



## IN THE NEWS: MAYOR'S OFFICE, 2061

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*Exhibit explores what Newport might be like in the year 2061 by Sean Flynn, originally published in The Newport Daily News, June 21, 2016*

A visiting futurist, Jake Dunagan, finds that of all the places where he has done pop-up installations imagining what the future might hold, Newport and Hawaii are the most similar and have unlikely ties.

“There’s that island mentality,” he said. “There is the need for confirmation from the outside while at the same time there is a suspicion of the outside.”

Dunagan is the inspiration behind the pop-up exhibit called “Mayor’s Office, 2061,” this week at Neill Coffey’s former garage on Spring Street. The exhibit explores what Newport might be like to live and work in 45 years from now, in the year 2061. In a piece he wrote, he places himself in the future and looks back at changes taking place around the world at a pace that seems to be moving faster and faster.

He spoke Monday night about the need to project these changes into the future in an experiential way, so we are better prepared to deal with them. He gave the lecture at Rosecliff to about 100 guests after he was introduced by Trudy Coxe, executive director of the Preservation Society of Newport County.

Dunagan is a professor of strategic foresight in a graduate program at the California College of Arts and director of design futures at [verynice.co](http://verynice.co), a social enterprise that gives half of its work away for free to nonprofit organizations. He lives in Austin, Texas, and has worked on exhibits and programs around the country, mostly in the West and Midwest.

He was invited here by Catalyzing Newport, an initiative overseen by the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities and funded by a grant from the van Beuren Charitable Foundation. Besides the Preservation Society, the Catalyzing Newport steering committee includes Salve Regina University, Newport Art Museum, Rhode Island Historical Society, Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport Restoration Foundation and the International Tennis Hall of Fame.

An art installation called ‘Mayor’s Office, 2061’ is displayed Monday at the former Coffey’s Citgo gas station on Spring Street in Newport. The exhibit will be on display through Sunday.

After his talk and interactive exercises with the audience Monday night, a woman from the audience asked him what it was like to work in Newport compared with other places he has been.

In 2006, he had worked on a program called Hawaii 2050, which imagined economic and environmental collapse around the world, with Hawaii becoming a haven for climate refugees. In his answer to the woman, he cited ties between Newport and Hawaii and some parallels. For example, Capt. James Cook in January 1778 may have been the first European to visit Hawaii. Less than a decade earlier, Cook circumnavigated the globe in the HMB Endeavour, which was scuttled in Newport Harbor in 1778 during the Revolutionary War. Then, the late Doris Duke had homes in Newport and Hawaii and both communities have benefited from her philanthropy.

“There are all kinds of connections between Newport and Hawaii,” Dunagan said.

But there are differences between Newport and the communities of the Midwest and West, he said. This city, with more than 375 years of history since its founding, has a sense of “deep time” compared to many places in the U.S., he said.

“There is a sense of long generational time here,” he said. That sense assists with projecting into the future.

Local artist Howard Newman, a member of the Newport Spring Leadership Committee, spoke at the opening of the exhibit over the weekend. The committee purchased the garage site to preserve the area around the city’s historic spring as public open space and gave permission to Catalyzing Newport to use it for the popup exhibit.

“It is a future seeded by the digital revolution, weaving a nervous system for the entire human race — a future of disruptive potential in medicine and robotics, in human lifespans and species’ extinctions, and of vast populations surging across the globe in flight from surging oceans, droughts, and totalitarianism magnified by short-sighted greed,” Newman said.

“And yet, it is a future filled with the optimism of farsighted generosity — a future of chaos and promise — a future again being tested, as it was in the 20th century, by humanity’s predilection for facile answers through the siren songs of the denier, the scapegoater and the demagogue,” he said.

“These are things we need to be thinking about now,” said Adrienne Morris of Providence after hearing Dunagan speak at Rosecliff and visiting the exhibit.

“We are at a point in our history when changes are happening so quickly; we have to deal with it all the time,” she said. “How do we teach our kids and prepare them for the more rapid changes that are coming? It’s really an important exercise.”

James Leonard, an artist from Brooklyn, N.Y., on Monday had an exhibit where the Coffey gas tanks once were, called “The Tent of Casually Observed Phenologies.”

Phenology is the science that studies periodic biological phenomena that are correlated with climatic conditions, and Leonard was seating inside the tent talking to people about changes.

“Inside I offer free climatechange divination readings,” he said on a sign.

“It’s meant to be a nomadic piece,” said his assistant, Molly Gallentine.

She said people were talking about changes in plant and animal species they have seen in their neighborhoods during their lifetimes.

Projected sea-level change was a big part of the exhibit inside the former service area of the garage, while the former garage office was the mayor’s office of 2061. The team of many people who worked on the exhibits, including students at Rogers High School, engaged in a series of thought experiments.

For example, an imagined Newport Daily News front page of the future has the headline, “Student Challenges Anti-Cloning Law as Cure.” The story is about a Rogers student whose cells are resistant to tumor growth but cannot be cultured in vitro. She seeks permission to clone herself so scientists around the world can find a cure for cancer by studying the cells of multiple clones of herself.

“It’s been a fascinating day,” said Carole Ann Penney, director of operations for the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities. She was welcoming guests to the exhibit on Monday.

“People are excited by the exhibits and thinking longterm about the future,” she said. “They are concerned about what coming generations will be facing.”

“In the next 300 years, long after we, and the mayor of 2061, are gone, what will those who come here glean from this place?” Newman asked. “Will they and their children learn about the dangers of easy answers, or will they have learned to minimize, trivialize and forget?”