Call to Order
Chair Thompson called the special meeting of the Connecticut River Gateway Commission to order at RiverCOG offices located at 145 Dennison Road, Essex at 7:00pm for the purpose of reviewing and deciding upon three petitions approved by the Haddam Planning & Zoning Commission on December 5, 2019, and submitted by certified mail to the Gateway Commission on December 11, 2019. Procedures from this process are stated in Section 25-102g of the Connecticut General Statutes, which govern adoption of zoning regulations for properties within the Gateway Conservation Zone. Determination was made that a quorum of members from at least five member towns was present.

Downes summarized the history of this petition. The petitioner, 7 Island Cove Road LLC, had previously submitted a petition to the Haddam Planning & Zoning Commission to revise the Haddam Zoning Regulations to (1) include a definition of “therapeutic and rehabilitative wellness center”, (2) include a “therapeutic and rehabilitative wellness center” use, approvable through a special permit process, to the list of uses in the Commercial C-1 Zone, and (3) rezone the property located at 7 Island Dock Road from residential to Commercial C-1 Zone so that the new use could be approved for that site. The Haddam Planning and Zoning Commission approved the petitions on December 5, 2019 and sent a notice of that decision to the Gateway Commission by certified mail as required by statute. The decision of the P&Z was received by the Gateway Commission on December 11, 2019 starting a 35-day window for review and approval. If the Gateway Commission was not able to meet to decide on the approved petitions within that 35-day period, the petitions would be considered automatically approved.

The petitions were discussed at the Gateway Commission’s December 5, 2019 regularly scheduled meeting (the same night as the Haddam P&Z meeting when the petitions were approved by the P&Z) where the decision was made by Gateway members to schedule a special meeting on Thursday January 2, 2020 in order to more fully review and understand the ramification of the petitions and decide upon whether or not the petitions should be approved, or a hearing scheduled for further input.

Farina, Haddam alternate representative and member of the Haddam Planning & Zoning Commission, commented that he made the choice to remain silent during most of the Gateway deliberations in deference to his position on the Haddam P&Z. He commented that it was the P&Z’s opinion that the proposed use at 7 Island Dock Road was unobtrusive given that the new use would go into an existing office building where no plans have been discussed for expansion and that he had voted in favor of approving those petitions as a P&Z member.

Downes commented that, as a result of staff-level communications, language was placed into the proposed
regulations that would allow new uses approved under this regulation – when in the Conservation Zone – to only occupy existing buildings.

Matthews commented that the proposed use appears to take care of the property owners desire to have the long-unoccupied building she owns occupied so that it will not fall into disrepair. Matthews also commented that she was quite pleased that Gateway members were willing to schedule a special meeting after taking the time to properly review the potential ramifications of the proposal and to make a finding that its approval would not adversely impact the “natural and traditional river scene” at that specific property or other Commercial C-1 Zone properties where a similar development could be proposed.

After much discussion and debate, and after a site visit by staff and Matthews, members of the Gateway Commission decided on January 2, 2020 to approve the petitions as such approval is consistent with the mission to preserve and protect the “natural and traditional river scene” of the Connecticut River. The motion, put forth by Woody and seconded by Bement, was approved unanimously.

Adjournment: Motion was made to adjourn the special meeting at 7:19pm by Bement, seconded by Sampson. The motion was approved unanimously.