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

CONNECTICUT RIVER GATEWAY COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 24, 2026

Present: Chester: Misha Semënov-Leiva (Arrived at 7:45 PM); **Deep River**: Jerry Roberts; **Essex:** Peter Fleischer, James Hiller (Alternate); **Lyme:** Lisa Wadge, Ray Fusco (Alternate); **Old Lyme:** Suzanne Thompson (Chair); **Old Saybrook:** Ellen FitzGerald (Alternate); **RiverCOG North:** Alan Ponanski (Alternate); **RiverCOG South**: Gail Reynolds; **CT DEEP:** Kathleen Perzanowski.

Also Present: Caroline Nanai, Architect; Mr. Bob Guilmette, Mr. Joe Bergin

Absent: Chester: Tom Brelsford (Alternate); **Deep River**: John Cunningham (Alternate); **Fenwick:** Newt Brainard; **East Haddam:** Debbie Langdon, Philip Barlow (Alternate); **Haddam:** Mike Farina (Secretary), Erin Ortega (Treasurer and Alternate); **Old Lyme:** Greg Futoma (Alternate); **Old Saybrook:** William Webb (Vice Chair); **RiverCOG North:** Raul de Brigard; **RiverCOG South**: Anne Redfield (Alternate); **Ex Officio**: Melvin Woody.

Staff support present: Sarah Makowicki, CRGC Staff; Amy Huot, Clerk

1. **Call to Order:** Chair Thompson called the meeting to order at 7:07 PM.
2. **Roll Call**
3. **Seating of Alternates:** Alan Ponanski represented East Haddam. Gail Reynolds represented Haddam.
4. **Approval of Agenda**

   A **motion** was made by A. Ponanski, Seconded J. Hiller, to approve the agenda. The Review of Referrals was updated to include item 7d: Essex Text Amendment.

   Voting in favor: J. Roberts, A. Ponanski, P. Fleischer, G. Reynolds, L Wadge, S. Thompson, E. FitzGerald, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion passed unanimously, 8-0-0.

5. **Approval of Minutes:** 8/19/2026 Regular Meeting

   An amended **motion** was made by L. Wadge, Seconded by J. Roberts, to approve the August 19, 2026 Regular Meeting minutes.

   Amendment: The annual budget was approved for $100,450.

   Voting in favor: J. Roberts, P. Fleischer, G. Reynolds, L Wadge, S. Thompson, E. FitzGerald, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** A. Ponanski. The motion passed, 7-0-1.

6. **Public Comment: No comments from the public.**

7. **Review of Referrals & Preliminary Discussions**

Ms. Makowicki explained changes that were made to the monthly staff report, including documents supporting referrals. The Commissioners provided feedback regarding the updates and will be working towards working with online documents versus printed documents.

a. **Special Exception – 38 Ayers Point Road, Old Saybrook**

Ms. Nanai presented the site plan. Key points: Lighting is minimal and dark sky compliant; non-reflective glass is being used, and a rain garden will be installed. Ms. Wadge requested that efforts be made, including erosion control, to protect Hydes Point Creek, which is immediately next to the property. Ms. Nanai commented that silt fencing will be used in multiple areas on the property.

A **motion** was made by J. Hiller, Seconded E. FitzGerald, to write a letter to the Old Saybrook Zoning Commission stating that the CRGC does not oppose the special exception and hope all efforts are made to protect the inlet and the adjacent Old Saybrook Land Trust property.

Voting in favor: J. Roberts, A. Ponanski, P. Fleischer, G. Reynolds, L Wadge, S. Thompson, E. FitzGerald, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion passed unanimously, 8-0-0.

b. **Special Exception – 55 North Cove Road, Old Saybrook**

Ms. Caroline Nanai presented the site plan. Most of the property is within the 50-foot tidal wetlands setback. The entire property is within the 100-foot riparian buffer and building structure setback except for one small portion that is unusable because of the street line setback.

A variance was obtained for the street line setback. A new septic system will be installed. The existing house will not change. Only the garage will be updated.

Ms. Nanai commented that the Old Saybrook Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) approved the variance request. Mr. Joe Bergin, architect, reviewed the design.

Ms. Nanai noted that existing trees will be preserved, but the vegetation will have to be removed. The applicants are considering adding new plantings. The Commission commented that additional bulk will be added within the 100-foot setback. There will be no living space above the garage. Ms. Nanai commented that the Old Saybrook Inland Wetlands Commission has approved the project.

A **motion** was made by M. Semënov-Leiva, seconded by A. Ponanski, to write a letter stating that the CRGC appreciates that the design meets many of the CT River Gateway Standards that are in the Old Saybrook zoning regulations. However, it increases visual bulk, is within the 100-foot setback, and does not meet standard **4e**: Building forms are to be scaled to the particular environmental setting to avoid excessively massive forms that fail to enhance the hillside character. Massing of structural elements such as large roof areas are to be broken up to approximate natural slopes.

The Commission recommends the applicant investigate how to reduce the bulk of the proposed garage, citing its July 31st letter to Old Saybrook Zoning Commission regarding variance application for the proposed expansion of the garage.

Voting in favor: J. Roberts, A. Ponanski, P. Fleischer, G. Reynolds, L Wadge, S. Thompson, E. FitzGerald,

K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion passed unanimously, 8-0-0.

c. **Text Amendment – Subdivision Regulations Update, Old Saybrook**

The Commission reviewed the proposed subdivision zoning regulations text amendment. Ms. Makowicki commented that the text amendment applies to subdivisions only. Ms. Makowicki noted that she will confirm that the wetlands are taken out from the density calculations.

A **motion** was made by L. Wadge, seconded by J. Roberts to write a letter stating the CRGC does not oppose the text amendment, and it commends the protection of wetlands.

Voting in favor: M. Semënov-Leiva, J. Roberts, A. Ponanski, P. Fleischer, G. Reynolds, L Wadge, S. Thompson, E. FitzGerald, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

d. **Essex Text Amendment and Map Change**

Ms. Makowicki presented the proposed text amendment. The purpose of the amendment, pursuant to Public Act 25-1, is to allow fewer parking per housing unit, and street parking will be counted. Practice: Low-income housing would not require two spots per unit if this is adopted. RiverCOG created the example language for all towns, and the amendment is word for word.

Ms. Makowicki noted that Mr. Webb said he supported the amendment, and he thinks they should move forward.

A **motion** was made by P. Fleischer, seconded by J. Roberts, to send a letter to the Essex Zoning Commission stating that CRGC finds that the proposed map and text amendments do not conflict with Gateway Standards. CRGC does not oppose the language as proposed, and the letter can be taken as approval of the map and text amendments if adopted as presented in this application.

Voting in favor: J. Roberts, A. Ponanski, P. Fleischer, G. Reynolds, L Wadge, S. Thompson, E. FitzGerald, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

Mr. Semënov-Leiva left at 8:39 PM.

8. **Public Hearing** – Adoption of Incentive Housing Zone (IHZ) Regulation Text into CRGC Standards

Ms. Makowicki commented that the Rules and Procedures Committee did not have adequate time to discuss the regulation text and recommends it be added to the October 2026 agenda.

9. Correspondence/Staff Report

Ms. Makowicki provided an update on the following:

The Essex library received administrative approval to replace an existing side yard shed and to add miscellaneous upgrades.

Ms. Makowicki commented that she is going to meetings with the land office staff of Gateway member towns. Ms. Makowicki noted some inquiries from land trusts regarding acquisition support. These will be presented to the Land Committee first for review and recommendation to the full Commission.

Chair Thompson commented that CRGC's annual meeting will be held in October, including election of officers. Committees also will be reviewed, Commissioners are expected to serve on one CRGC Committee. All Committee meetings are open to all Commissioners.

Ms. Makowicki commented that on October 13, 2026, in New London, a housing discussion will be held. Ms. Makowicki noted she will create a calendar to list the local activities; town meetings, and links to those meetings will be added as well.

Chair Thompson gave the following update: Multiple groups including the Connecticut River Conservancy and the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) hold workshops or programs that can be added to the calendar Ms. Makowicki is creating for Commissioners. Chair Thompson asked that everyone send Ms. Makowicki information that should be added to the calendar.

The Commission discussed the annual boat trip on the river, set for Thursday, Oct. 8, 4 – 6 pm, leaving from CT River Museum dock in Essex. Invitations have been issued. Commissioners were asked to encourage town planners, Planning & Zoning and ZBA Chairs and First Selectmen to attend.

Ms. Makowicki noted A Slice of Life with host Jim Therrien, a monthly show on Valley Shore Community Television public access channel and YouTube, covers topics in the region. She has been asked to talk about the Conservation Zone and CRGC Commissioners agreed that the show is a good opportunity to provide outreach and training to the member towns.

Ms. Makowicki is still transitioning into her new role with the CRGC. She does not have a phone yet, and RiverCOG is still the mailing address for CRGC until a PO Box is set up.

10. Chairman's Report: No other comments or updates.

11. Committee Reports

a. Finance - Approve Bills:

A **motion** was made by A. Ponanski, seconded by J. Hiller, to pay the following bills: Halloran and Sage: $562.50, RiverCOG August staff support: $4145.60, Ms. Makowicki's September hours: $4130.88, and a deposit and payment in full to the CT River Museum for $1400.00. Total Bills: $10,228.98.

Voting in favor: J. Roberts, A. Ponanski, P. Fleischer, G. Reynolds, L Wadge, S. Thompson, E. FitzGerald, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

b. Rules of Procedures – Update

Mr. Ponanski informed Commissioners that the Rules of Procedures committee has been having productive meetings and would like to discuss the Chester ECO Alliance cell tower request.

A CRGC letter needs to be sent to Chester in response to request and should contain several concerns and findings that the Chester Fairgrounds are a better place for the cell tower. Mr. Ponanski requested that the Rules committee be allowed to write the letter.

A **motion** was made by Mr. Ponanski, seconded by L. Wadge, that the Rules Committee be delegated to write the letter to the town of Chester on the matter with their recommendation for the fairgrounds site for the cell tower.

Chair Thompson commented that the Connecticut Siting Council recognizes the CRGC as a result of past comments on cell tower applications in Haddam and our granted request to be intervenors in CSC's consideration of Eversource wire replacement over the CT River. and what they do because of their involvement in previous meetings. The CT Siting Council has not formally taken up this issue yet.

Voting in favor: J. Roberts, A. Ponanski, P. Fleischer, G. Reynolds, L Wadge, S. Thompson, E. FitzGerald, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

Ms. Wadge commented that the Rules Committee will create a form that will help the public evaluate a possible land trust opportunity. Chair Thompson commented that a similar CRGC Grant form created in past years for other funding requests can be used as a model.

Ms. Makowicki commented that she has had great reception from all the towns that she and Ms. Susie Beckman (RiverCOG) have met with, and the towns are open to presentations explaining the CRGC mission.

c. Communications – Update

Chair Thompson commented that Ms. Makowicki will be updating the CRGC website, and the transition is ongoing. Ms. Makowicki also commented that a quarterly newsletter or news article that can be posted on the website are under consideration.

d. Land – Update: Ms. Wadge commented that the committee will be meeting soon.

12. Old Business: None

13. New Business

Mr. Fleischer asked to lead an effort on behalf of the CRGC to meet with other entities that evaluate the health of the Connecticut River. Chair Thompson suggested Mr. Fleischer conduct research to get a broad picture of what is being done today and provide a report to the Commission. Chair Thompson suggested the following: The current state of federal funding under the Clean Water Act, CT River Conservancy actions, Save the Sound studies, etc. It was proposed to suggest this to CT River Museum as a topic for its annual environmental conference. Ms. Wadge and Mr. Roberts volunteered to help. Mr. Ponanski recommended having this as a regular topic on CRGC's agenda.

Mr. Roberts commented that the town of Deep River will vote to fine residents who violate zoning regulations and ignore statutes. An update will be given at the next meeting.

14. Adjournment

A motion was made by L. Wadge, seconded by J. Roberts, to adjourn the meeting.

Voting in favor: J. Roberts, A. Ponanski, P. Fleischer, G. Reynolds, L Wadge, S. Thompson, E. FitzGerald, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

The meeting adjourned at 9:26 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Huot, CRGC Clerk

The next regular meeting of the Gateway Commission is scheduled for
Thursday, October 22, 2026 at *7pm*