



**CT River Gateway Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes – Hybrid Meeting
Thursday, June 22, 2023, 7:00 PM
RiverCOG Conference Room and via Zoom**

DRAFT

Present: Chester: Jenny Kitsen (Alternate); **Essex:** Misha Semënov-Leiva (Alternate); **East Haddam:** Debbie Langdon (Alternate); **Haddam:** Susan Bement, Mike Farina (Alternate); **Lyme:** Melvin Woody (Vice Chair), Susan Fox (Alternate); **Old Lyme:** Suzanne Thompson (Chair), Greg Futoma (Alternate); **Old Saybrook:** William Webb (Secretary), Diane Stober (Treasurer); **CT DEEP:** Kathleen Perzanowski; **RiverCOG North:** Raul de Brigard, Alan Ponanski (Alternate); **RiverCOG South:** Judy Preston

Absent: Chester: Tom Brelsford; **Deep River:** Jerry Roberts; **East Haddam:** Crary Brownell, **Fenwick:** Newt Brainerd

Staff support present: Susie Beckman (RiverCOG), Sam Gold (River COG), Amy Huot (CRGC Clerk)

II. Agenda

1. Call to Order: Chair Thompson called the Connecticut River Gateway Commission (CRGC) meeting to order at 7:06 PM.

2. Approval of Agenda:

A **motion** was made by R. de Brigard, seconded by M. Woody, to approve the meeting agenda.

Voting in favor: J. Kitsen, M. Semënov-Leiva, D. Langdon, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, K. Perzanowski, R. de Brigard, J. Preston; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

3. Approval of 5/25/23 Regular Meeting Minutes & 6/14/23 Special Meeting Minutes:

A **motion** was made by M. Woody, seconded by S. Bement, to approve the May 25, 2023 Regular Meeting Minutes:

Voting in favor: J. Kitsen, M. Semënov-Leiva, D. Langdon, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, K. Perzanowski, R. de Brigard, J. Preston; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

A **motion** was made by M. Woody, seconded by A. Ponanski, to approve the June 14, 2023 Special Meeting Minutes with corrections as amended: Correct the spelling of “Special” and remove Greg Futoma from the attendance list.

Voting in favor: J. Kitsen, M. Semënov-Leiva, D. Langdon, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, K. Perzanowski, R. de Brigard, J. Preston; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

4. Referrals

a. Morris – Haddam – Staircase to the River – Variance

Mr. Bill Morris presented the plan for the staircase to the Commission. Mr. Morris explained that the 3-foot wide staircase would lead down an embankment to a new dock from the house. The design creates a platform that is wider than the standard 5' due to the incline of the embankment. Mr. Morris explained that one section is designed to be 8' x 10' as a landing, due to anchoring requirements. Mr. Morris stated the color will be brown so it will blend into the embankment and the trees will be preserved except for a few dead trees that are in the proposed path of the staircase. Mr. Morris noted that there are no provisions for lighting at this time and they do not anticipate adding lighting. Mr. Semenov-Leiva suggested a condition of approval be that the design include International Dark Sky-compliant guidelines, to which Mr. Morris agreed.

The Commission asked for more detail about the landing(s) requirements. Mr. Morris explained if the design is to follow the natural path of the embankment, which would help avoid tree removal, the landings must be installed. He said that a straight staircase would not be allowed, due to the length and drop (elevation grade is 35'/35.68' (approximately 1)). Ms. Preston asked that Mr. Morris minimize the dead tree removal as it serves a purpose in the natural landscape. Ms. Langdon suggested making a condition of approval that no additional permanent structures or features be added to the platform structure that is being proposed at this time.

A **motion** was made by R. de Brigard, seconded by S. Bement, to write a letter of referral with no objection to the design, with the following conditions: That no additional permanent structures be added to the platform that the Commission is being asked to consider, current trees will be preserved, dead tree and brush removal will be minimized as these serve a purpose in the natural landscape, and Mr. Morris will adhere to Dark Sky (www.darksky.org) guidelines if lighting should be added in the future.

Voting in favor: J. Kitsen, M. Semenov-Leiva, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, K. Perzanowski, R. de Brigard, J. Preston; **Opposed:** D. Langdon; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 9-1-0.

b. LaRosa – 15 Mallard Dr., Old Saybrook – Preliminary Review

Mr. Bob and Mrs. Carmella LaRosa presented the revised design for preliminary discussion with the Commission. The plan was originally reviewed by the CRGC in April 2023. Mr. LaRosa noted the design was changed based on consultations with Old Saybrook Planner Ms. Chris Costa and RiverCOG staff. Mr. LaRosa stated the redesign will include an addition to the back of the house. Mr. LaRosa stated the house was built in the mid-1960's before the 100' setback rule was established. Today the house encroaches on the 100' setback by approximately 5' per Mr. LaRosa. The LaRosa's would like to keep the current setback with the new design.

Mr. LaRosa stated they will not remove any trees and will add indigenous plants. Mr. LaRosa explained the house is currently a gray and white color, which can be seen from the river, so the new design will use earth tones to blend into the landscape better. When asked about non-conformance, Mr. LaRosa noted the design is conforming for Old Saybrook lot coverage and bulk coverage.

Commissioners were concerned that this house is quite visible from anywhere along the river and there will still be an increase in bulk with the redesign. Mr. Webb pointed out that the second point in the Gateway Standards, concerning the scenic qualities in open space, might not be met with this updated

design. Commissioners noted that it is a better design, and the view will be minimized by changing the house color and adding plantings in front of the house. Mr. LaRosa said they would be happy to add plantings by the garage and on the side of the house to help minimize the elevation that is seen from the river. Mr. Webb also suggests the addition on the west side of the house be limited to one story, to which Mr. LaRosa agreed. Mr. LaRosa asked if he could sit with RiverCOG staff again with a new plan. Mr. Gold and Ms. Beckman agreed, and Mr. Webb said that he would be happy to meet with the LaRosa's again as well.

c. Corigliano – 38 Watrous Point, Old Saybrook – Variance

Mr. Corigliano and Architect Brooke Girty presented the design to the Commissioners. The house was presented to the CRGC last month, however, Mr. Corigliano stated they have new information after meeting with the Old Saybrook Zoning Commission last month. Mr. Corigliano explained they discovered the survey was older and incorrect and that a portion of the house and proposed new addition are now within the 100' setback. The Coriglianos will be meeting with the Old Saybrook Zoning Board of Appeals to get a variance for the setback encroachment.

Chair Thompson pointed out that the Commission is still concerned about the mass and visual bulk density of the house as was discussed in the May 2023 CRGC Regular Meeting. The Commissioners were concerned about the bulk and the house appearing like a compound from the river. Ms. Girty noted that in the last meeting the team did not accurately portray the rooflines; there is not one long roofline in the design. Ms. Girty explained there are design elements that will help minimize the bulk: there is a one-story breezeway and a porch in front of the house on the river side, the proposed pool house is pushed back behind the pool as far as it can go and still be accessible, and the existing vegetation obscures some of the view. Ms. Girty stated the team has done everything they can to minimize the bulk.

The Commissioners, Mr. Corigliano and Ms. Girty discussed the setback issue. Ms. Girty noted that the addition is mostly on top of the existing footprint and that the house is quite far back, but Mr. Webb pointed out it is still a very large building along the river. Ms. Girty noted that it is almost 8 wooded acres, making the house size appropriate for the lot size.

Mr. Gold asked for the amount the impervious surface will increase. Ms. Girty stated she would get the information to the Commissioners. Chair Thompson noted the Commission has not changed their concerns and stance on the property and would like to know about the change to impervious surface.

A **motion** was made by M. Woody, seconded by W. Webb to send a letter adhering to the previously stated language in the CRGC letter sent in May 2023, with the addition to the letter that the CT River Gateway Commission does not support the proposed increase in non-conformity.

Voting in favor: J. Kitsen, M. Semënov-Leiva, D. Langdon, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, K. Perzanowski, R. de Brigard, J. Preston; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

d. King – 14 Book Hill Road, Essex – Variance

Ms. Beckman and Mr. Semënov-Leiva visited the property. Mr. Semënov-Leiva stated it is nowhere near the river and not visible from the river. Mr. Semënov-Leiva drafted a letter to be sent stating that because of the location of the property, it is not inconsistent with Gateway Standards. He reiterated the

need for the use of the Dark Sky compliant lighting, preserving existing vegetation to the extent possible and to mitigate the increase in impervious surface.

A **motion** was made by Mr. Webb, seconded by Mr. Woody, that the CT River Gateway Commission write a letter stating the proposal is not inconsistent with the Gateway Standards and reinforce the comments of Mr. Semënov-Leiva.

Voting in favor: J. Kitsen, M. Semënov-Leiva, D. Langdon, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, K. Perzanowski, R. de Brigard, J. Preston; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

5. Correspondence/Staff Report:

Ms. Beckman said that Governor Lamont is expected to sign legislation that was approved by the General Assembly that will protect birds from nocturnal light pollution called the “Lights Out Law”. Mr. Gold stated he would send the Bill number out to the Commissioners. Mr. Futoma noted he would draft something for the CRGC webpage. Ms. Beckman noted that the legislation directs the CT Code and Standards Committee to add lighting requirements in CT state building code.

CT DEEP is accepting applications for the Competitive Open Space and Water Shed Land Acquisition grant program.

Ms. Langdon noted that an addition to HB6781, an affordable housing bill, has been proposed that would affect the Wetlands Commission. The proposal would set up a committee to review Wetlands Commission activities to see if they, along with other groups such as CRGC, are restricting development in a reasonable manner. This Bill did not pass, but Mr. Gold and the CRGC believe it will come up again in the next session.

6. Chairman’s Report: Next week a reception will be held by CT Land Conservation Council at Gillette Castle for the CRGC. The invitation was emailed to CRGC Commissioners. Next Thursday night, June 29 at 5:30 PM and spouses are welcome. State elected officials have been invited. The CRGC Commissioners should follow up with the town First Selectmen, Planning & Zoning Commissions, Conservation Commissions, and Land Use staff as they have received invitations.

Ms. Preston noted that the Army Corp of Engineers will be holding a meeting on June 29th at 7:00 PM via Zoom about hydrilla and the attempt to use a chemical removal method in the CT River. The Army Corp of Engineers will address the challenges in working on the removal. The thought is that the meeting is to check the public response. This is the first meeting to hear public comment. Additional meetings will be held but are not yet scheduled. It will be held at the deKoven House.

The CT DEEP Commissioner has been invited to the event at Gillette Castle and to the event in August at the Audubon Society.

7. Committee Reports:

a. Finance – Budget:

A **motion** was made by S. Bement, seconded by R. de Brigard to pay the bills. The bills are as follows: RiverCOG: \$9229.89 and Amy Huot: \$109.25.

Voting in favor: J. Kitsen, M. Semënov-Leiva, D. Langdon, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, K. Perzanowski, R. de Brigard, J. Preston; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

Ms. Stober reviewed a proposed budget for the fiscal year with Commissioners. Ms. Stober noted that RiverCOG staffing expenses are still increasing. Ms. Stober and Chair Thompson met with Mr. Gold to obtain a project and budget estimate for 2024. It is hoped that more-detailed estimates from RiverCOG will help the Commission stay within budget.

Mr. Gold noted that the staff expenses in previous years were much lower partly because some of the work that was being done by RiverCOG staff was not correctly billed. Mr. Gold noted the RiverCOG staff are tracking their hours and can formalize the tally for each task identified as a standard task then give that information to Ms. Stober to help with budget creation.

While the Commissioners discussed the need for budget-saving measures, Mr. Futoma commented on the new temporary marketing employee recently hired to help with tasks such as website updates. He said that training has already taken place, it was successful, and the new employee might be able to do additional tasks at a more budget friendly rate. The Commissioners discussed proposed budget requirements for other committees and agreed more discussion was needed. Chair Thompson stated the Commission can provisionally approve it and come back to edit after further budget discussions.

A **motion** was made by M. Woody, seconded by R. de Brigard, to approve the budget as presented by Ms. Stober during the CRGC meeting.

Voting in favor: J. Kitsen, M. Semënov-Leiva, D. Langdon, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, K. Perzanowski, R. de Brigard, J. Preston; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

b. Rules of Procedures: Mr. Webb noted he will set up meetings and will address the income definition and expense (Rules of Procedures budget) and circulate it to Commissioners.

c. Communications: There was not a meeting in the past month due to scheduling conflicts. Because the Commission will be inviting many of the elected officials and zoning staff to June and August 50th anniversary celebrations on land, the recommendation is to not hold a September boat trip this year. The approved budget does not include funding for a boat trip, but uses the funds for the land-based celebrations instead. Commissioners agreed there will be no boat trip this year.

d. Land: No Executive Session to discuss potential acquisition of land in the Gateway Conservation Zone: Mr. Futoma mentioned that the Committee is considering creating a presentation for realtors.

9. New Business

a. Consideration of Lynde Point Lighthouse Preservation

Chair Thompson, Ms. Preston, and Mr. Futoma attended a ribbon cutting ceremony for Old Saybrook Land Trust at Ayer's Point. During the reception Chair Thompson inquired about the Lynde Point Lighthouse in Old Saybrook, which is being disposed of by US General Services Administration (GSA).

First Selectman Fortuna informed her that the Town of Old Saybrook sent a letter of interest and the Old Saybrook Historic Commission and other groups would like to figure out how to purchase the light house. It was suggested that CRGC submit its own letter of interest to GSA. Letters must be filed by July 14th, 2023.

Ms. Preston noted that Gateway has a strong argument and good potential for successfully getting the Lynde Point Light House. Would like to make it useful for other non-profits.

A **motion** was made by M. Woody, seconded by W. Webb, to send the draft letter of interest written by Ms. Stober to the General Services Administration for the lighthouse.

Voting in favor: J. Kitsen, M. Semënov-Leiva, D. Langdon, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, K. Perzanowski, R. de Brigard, J. Preston; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

Ms. Perzanowski said she would investigate whether CT DEEP will be issuing its own letter for acquisition.

8. Old Business: Ms. Bement said that a few weeks ago there was a fire in Haddam that destroyed one of the 18th century houses. Ms. Bement noted that the house was purchased by an LLC, so she investigated and got a copy of the deed. Ms. Bement noted the deed stated the land is 3.1 acres.

The building department said a new house would be built about halfway back. Ms. Bement noted that the owners are working with the building department and Ms. Langdon suggested the CRGC should consider buying it to add restrictions to the property.

Chair Thompson noted there might not be anything the CRGC can do at this point. Ms. Bement noted the entire property is full of trees. Mr. Woody suggested trying to get an easement; however, Mr. Webb noted it is a Land Committee discussion. Ms. Langdon had suggested at minimum approaching the owners about the plan and suggesting a keyhole opening approach before the owners start work on the new house. Mr. Webb suggested it be brought to the Land Committee.

From the Commission: Susan Bement- thank you for your years of service!

10. Adjournment meeting adjourned at 9:46 PM.

A **motion** was made by S. Bement seconded by W. Webb, to adjourn the meeting.

Voting in favor: J. Kitsen, M. Semënov-Leiva, D. Langdon, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, K. Perzanowski, R. de Brigard, J. Preston; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Huot, Clerk

The next regular meeting of the Gateway Commission is scheduled for Thursday, July 27, 2023 at 7:00 PM.