

CONNECTICUT RIVER GATEWAY COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

September 24, 2015

Present/Absent: [Excused absence (E); Unexcused absence (U)]

Chester:	<i>Margaret (Peggy) Wilson (E), Martha Wallace (E)</i>
Deep River:	Nancy Fischbach, Kate Cotton (E)
<i>East Haddam:</i>	Harvey Thomas, Emmett Lyman
<i>Essex:</i>	Claire Matthews, Jerri MacMillian
<i>Fenwick:</i>	<i>Ethel Davies, Borough Warden (E)</i>
Haddam:	Susan Bement
Lyme:	J. Melvin Woody, Emily Bjornberg (E)
Old Lyme:	Peter Cable, Suzanne Thompson (E)
Old Saybrook:	Madge Fish, Belinda Ahern
Regional Rep:	Raul Debrigard
DEEP:	David Blatt
Staff:	J. H. Torrance Downes
Guests:	Claudia Weicker, Eleanor Robinson, Ralph Wood (CT Audubon), Governor Lowell P. Weicker

Call to Order

Chairman **Woody** called the regular meeting of the Connecticut River Gateway Commission to order at RiverCOG offices located at 145 Dennison Road, Essex at 7:30pm.

Approval of 8/27/15 Regular Meeting Minutes

Upon a motion by **Matthews**, seconded by **Cable**, the 8/27/15 minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

Discussion, Roger Tory Peterson Estuary Research Center. Co-chairs Claudia Weicker and Eleanor Robinson and CT Audubon Society's President Ralph Wood sat with the Gateway Commission and introduced the mission of the group with respect to the effort to establish a partnership that would bring eminent scientists and educators to the lower river estuary in the name of Roger Tory Peterson, formerly of Old Lyme. The group is now sponsoring environmental lectures held at the Essex Meadows facility (invitations were provided for all Gateway members). Ms. Wecker's statement is included as a part of these minutes. The Gateway Commission expressed interest and asked to be kept up to date on efforts. Members agreed that the two groups had potentially overlapping missions, especially with respect to educational efforts.

Ms. Weicker described educational efforts entitle SOAR with Mr. Wood indicating that such efforts would primarily be "after hours" (after school). The hope is that researchers that would call an estuary center home would take on students from area schools (middle school and high school mentioned). These efforts would provide an opportunity for the organization and the Gateway Commission to work together in partnership.

Ms. Weicker and Ms. Robinson indicated that scientific work is already being done in the lower river through the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute as well as other educational institutions. Although that work exists and is ongoing, there doesn't seem an effort to coordinate the dissemination of that information to those that could use it in the lower river valley and elsewhere. Of particular interest would be to have that information made available to area schools as a way to interest students and establish programs of cooperation in local schools. The effort would include facilitation and coordination of efforts that already exist.

The group has an ongoing education program in the form of the environment lectures, but would very much like to

establish a “brick and mortar” effort to either purchase and construct a research center or, preferably, refit an existing structure to accommodate the needs of such a research center.

The three representatives acknowledged the need to fundraise and will do so through private donations, grant opportunities and working with the Trust for Public Land, among other ideas.

Matthews raised the question of the relationship of the *Friends* of Roger Tory Peterson group and the group represented by Weicker, Robinson and Wood. The groups, as explained by Weicker, are separate. There was also confusion expressed regarding how the Peterson effort does or does not coincide with the USF&WS’s Conte Management Plan and other programs. **Matthews** suggested that clarification of the various groups and whether or not they are related or partnered would be helpful in the effort to establish the Peterson center.

Treasurer’s Report

In **Wilson’s** absence, Downes presented the Treasurer’s Report and two bills for payment.

The first bill totaled \$1,300 for legal services rendered by Attorney Mark Branse for review of the proposed Gateway standards. The second bill totaled \$1,299.89 which included \$1,179.89 for staff services and \$120 for the annual fee for website hosting through TechNet Computing of Haddam.

Motion to approve by **Bement**, seconded by **Matthews**, approved unanimously.

Correspondence and Staff Report

Housing Opportunity Development regulation draft, Haddam. Town Planner Liz Glidden sent down a draft of proposed HOD regulations that were to be taken to public hearing in the middle of October, leaving only GW’s September meeting to review and comment regarding whether the draft might be “approved” or “disapproved”. The proposed regulations, developed by Glidden and the P&Z, are intended to provide opportunity for the development of affordable housing throughout town, including within the GW Conservation Zone. The regulations will require 25% of units to be “affordable”. Higher possible development densities and proposed “design waivers” result in the need for more GW review and possible regulation revision.

Following staff review, concerns regarding completeness of regulations and language regarding possible waiver of design standards were expressed to Glidden. In the case of the former, a section of standards didn’t include specific numbers or percentages (Milone and MacBroom hadn’t provided them yet). The waiver of design standards and what might happen were that to happen for a proposal in the Gateway Conservation Zone is the greater GW-related issue.

The uncertainty led Glidden to postpone the scheduling of the hearing and to schedule a staff-level meeting to discuss and resolve any possible GW issues. Glidden indicated that her intent was to modify and adjust the regulations right up until the time when the notices would have to go into the paper, a challenging procedure when only a single GW review opportunity would exist. Downes reminded Glidden that the best way to resolve potentially conflicting issues was to do so without the deadline for the scheduling of the public hearing. Gateway, it was said, does not prefer to be in a position to write letters that inform a town that “*were the submitted regulations to be approved by the P&Z, the Gateway Commission would be obliged to disapprove*”. It was much preferred that concerns be raised and resolved at staff level prior to scheduling a public hearing, which is what will likely happen now.

Gateway Promotional Brochures were delivered to the four top River Road real estate agencies (Essex/Deep River) in late September along with an offer for staff to attend any monthly meetings of agents (Wm Pitt/Sotheby, Coldwell Banker, Berkshire Hathaway and Page Taft). Further, an agent who is involved in the iCRV internet radio programming requested contact information so that staff could “appear” and discuss the Gateway Commission and its mission.

Dock & Dine. It is understood that the Dock & Dine project is on the verge of “moving forward”. At issue was the resolution of FEMA issues regarding the large front stair case and how to design that access to fulfill design requirements while meeting the standards of FEMA on the V-zone property. A variance of the FEMA standard for a negotiated design is scheduled to go before the Old Saybrook ZBA in October. The variance application will come to the Gateway Commission for review, and a position of “no opposition” will likely be consistent with Gateway’s previous findings on the variance and Special Exception applications to rebuild the restaurant. If the anticipated schedule is met, construction should occur over the winter. The information was made

available by site engineer Joe Wren, who also informed GW staff of several upcoming residential proposals, one a “knockdown” in Old Lyme and the other a partial “knockdown” and enlargement on Saybrook Point in Old Saybrook.

Conte Management Plan. Members have been informed about the USF&WS proposal for a 15 year management plan for the Conte preserve. Links for the 50 page summary and the large report were forwarded previously and are provided in this report. Cut and Paste the links into your browser window:

- Draft CCP-EIS Plan:

http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Silvio_O_Conte/what_we_do/draftccp.html

- Summary of Draft:

http://www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/Region_5/NWRS/North_Zone/Silvio_O_Conte_Complex/Silvio_O_Conte/Summary_DraftCCP.pdf

The period for submitting comments about the USF&WS proposal will end on November 16, 2015. The Commission’s land committee has taken up the issue and will be discussing the proposal as a part of the Land Committee’s report at the end of the meeting. It is anticipated that there will be discussion at the September 24th meeting, and then more discussion with the formulation of a consensus on comments being finalized at Gateway’s October meeting. As a note, the area’s scheduled public meeting is on September 24th, the same evening as the 7pm land trust and 7:30p GW meeting. A public meeting to be held in Glastonbury is scheduled for tomorrow evening, September 22nd.

CRWC “Source to Sea” Cleanup. Weekend two of the two week “Source to Sea” Cleanup is scheduled for this coming weekend, September 25th and 26th. Cut and Paste the links into your browser window.

“Click here to learn more & sign up”

<http://www.ctriver.org/projects/source-to-sea-cleanup/>

“More details”

https://www.google.com/calendar/render?eid=Y2I2Ymw4YWNTZ2ZhanRjZzBlMDNybmNmMjQgY3J3YzUyQG0&ctz=America/New_York&pli=1&t=AKUaPmaniVjv3QHOMjgHxSc8rVf01YHPbUqqotETf6MpDZYulBQHx3-cstVRV3nrSB4L_aJp5wUYrTyR2u9jZS2sSEo6DXqkA&sf=true&output=xml#eventpage_6

Members will recall that GW voted in June, 2015 to provide its annual donation of \$1,000 for the effort.

Staff Actions.

Old Saybrook, 200 North Cove Road, Harms. Downes described the special exception application to regrade the riverfront property on the northeast corner of Saybrook Point. An existing, unused impervious tennis court will be removed along with old landscaping around the court and replaced with topsoil brought to the site to smooth the area from the historic structure down to the area near the top of slope by the river. New non-invasive landscaping will be planted.

Essex, 18 Laurel Road. Second story addition to a single-story residential structure located two lots west of North Main Street opposite North Cove. Letter of no opposition sent as the addition, although substantial, will be unseen from North Cove or the river due to distance, trees and intervening structures.

Committee Reports

a. Land.

In the absence of **Wilson**, **Cable** presented the results and conclusions of the land committee’s meeting held on September 14th. Discussion on the Seldon property in Haddam Neck resulted in a committee recommendation that acquisition or protection of that property should not be considered as a high priority in that it doesn’t have a significant level of visibility to the river. Half of the property – the western half – is located within the Conservation Zone, but the eastern half is not. Using the review criteria recently agreed upon by the committee, the property did not rise to the level of interest required to have the entire Commission weigh in. **Cable** indicated that the committee recommended that **Bement** communicate the possible opportunity to the Haddam Land Trust with an expression of willingness to support the land trust in some, as of yet, undetermined way.

Conte Preserve Management Plan Discussion.

The plan, as it affects properties within the Gateway Conservation Zone, was described to include two areas – the Salmon River area and the Whalebone Cove area. The USF&WS has proposed differing ways of managing properties in the Conte Preserve with varying levels of control. Of the four alternatives (A through D), the USF&WS proposes Alternative “C” as their preferred alternative. That alternative proposes to more than double their authorized area for land acquisition and proposes an increase in management as well as promoting passive recreation such as canoeing, kayaking, hunting and fishing. Alternative “D”, which was also discussed, would propose a much larger land acquisition area, but leave any acquired areas essentially unmanaged unless intervention was necessary (described as their mission in areas described as “wilderness”, such as areas in the far north of New Hampshire and Vermont or elsewhere in the country).

Cable reported that the Land Committee asked each member to review the Plan summary and be prepared to come to the October 22, 2105 meeting to formulate a Commission response. Individual comments should be sent via email to **Wilson**, the land committee chair, for compilation **by Friday, October 9, 2015**.

Woody noted that he had requested that Downes contact Andy French of the USF&WS to ask if he’d be willing to attend Gateway’s October 22nd meeting to discuss the management plan. Downes reported he emailed French but hadn’t heard back. Downes indicated that he would contact others at USF&WS to reach out and potentially schedule a discussion for the October 22nd GW meeting.

Haddam Neck Properties

Debrigard updated the Commission on discussions held between CYCP member Jim McHutchison and Wayne Hilt. It was reported that Hilt has worked out an “agreement” with McHutchison with regard to possible property lines.

(**Ahern** and **Fish** depart at 8:55p)

b. Governance Committee.

Fischbach reported that she and Downes will meet to incorporate comments provided by Attorney Branse. The committee will be convened after the comments are incorporated.

Old Business.

None.

New Business.

Downes quickly updated the members on the ongoing question of whether or not the Public Health Code requires the clearing and filling of a “reserve” septic area even if that area was likely never going to be used. Downes has been in contact with Cathie Jefferson of Deep River, Bob Scully of the CT DPH and Scott Martinson of the CT River Area Health District in an effort to come to an understanding of the code requirements and whether or not tree clearing can be avoided when the reserve area is located on a visible hillside in the Gateway Conservation Zone.

Adjournment

Upon motion by **Bement**, seconded by **Thomas**, the meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.