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Chester
Deep River
East Haddam
Essex
Haddam
Lyme
Old Lyme
Old Saybrook

CONNECTICUT RIVER GATEWAY COMMISSION REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES April 23, 2026

Present: **Chester:** Misha Semënov-Leiva; **Deep River:** Jerry Roberts, John Cunningham (Alternate); **Essex:** Peter Fleischer, James Hiller (Alternate); **Haddam:** Raul de Brigard; **Lyme:** Lisa Wadge (Alternate); **Old Lyme:** Suzanne Thompson (Chair), Greg Futoma (Alternate); **Old Saybrook:** William Webb (Vice Chair), Ellen FitzGerald (Alternate); **RiverCOG North:** Raul deBrigard (arrived at 8:26pm), Alan Ponanski (Alternate); **RiverCOG South:** Gail Reynolds, Anne Redfield (Alternate); **CT DEEP:** Kathleen Perzanowski.

Also Present: Joe Wren, Indigo Designs; Ed Cassella, Cloutier & Cassella, LLC.

Absent: **Chester:** Tom Brelsford (Alternate); **Fenwick:** Newt Brainard; **East Haddam:** Debbie Langdon, Philip Barlow (Alternate); **Haddam:** Mike Farina (Secretary), Erin Ortega (Treasurer and Alternate); **Lyme:** Susan Fox; **Ex Officio:** Melvin Woody.

Staff support present: Susie Beckman, RiverCOG Staff

1. Call to Order: Chair Thompson called the meeting to order at 7:06 PM.
2. Roll Call
3. Seating of Alternates: Lisa Wadge (Lyme), Alan Ponanski (RiverCOG North)
4. Approval of Agenda

A **motion** was made by G. Futoma, seconded by J. Hiller, to **APPROVE** the agenda.

An amendment to add IHZ Revised Text Amendments application to the agenda was proposed and accepted.

Voting in favor: M. Semënov-Leiva, J. Roberts, P. Fleischer, A. Ponanski, L. Wadge, S. Thompson, W. Webb, A. Ponanski, G. Reynolds, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

5. Approval of Minutes: March 26 CRGC Regular Meeting

A **motion** was made by B. Webb, seconded by L. Wadge, to **APPROVE** the March 26, 2026 CRGC Regular Meeting minutes.

Voting in favor: M. Semënov-Leiva, J. Roberts, P. Fleischer, A. Ponanski, L. Wadge, W. Webb, A. Ponanski, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** S. Thompson, G. Reynolds. The motion **passed**, 8-0-2.

6. Public Comment - None
7. Review of Referrals & Preliminary Discussions
 - a. Special Exception – 18 Old Shore Rd, Old Lyme

Mr. Wren presented the application. He explained that the site was designed to comply with all zoning regulations including setbacks for Gateway Zone standards, wetlands and tidal areas. The proposed Special Permit Application requests approval to construct a new 4-bedroom, year-round single-family

dwelling. The existing lot abuts the tributary wetland of the Back Hall River.

The commissioners reviewed the Gateway Standard requirements for Special Exception approval. There were some questions about fill being brought in, lighting and windows.

A **motion** was made by W. Webb, seconded by J. Roberts, to write a letter using standard language stating that CRGC does not oppose the application as presented and CRGC finds that the proposed development conforms to Gateway Standards.

Voting in favor: M. Semënov-Leiva, J. Roberts, P. Fleischer, A. Ponanski, L. Wadge, S, Thompson, W. Webb, A. Ponanski, G. Reynolds, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

b. Special Exception – 15 Smith’s Neck Rd, Old Saybrook

Mr. Wren presented the application. The proposed Special Permit Application requests approval to construct additions to the existing 4-bedroom, year-round single-family dwelling. He explained that the additions have been designed to comply with all zoning regulations including setbacks for Gateway Zone standards. The existing structures and proposed additions are well outside the 100ft Structural Setback and 50ft Riparian Setback.

The commissioners reviewed the Gateway Standard requirements for Special Exception approval. A question was asked about the septic system that was answered by Mr. Wren.

A motion was made by W. Webb, seconded by G. Futoma, to write a letter stating the CT River Gateway Commission (CRGC) finds the proposed development as presented conforms to Gateway Standards. CRGC also notes that the exterior shingling will be cedar the color of which will help conceal the expanded bulk of the structure, that the lighting should be Dark Sky compliant and will not exceed what is needed for health and safety. CRGC appreciates that no canopy trees are being removed.

Voting in favor: M. Semënov-Leiva, J. Roberts, P. Fleischer, A. Ponanski, L. Wadge, S, Thompson, W. Webb, A. Ponanski, G. Reynolds, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

c. Variance – 49 Cromwell Pl., Old Saybrook

Mr. Wren presented the application. The applicant proposes to renovate an existing 2.5 story, 3-bedroom year-round dwelling into a 4-bedroom year-round dwelling. The proposed renovations will demolish the existing attached garage, deck and pool in order to construct a new attached garage, deck and pool. A 201sf non-conforming shed in the rear of the lot will be removed and replaced with a smaller 120sf conforming shed.

A variance is required from the Gateway Standard for coverage which is 15%. The existing coverage is non-conforming at 21%. The proposed renovations will reduce the coverage to 17.6% and reduce this non-conformity. The 37ft height of the property, which was built before the Gateway Zone and Standards were adopted, is over the allowed 35ft allowed in regulations. The roof and height are not being changed so a variance is not required. The structure will also be over the 3,500sf threshold and require a Special Exception. That will be a separate application submitted if ZBA approves the variance.

A motion was made by W. Webb, seconded by G. Futoma, to write a letter stating that CRGC finds that although the proposed renovation is not in conformity with Gateway Standards, it reduces an existing non-conformity making the property more in conformity with the Gateway Standard for coverage on the

lot.

Voting in favor: M. Semënov-Leiva, J. Roberts, P. Fleischer, A. Ponanski, L. Wadge, S, Thompson, W. Webb, A. Ponanski, G. Reynolds, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

d. Zoning Regulation Amendment – Housekeeping Text Amendments, Old Saybrook

S. Beckman presented the application from Old Saybrook proposing housekeeping text amendments. W. Webb reviewed all the amendments with the commissioners. The commission agreed that amendments were clarifying existing regulations and definitions. The clarifications and amendments to regulations in the Gateway Conservation Zone strengthened those regulations and support further protection of the Gateway Conservation Zone. The regulations are examples that other towns could replicate.

A motion was made by W. Webb, seconded by A. Ponanski, to write a letter stating that CRGC does not oppose the proposed text amendments and that the letter can be taken as approval of the approved text amendments if the language approved is the same as presented in the application. CRGC appreciates the strengthening of the language for regulations in the Gateway Conservation Zone.

Voting in favor: M. Semënov-Leiva, J. Roberts, P. Fleischer, A. Ponanski, L. Wadge, S, Thompson, W. Webb, A. Ponanski, G. Reynolds, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

e. Zoning Regulation Amendment – Revised Incentive Housing Zone (IHZ), Old Saybrook

Attorney Cassella presented the revised application. CRGC reviewed the first application at its March 23, 2026 meeting. The property is 127 Ferry Road, Old Saybrook, with an existing single-family house. The owner wants to develop multi-family housing. The IHZ provides incentives to the developer to include affordable housing. Since the last meeting, the property owner found additional amendments were needed to make the development financially feasible. The revised request is to increase the coverage to 24%, allow for 3-story units (the height maximum will remain 35ft), and allow for flexibility in landscaping and parking requirements.

There was discussion about the text change regarding landscaping and parking. The intent of the change is to provide some flexibility for IHZ developments. CRGC commissioners expressed concern with the language allowing the flexibility for landscaping and parking because it's not measurable. CRGC commissioners suggested removing that language or the reference to the Gateway Conservation Zone. Attorney Cassella suggested he take the recommendations back to the property owner and talk with the Old Saybrook ZEO.

The revised application will go to the Old Saybrook Zoning Commission on June 1, 2026. Commissioners agreed to wait until the Zoning Commission has made its determination and drafted final language before making a final determination regarding approving the text amendments.

CRGC decided to continue the discussion until its next Regular Meeting, May 28, 2026. Attorney Cassella will provide revised regulations for CRGC to review.

A motion was made by W. Webb, seconded by A. Redfield, to continue the discussion to the next Regular Meeting, May 28, 2026.

Voting in favor: M. Semënov-Leiva, J. Roberts, P. Fleischer, A. Ponanski, L. Wadge, S, Thompson, W.

Webb, A. Ponanski, G. Reynolds, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

8. Correspondence/Staff Report

S. Beckman quickly reviewed correspondence about the court case decision, 90 Halls Rd Tree Cutting. Conservancy Source to Sea Cleanup, the CT River Museum Environmental Summit. P. Fleischer and S. Thompson will attend the CT River Museum Environmental Summit and use the free tickets given to sponsors.

Commissioners were reminded that CRGC's display needs to be placed in different public areas in the eight towns of the Gateway Conservation Zone. It has been in the Old Lyme library for the last 3 weeks.

J. Roberts, W. Webb and J. Cunningham have visited the Mount St. John's School property with the new owners. J. Roberts is developing a relationship with the new owners as is Laurie Giannotti of the Deep River Land Trust.

9. Chairman's Report

S. Thompson reviewed the court decision for the reconsideration of the CRGC case against OS ZBA. The property owner has 20 days to determine if they will appeal the decision, negotiate a settlement with the ZBA or do nothing. The property owner may submit a new application.

Keith Ainsworth has closed his law office. The cases he assisted CRGC with have closed. Eversource has proposed an under-river gas pipeline at the Scoville Crossing location. S. Thompson will ask K. Ainsworth for a recommendation of another attorney in the event CRGC wants to address with the Connecticut Siting Council that this under-river crossing was not presented as a possible option for the river wire crossing. Jason Hale, who will be replacing K. Perzanowski as the CT DEEP Representative, may be able to provide information from CT DEEP on the issue.

S. Thompson announced that Sam Gold, Executive Director of RiverCOG, informed her and W. Webb that the RiverCOG Board has determined that it needs all of its staff to focus on RiverCOG tasks due to increased responsibilities placed on the councils of governments by the state. S. Thompson and W. Webb will meet with S. Gold and S. Beckman to discuss the transition to a new service provider. The current service contract expires June 30, 2026.

10. Committee Reports

a. Finance Committee - Approve Bills

Bills were reviewed for RiverCOG's February Invoice (\$4,445.22), CT River Conservancy Source to Sea Sponsorship (\$3,000.00), Amy Huot for clerking services (\$115.00), Halloran & Sage for attorney services (\$22.00 and \$150.00).

A motion was made by W. Webb, seconded by J. Roberts, to pay the bills.

Voting in favor: M. Semenov-Leiva, J. Roberts, P. Fleischer, A. Ponanski, L. Wadge, S. Thompson, W. Webb, A. Ponanski, G. Reynolds, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

b. Rules of Procedures Committee –

W. Webb and others met with S. Gold to discuss the requirements in PA 25-1. Section 16 of the Act requires all towns to develop definitions and processes for Summary Review of housing applications in commercial zones. Each town will be submitting revised regulations to CRGC for approval before July 1, 2026. Gateway Standards will not be affected and will remain in force. CRGC does not need to adopt new definitions or regulations for towns to complete this task. However, it will be important for CRGC to review and respond to the submitted zoning regulation changes as quickly as possible. If new zoning regulations are not in place by July 1, 2026, towns risk developers taking advantage of the lack of regulations regarding housing development in commercial zones.

Other proposed legislation of concern is SB 151 that reduces maximum lot sizes to 5,000sf and reduces setbacks to no more than 10ft on lots served by public water and public sewer. There are a few areas in the Gateway Conservation Zone that may be impacted and create significant conflict with Gateway Standards. A. Ponanski drafted a letter, with input from other commissioners, to send to Governor Lamont urging the Governor to veto this legislation if it comes to him for signature.

A motion was made by A. Ponanski, seconded by R. deBrigard, to approve the drafted letter and send it to the Governor. W. Webb recommended the letter be sent to M. Willis for review prior to sending it. A. Ponanski amended his motion to include the recommendation and added that CRGC accept the changes made by M. Willis so the letter is sent immediately after M. Willis completes his review.

Voting in favor: M. Semënov-Leiva, J. Roberts, P. Fleischer, A. Ponanski, L. Wadge, S, Thompson, W. Webb, A. Ponanski, G. Reynolds, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

- c. Communications Committee – Nothing to report.
- d. Land – Nothing to report.

11. Old Business - None

12. New Business – Invasive Removal Habitat Restoration in Old Saybrook

W. Webb provided information on efforts by Old Saybrook to remove invasive plant and tree species at Saybrook Point. He sees this as a pilot project that could provide an example to other towns. He also recommended CRGC consider supporting the project if it comes to the commission for a grant. G. Futoma stated that support should not be provided to Old Saybrook at the expense of other towns doing similar projects. The Grants Committee stopped providing grants to individual groups doing similar invasive species removal projects. W. Webb recommended commissioners read the Rules of Procedures and have further discussion about making grants for land preservation and projects.

13. Adjournment

A motion was made by W. Webb, seconded by P. Fleischer, to adjourn the meeting.

Voting in favor: M. Semënov-Leiva, J. Roberts, P. Fleischer, A. Ponanski, L. Wadge, S, Thompson, W. Webb, A. Ponanski, G. Reynolds, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

Meeting adjourned at 9:27 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susie Beckman, Staff to CRGC