not get an application in the mail? You can download the forms online at [www.CityOfNewport.com/ResidentRate](http://www.CityOfNewport.com/ResidentRate). The website also includes directions on how to fill out the forms and upload them online. If you prefer to submit the forms in person or have questions, the City has a team located inside the main entrance of City Hall who can help you apply. They can also be reached by phone at (401) 845-5365.

Second, the Council identified some key policy priorities at a recent goal setting session on January 4<sup>th</sup>. The objective of the session was to familiarize the Council with one another's priorities and to identify potential areas to collaborate. Consistent with our commitment to ensuring we do our work out in the open, our meeting was a very well attended public working session.

The Council found consensus on some important policy areas.

- **Policies that help increase the availability of housing for residents and decrease City related administrative burdens on homeowners.** Examples include a policy for the creation or conversion of existing spaces into accessory dwelling units, cracking down on illegal short-term rentals, streamlining the Historic District Commission permitting process to be clearer and more objective, and the development of vacant City properties, like the Coggeshall School. Longer term, the City's zoning code, under which 89% of homes in residential zones are non-conforming, needs to be modernized.
- **A Master Transit Plan that balances the community's varying interests and thinks outside of the box to include alternatives such as waterborne transit options.** The City also needs higher quality and more frequent communication from the State Department of Transportation regarding the Pell Bridge Realignment project. We are actively working with the State and will be meeting with the Director of Transportation to elevate this important issue.

- **A comprehensive infrastructure plan to make critical improvements, which includes steps and resources to aggressively pursue the once in a generation amount of federal funding available.** These investments include traditional municipal priorities like roads, sidewalks, and sewers, as well as investments in emerging areas including resiliency, broadband, and cyber security. The City currently has a job posting for a grants coordinator and over the past month we have met with both state and federal officials responsible for the awarding of federal funding.
- **Clear and objective criteria and a predictable process for the consideration of development proposals for properties in the North End.**
- **More enforcement of laws for issues that impact our basic quality of life.** For example, violations relating to noise, distracted driving, speeding and parking.

Importantly, this Council is focused on measuring progress in these areas by establishing and tracking key performance indicators.

We are committed to serving our residents and preparing Newport for its next chapter and appreciate the opportunity to check in with you through this newsletter.

Sincerely,  
Mayor Xay and Councilor Holder

## TOH Holiday Party at Edward King House

We had a great turnout for the annual holiday party on December 4<sup>th</sup>. The Edward King House was festively decorated, and holiday music was provided by Peter Martin. A big thank-you to our new co-chairs of the Events Committee, Susan Kelleher and Laurie Love, who spent a lot of time planning and executing the party. They introduced a new format; the food was catered from Dave's Market and TOH members provided beverages. It was a big success with nobody going home either hungry or thirsty. A few photographic highlights are provided below.



## Admiral Luce Park Revitalization Video and Project Update

In December, the sponsors of the Make Every Block Better program (H&R Block/Nextdoor), who awarded TOH the \$10,000 grant to revitalize Admiral Luce Park, completed a video segment that chronicled last year's park revitalization efforts. To create the video, videographers attended two of our Luce Park Volunteer Days (July 23rd and October 16<sup>th</sup>) to photograph the ongoing work and interview TOH participants. You can access the video, and perhaps catch a glimpse of you or your fellow neighbors in action, by clicking on the following YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/6r3GC2Fq5dA>

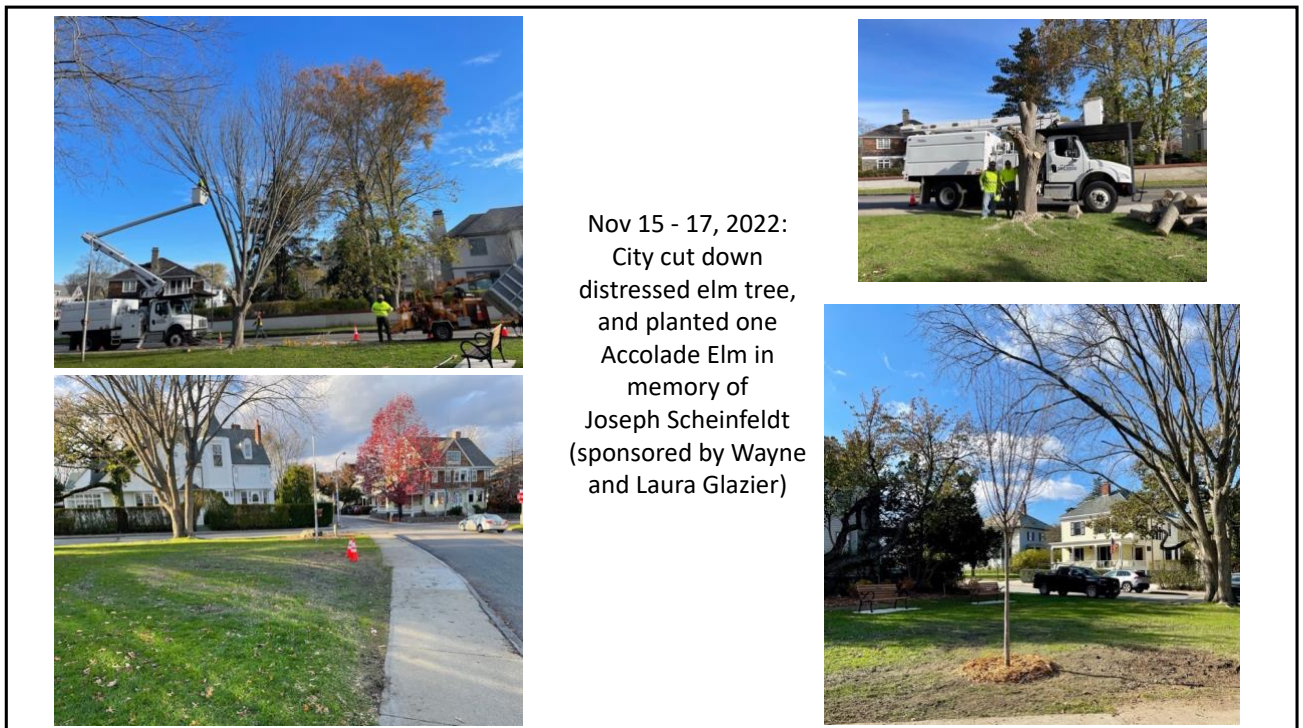
Progress on the Admiral Luce Park revitalization effort since the Fall Newsletter includes:

In early November, City Public Services assembled and installed three new park benches. These benches were funded through the H&R Block/Nextdoor Make Every Block Better grant program, and a donation from the Naval War College Foundation on behalf of the Naval War College and its founder, Admiral Stephen Luce. The bench plaque inscriptions reflect the support of these organization along with the Top of the Hill Association who executed the renovation in coordination with City Public Services personnel.



In mid-November City Public Services personnel removed the distressed elm tree along the Rhode Island Ave side of the park and planted a replacement Accolade Elm tree. This is one of four trees that were sponsored by our generous

TOH members via the Newport Tree Conservancy's Commemorative Tree Program. Wayne and Laura Glazier sponsored the planting of the Accolade Elm in memory of Joseph Scheinfeldt a former TOH member who lived just up from the park on Kay Street. Thanks Wayne and Laura, for your gracious sponsorship.



In late-November, a QR-code post was completed and placed next to the Admiral Luce dedication stone. Anyone visiting the park can access the QR-code via their smart phone camera which will direct them to the U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command's webpage displaying the biography of Admiral Luce. Here's the link in case you haven't had a chance to get down to the park:

<https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/us-people/l/luce-stephen-b.html>

Next Spring, the revitalization effort will culminate with the planting of three June Snow Dogwoods in the park's perennial woodland garden behind each of the benches. As these dogwood trees mature, the existing cherry trees in the back of the perennial bed, which are past the age of their average lifespan, and showing signs of distress, will be removed.

With the park revitalization nearing completion, TOH will switch our efforts from revitalization to park maintenance. We plan on having at least two park clean-



up events annually and hope to have as many people as possible participate. Details about our first event in May will be disseminated in early spring.

## Gardening on Top the Hill by Claire O'Donnelly

Happy winter, fellow gardeners! I hope that you all had a healthy and happy Holiday season. I don't know about you, but I am looking forward to a bit of downtime with NO shopping! I am so glad the holidays fall in Winter; can you imagine having to garden during the holiday season? Stuff of nightmares for sure!

It really is safe to say that there is nothing that needs to be done in the garden right now. You might want to look at gardening books and magazines and get a head start on some ideas for your spring and summer garden, but that is about it. Sadly...

So, I have decided to devote this newsletter to a subject that is close to my heart, Composting. I am sure that, like me, many of you are concerned about Global warming and the weather-related disasters brought about by such warming, that are bombarding our country on an almost daily basis. When food waste is composted instead of trashed, it reduces methane emissions (CH<sub>4</sub>). These emissions are harmful to our world and they are so avoidable. According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, up to **40%** of the food produced in the United States is never eaten. An estimated **133 million pounds** of edible food ends up in the trash every year. Not only does this waste all the valuable resources that go into producing food, but it wastes about \$161 billion of Americans' money, too. Most importantly, it releases too much methane into our world, and requires large amounts of open space to be used for landfills!

In contrast, composting builds healthy soil, reduces runoff, controls erosion, supports local farms, and gets you outdoors more often! Composting creates new life—for plants, bacteria, fungi, insects, and ultimately us!

Composting helps multiple aspects of natural systems. And the good news is that it's not as hard to do as you might think. The city of Newport has a composting program that provides compost bins to residents. The Clean City Program which began on May 24, 2021, has backyard compost bins available at a discounted price of **\$45** (comparable retail value \$120). To ensure availability, please make an appointment for pick up at 80 Halsey Street via email at [cleancity@cityofnewport.com](mailto:cleancity@cityofnewport.com) or by calling 401-845-5617. For more information on the compost bin available through this program please visit: <http://enviroworld.com/environmental-products/freegarden-earth>.

There are also several units available for sale from manufacturers that compost your food scraps right on your kitchen counter. One that I thought looked fairly easy to use is the LOMI which is a smart waste disposal system that composts right on your counter. These units are pricey but may be of interest to some of you. You can take a closer look at [lomi.com](http://lomi.com).

This is not the only unit of its kind out there so you may find another that suits your needs better.

So, till the daffy daffodils make their appearance, enjoy this gardening downtime.  
Claire O'Donnelly

## Historian's Corner by Mike Margonis

### Admiral Augustus L. Case and The Case Villa - 16 Catherine Street

For this newsletter I chose a house near and dear to me: My very own home, built by Rear Admiral Augustus Ludlow Case and his wife Anna Rogers. The house hits a milestone this March turning 150 years old.

Augustus L. Case was born in Newburgh, NY to a family with a prominent naval pedigree. In fact, he was named in honor of his uncle Lieutenant Augustus Ludlow who was killed during the War of 1812 in the naval battle between the USS Chesapeake and HMS Shannon. Ludlow, second in command, received the famous order "don't give up the ship" from the mortally wounded Captain Lawrence before succumbing to his own wounds. Case's mother decided to name her newborn son after her deceased brother in 1813.[ing](#)

Case joined the Navy at a very young age, attained the rank of Midshipman by 1828 at the age of 15. He would face hardship and danger throughout his illustrious naval career which started as a member of the Wilkes Expedition (United States Exploring Expedition) from 1838-1842. The expedition was of major scientific importance to the young United States; many of the plant and animal species collected were acquired by the Smithsonian. The expedition also discovered a large portion of Antarctica known today as Wilkes Land. By expedition's end, they had circumnavigated the globe. *Sea of Glory* by Nathaniel Philbrick is a great account of the expedition, Case is even mentioned in the book.

Lieutenant Case also fought in the Mexican American war from 1846-1848 supervising the landing of men, ordnance, and stores for the siege of Vera Cruz. When the Civil War broke out he was appointed Fleet-Captain of the North Atlantic Blockade Squadron, where he took part in the capture of Fort Clarke and Hatteras in North Carolina. By 1872 he had earned the rank of Rear Admiral and retired shortly after.

Admiral Case and his wife Anna Rogers built their Newport home on Catherine Street, the former site of the Bellevue Hotel, and took possession of it in March 1873. Anna had a deep connection to Newport; she could trace her family roots back to the founding of the city. The Admiral and his wife lived in the home with their three children, Annie, Gus Jr., and Daniel. Both boys attended the Naval Academy in Annapolis. The family welcomed friends to the home, such as John Singer Sargent on his first trip to the United States in the summer of 1876. One of Sargent's early landscape paintings "Oyster Gatherers at Cancale" was purchased by the family; donated years later, it now hangs on the second floor of the Smithsonian. Sargent also sketched and painted members of the Case family. The Admiral would also receive old military acquaintances such as William Tecumseh Sherman, who visited the home in 1877 after his inspection of Fort Adams and the Goat Island Torpedo Station.

Unfortunately, tragedy would also be part of the Case family story. The Admiral, who had faced death numerous times in the Navy, would face it throughout his personal life. In 1851 the parents lost their four-year-old daughter Maria. In 1876, just after her marriage to Charles Deering, Annie died shortly after childbirth at age 28. The funeral was held at the home on November 3<sup>rd</sup> and she was subsequently buried. It was her one-year wedding anniversary. By 1890, Gus Jr. had drowned off Poppasquash Point in Bristol trying to reach an unmoored sailboat during a storm; Daniel barely survived the incident. Anna Rogers would die shortly after the tragedy in 1891. The Admiral spent his last years living in Washington D.C. a few blocks from the White House, and di in 1893. The family are all buried together in Island Cemetery. Every house has a story...



Rear Admiral Augustus L. Case



Annie Case (Mrs. Charles Deering)  
John Singer Sargent 1877 (Posthumously)



Siesta on a Boat (Gus, Daniel & Charles Deering) Newport Summer 1876  
John Singer Sargent

## Additional TOH Volunteer Opportunities

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 and Maureen Neville – [TOHinfo@topofthehill.org](mailto:TOHinfo@topofthehill.org) or  
[santiago.r.neville@icloud.com](mailto:santiago.r.neville@icloud.com)

### Committee Chairs:

Community – Harry Elkin: [community@topofthehill.org](mailto:community@topofthehill.org)

Events – Susan Kelleher and Laurie Love: [TOHevents@topofthehill.org](mailto:TOHevents@topofthehill.org)

Membership – Donna Elkin: [membership@topofthehill.org](mailto:membership@topofthehill.org)

Welcome – Susan McCoy: [welcome@topofthehill.org](mailto:welcome@topofthehill.org)

Beautification – John Hirschboeck: [beautification@topofthehill.org](mailto:beautification@topofthehill.org)

## Notice of Interest

Feb 11<sup>th</sup>: Newport Tree Conservancy Virtual Presentation (free): Beech Leaf Disease Information and Practical Approaches. See below link for more information and to register <https://www.newporttreeconservancy.org/events>

Feb 25<sup>th</sup>: Newport Tree Conservancy Virtual Presentation (free): Winter Flowering Trees and Shrubs. See below link for more information and to register <https://www.newporttreeconservancy.org/events>

March: TOH Social, Newcomer Welcome

May: Admiral Luce Park maintenance day

Spring: TOH Community Forum

Summer: TOH Annual Garden Party

## 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.

Child and Family RI – [childandfamilyri.com](http://childandfamilyri.com).

Report It - [https://seeclickfix.com/newport\\_2](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 Charles Holder – Go to city website

<https://www.cityofnewport.com> and look him up by name in the Staff Directory tab (upper right, next to the “City of Newport” banner. You will then be able to email him through the City email system.

Top of the Hill (TOH) Neighborhood Association - <http://www.topofthehill.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, provided 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.

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