

THE CITY OF NEWPORT

**RESOLUTION**

**OF THE**

**COUNCIL**

**No.2025-26**

WHEREAS, George T. Downing, one of the country's foremost African Americans (Black Americans), arrived in Newport, Rhode Island in 1840; and

WHEREAS, having learned the restaurant trade from his father, Thomas Downing, New York's Oyster King, he brought with him a gastronomic prowess that quickly changed the culinary landscape of the seaside towns, creating a steady business of oyster delicacies: raw, pickled, fried, and stewed, oyster pie, fish with oyster sauce, and poached turkey stuffed with oysters; and

WHEREAS, in order to accommodate a burgeoning summer clientele of Newport, he built the Sea Girt Hotel on South Touro Street in 1854, the first and largest Black owned luxury hotel in the United States; and

WHEREAS, despite the misfortune of arson burning it down in 1860, a resolute George Downing recouped his losses and built an entire city block on Bellevue Avenue, the Downing Block which stands today as a testament to his enterprising vision and community spirit; and

WHEREAS, George Downing's tenacity drove not only his entrepreneurial engine, but a fierce political agenda aimed at the heart of racial injustices in education, the military, matrimony, public accommodation, and the ballot box; and

WHEREAS, in 1865, with strong political ties to United States Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, he became the director of the Members' Dining Room for the United States House of Representatives, where he helped influence legislation, political strategy and Reconstruction efforts that advanced racial uplift; and


WHEREAS, George T. Downing is emblematic of the extraordinary excellence and accomplishments of Newport's historic African American community, which distinguished itself in its creation of the nation's first pieces of art, music, and literature by Africans in the New World, and its founding of the first Black school, philanthropic organization, and catering business; and

WHEREAS, community members have undertaken steps to establish a statue honoring his contributions, and those efforts have included securing support from the City's respective advisory commissions;  
NOW THEREFORE BE IT

RESOLVED, that the Council does hereby endorse community efforts to create a statue of George T. Downing as a memorial to his inestimable contributions to the City of Newport.

XAY KHAMSYVORAVONG  
ELLEN PINNOCK  
STEPHANIE SMYTH

IN COUNCIL  
READ AND PASSED  
**FEBRUARY 12, 2025**

  
LAURA C. SWISTAK, CMC  
CITY CLERK