



**CT River Gateway Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes – Hybrid
Meeting Thursday, August 24, 2023, 7:00
PM RiverCOG Conference Room and via
Zoom**

Present: **Chester:** Tom Brelsford (Alternate); **Deep River:** Jerry Roberts; **East Haddam:** Debbie Langdon (Alternate); **Haddam:** 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); **RiverCOG North:** Raul de Brigard; **CT DEEP:** Kathleen Perzanowski

Absent: **Chester:** Misha Semënov-Leiva; **East Haddam:** Crary Brownell; **Fenwick:** Newt Brainerd; **RiverCOG North:** Alan Ponanski (Alternate); **RiverCOG South:** Judy Preston

Staff support present: Susie Beckman (RiverCOG)

II. Agenda

1. Call to Order: Chair Thompson called the Connecticut River Gateway Commission (CRGC) meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

2. Approval of Agenda

The agenda was followed as posted.

3. Approval of 7/27/23 Regular Meeting Minutes

A **motion** was made by T. Brelsford, seconded by G. Futoma to approve the July 27, 2023 Regular Meeting Minutes.

Voting in favor: T. Brelsford, J. Roberts, D. Langdon, M. Farina, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, R. de Brigard, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 9-0-0.

Chair Thompson introduced guest Ms. Erin Ortega from Haddam. Ms. Ortega expressed interest in serving on CRGC.

4. Review of Referrals

a. Old Saybrook- Saybrook Point Special Exception Modification

Attorney David Royston with Arch Law Group of Old Saybrook presented the special exception modification. A storage section is being added to a garage that would be obscured from the view of the river.

Mr. de Brigard made a **motion**, seconded by T. Brelsford, that the CRGC have no objections to the change and that this is communicated via letter to the Old Saybrook Zoning Commission.

Voting in favor: T. Brelsford, J. Roberts, D. Langdon, M. Farina, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, R. de Brigard; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** K. Perzanowski. The motion **passed**, 8-0-1.

b. Haddam- Notice of Regulation Change- Accessory Apartments

R. de Brigard made a **motion**, seconded by M. Farina, to approve the regulation change.

Voting in favor: T. Brelsford, J. Roberts, D. Langdon, M. Farina, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, R. de Brigard, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 9-0-0.

c. Essex – 22 Main Street Variance

Mr. David Dick, applicant, explained the variance is requested to not interfere with an ornamental tree that is located on the property.

W. Webb made a **motion**, seconded by M. Woody, that the CRGC write a letter stating the CRGC does not object to the variance request.

Voting in favor: T. Brelsford, J. Roberts, D. Langdon, M. Farina, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, R. de Brigard, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 9-0-0.

d. Old Saybrook – 25 North Cove Road Variance

Mr. Joe Wren, P.E., presented the plan for the proposed swimming pool. Ms. Langdon recommended a splash pool to limit the proposed size of the pool and to alter the shape of the pool. Mr. Brelsford noted that the Gateway Standards explicitly prohibit new construction within the 100 FT setback from the coastal jurisdiction line. Mr. Webb noted that in some cases actions can be taken by applicants to offset the non-conformity and encouraged Commissioners to consider this option.

A motion was made by Mr. Brelsford, then discussion followed, and the motion was updated to the language below.

A **motion** was made by T. Brelsford, seconded by J. Roberts, that the CRGC write a letter that rejects the requested variance, citing the Gateway Standards, Section III C. Setback: “No building or other structure will be constructed, reconstructed, enlarged, extended, moved or structurally altered within one hundred (100) feet of the Coastal Jurisdiction Line, as defined in the Connecticut General Statutes, of the Connecticut River...”. This is new construction within the 100 FT setback. There could be mitigating changes to the existing design that would reduce its impact and encroachment on the setback.

Voting in favor: T. Brelsford, J. Roberts, D. Langdon, M. Farina, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** R. de Brigard. The motion **passed**, 8-0-1.

Mr. de Brigard supported further review of the referral and recommended the Commissioners consider an exception for this referral (and future similar referrals) and solutions to reduce the overall non-conformity.

5. Correspondence/Staff Report

Ms. Beckman reported on correspondence sent to CRGC:

Lower CT Land Trust offers to be a back-up for easements to all Land Trusts in the region.

CT DEEP noted there is additional funding available this year to support coastal habitat restoration and coastal land acquisition. Ms. Beckman will ask for further information and send it to the Commissioners.

6. Chairman’s Report

Chair Thompson urged the Rules Committee to move forward in working with Attorney Matt Willis to confirm how the Gateway Standards apply to referrals and variance requests on properties with already not in compliance and to bring back to the full Commission procedures for how to address these in its regulatory and referral decisions. The Rules Committee should also request recommendations about

guidance that can be given to applicants as well.

The CRGC 50th anniversary commemoration at Roger Tory Peterson Estuary Center gathering on August 3rd was very successful. Chair Thompson thanked Mr. Futoma for organizing the event and Ms. Perzanowski for taking photos, which will be used in CRGC publicity.

7. Committee Reports:

a. Treasurer – Approve Bills

A **motion** was made by D. Stober, seconded by W. Webb, to pay the July 2023 bills. The bills are as follows: RiverCOG: \$7,751.

Voting in favor: T. Brelsford, J. Roberts, D. Langdon, M. Farina, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, R. de Brigard, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 9-0-0.

Mr. de Brigard asked Ms. Beckman if the allotted 16 hours would be enough to cover her normal staff support work. Discussion took place and Ms. Beckman was advised to charge hours worked in areas like marketing to special projects and to please note those on her timesheet and the bill from RiverCOG.

b. Land Committee – Executive Session. Potential acquisition of land in Gateway Conservation Zone.

No Executive Session was held. Ms. Laurie Giannotti, President of Deep River Land Trust and Dr. Mike Zarfos were present to discuss the funding assistance requested for the acquisition of 136 Rattling Valley Rd.

A **motion** was made by J. Roberts, seconded by T. Brelsford, to give 20% (\$16,000) of the presented expenses to assist Deep River Land Trust in purchasing 136 Rattling Valley Rd. After discussion, the motion was amended as follows:

A **motion** was made by J. Roberts, seconded by T. Brelsford, to give \$20,000 of the presented expenses to Deep River Land Trust to support the purchase of 136 Rattling Valley Rd, Deep River.

Voting in favor: T. Brelsford, J. Roberts, D. Langdon, M. Farina, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, R. de Brigard, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 9-0-0.

c. Rules of Procedures

Mr. Webb reported that the Rules Committee met to discuss how to accommodate Deep River's request for flexibility from the CRGC for specific areas within the Gateway Conservation Zone and to formalize CRGC processes for administrative approvals that would not require holding an application until the next Commission meeting for a vote.

Mr. Webb outlined the criteria and processes for administrative approvals, which are still being developed by the Committee, to address variance requests, special exception permits and rule changes:

1. Time constraint exists, and the Commission is unable to meet before the date in which a response is required.
2. No Gateway Standards are violated, and changes are not significant.
3. The proposed site modifications cannot be seen from the river, will not affect river ecology and will not significantly affect the view of the river.
4. Staff will send the Gateway Commission the recommendation and if the Commissioners do not submit disapproval within four days, the staff can assume approval. Commissioners representing the town of an

application will work with the staff to finalize the response and provide final approval.

Adoption of these changes to the Rules of Procedure will require a vote by the full Commission. Mr. Webb requested the Commissioners give their thoughts to the Rules of Procedures Committee prior to the next CRGC meeting and welcomed all Commissioners to participate in the Committee's meetings.

Mr. Roberts gave an update on Deep River. A letter was sent to Deep River Planning and Zoning requesting the CRGC and Deep River P&Z work together to identify areas that Deep River P&Z believe the Gateway Standards rules are unnecessary or onerous. Mr. Roberts requested that Deep River P&Z articulate the rules they believe are onerous, which must be mutually agreed upon. Following these discussions, the Rules Committee will work on a procedure to legally uphold the agreed upon terms of the discussions. Mr. Roberts noted that the Gateway Standards and areas identified cannot visually or environmentally affect the river, coves, and tributaries. Mr. de Brigard noted the CRGC cannot change anything in the statutes.

d. Communications

Mr. Futoma summarized activities at the reception at the RTPEC in Old Lyme. Several notable guests were in attendance; Mr. Andy Fisk, CT DEEP Bureau Chief for Natural Resources, read a proclamation from the Governor congratulating the CRGC on its 50th anniversary; Ms. Kristina White, Lyme First Selectperson congratulated Mr. Woody on serving 50 years with the Commission on behalf of the town of Lyme.

The CRGC has been requested to help staff a booth at the Haddam Neck Fair. Mr. de Brigard noted a volunteer is needed to bring CRGC materials to the fair. Chair Thompson noted materials and table-top display from the CT Land Conservation Conference are available and those interested in volunteering should email Mr. Futoma.

Another event proposed to the CRGC is a tour on the Essex Steam Train and the River Boat to commemorate the 50th anniversary and to raise awareness of tour participants. Ms. Perzanowski noted that the Essex Steam Train would like to keep their traditional narration and a CRGC Commissioner provide narration for a small portion of the tour. Mr. Futoma said he is willing to work with the Essex Steam Train on tickets if Commissioners are interested.

CT River Museum is celebrating their 50th anniversary this fall, and they have contacted the CRGC to cohost an event, potentially in December.

Mr. Futoma noted the 8 Mile Riverfest is October 14, 1 PM – 4 PM, at Devil's Hopyard State Park in East Haddam, and will require three hours of Commissioner's time to participate. The same display materials for Haddam Neck Fair can be used.

Chair Thompson noted that the Lyme Land Trust Executive Director Kristina White has offered the Lyme Land Trust's new building, once completed, for a CRGC celebratory gathering. November might be a good time to bring together elected member towns representatives and CRGC.

Mr. Roberts requested that when events are hosted by the CRGC, plastic cups should be avoided.

8. Old Business: None

a. Lynde Point Lighthouse Update

Chair Thompson noted that she and Ms. Stober will be CRGC's participants in a September 1st guided tour of the lighthouse with Ms. Denise Savageau, former Conservation Director for the town of Greenwich.

Ms. Savageau has dealt with projects like this in Greenwich and has experience with conservation projects. This starts the 90-day period to file an application and Chair Thompson noted that the Old Saybrook Land Trust, Old Saybrook Historic Society, Town of Old Saybrook, Fenwick and the Gateway Commission have all expressed interest in saving the lighthouse and offering it for public access. Mr. Roberts noted that he made a complete proposal on the lighthouse when he was Director of the National Lighthouse Museum, and the Museum was attempting to acquire another Old Saybrook lighthouse from the Coast Guard. He will provide a copy.

Mr. Futoma noted Senator Murphy’s staff was interested in working with the CRGC and other groups on the lighthouse project if help is needed. He, Chairman Thompson, and Ms. Beckman met with the staff on August 24th.

Chair Thompson noted that Mr. Futoma has written a CRGC copy for the annual report for the Town of Old Saybrook and will be revising it for the Town of Old Lyme. Mr. Futoma offered the report template to Commissioners for their town annual reports. Chair Thompson encouraged Commissioners to see if their town published a quarterly Events Magazine and if the report copy or other Commission news could be included.

9. New Business: Not discussed.

a. Haddam – Cell Tower Proposal

Ms. Beckman noted that there is a process for the CT Siting Council when a location has been found. The first step is to inform the town and do several studies prior to hearings. A public hearing will be held on October 12th and during the hearing process of CT Siting Council starting no sooner than October 27th. Chair Thompson recommended an ad hoc committee be formed to develop CRGC comments. Mr. de Brigard, Mr. Farina, and Mr. Roberts (Alternate) volunteered; Chair Thompson appointed them, and Mr. Alan Ponanski to the committee.

10. Adjournment:

A **motion** was made by Mr. Webb, seconded by S. Thompson, to adjourn the meeting.

Voting in favor: T. Brelsford, J. Roberts, D. Langdon, M. Farina, M. Woody, S. Thompson, W. Webb, R. de Brigard, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 9-0-0.

Meeting adjourned at 9:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Huot, Clerk

The next regular meeting of the Gateway Commission is scheduled for Thursday, September 28, 2023, at 7:00 PM.

Minutes are posted in compliance with Connecticut’s Freedom of Information Act. Please note that edits may be made to these minutes prior to their acceptance by the Commission at its next meeting. Any changes will be included within the next meeting’s minutes.