



**CT River Gateway Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes – Hybrid Meeting
Thursday, April 27, 2023, 7:00 PM
RiverCOG Conference Room and via Zoom**

DRAFT

Present: **Chester:** Tom Brelsford; Jenny Kitsen (Alternate); **Deep River:** Jerry Roberts; **Essex:** Claire Matthews (Treasurer), Misha Semënov-Leiva (Alternate); **East Haddam:** Debbie Langdon (Alternate) (arrived late); **Haddam:** Susan Bement, Mike Farina (Alternate); **Lyme:** Melvin Woody (Vice Chair), Susan Fox (Alternate); **Old Lyme:** Suzanne Thompson (Chair), Greg Futoma (Alternate); **Old Saybrook:** Diane Stober (Alternate); **CT DEEP:** Kathleen Perzanowski; **RiverCOG North:** Alan Ponanski (Alternate) joined at 7:17 PM; **RiverCOG South:** Judy Preston (arrived at 7:40 PM).

Absent: Cary Brownell; **Fenwick:** Newt Brainerd; **Old Saybrook:** William Webb (Secretary), **RiverCOG North:** Raul de Brigard

Staff support present: Sam Gold (RiverCOG), Susie Beckman (RiverCOG)

Guests present: Robert Larosa, Don Lucas

II. Agenda

1. Call to Order: Chair Thompson called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM. After roll call, it was noted that there is a quorum of towns.

Chair Thompson asked the Commissioners to consider changing the order of Committee Reports, moving Communications to the first.

A **motion** was made by C. Matthews, seconded by S. Bement to move agenda item **7c: Communications**, to first of Committee Reports.

Voting in favor: T. Brelsford, J. Roberts, C. Matthews, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, D. Stober, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 8-0-0.

2. Approval of 3/23/23 Regular Meeting Minutes

A **motion** was made by S. Bement, seconded by G. Futoma to **APPROVE** the March 23, 2023 Regular Meeting Minutes.

Voting in favor: T. Brelsford, J. Roberts, C. Matthews, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, D. Stober, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 8-0-0.

3. Lighting Standards Adoption by Towns- Update

The Commissioners reported on status of towns reviewing the proposed new Lighting Standards language and adoption of language standardization of other sections of the Gateway Zone Standards. Essex received positive feedback and adopted the standards at their recent public hearing and meeting. Old Saybrook already had incorporated the language in their Zoning Regulations. Old Lyme Zoning Commission voted to continue its public hearing on the standards at its May 8 meeting. Commissioners expressed initial support of the Lighting Standards language at their April public hearing and meeting. The Haddam Town Planner did not give positive feedback on the updated lighting standards. It was recommended that all town representatives go to their respective town Zoning Commission meetings for a possibly more favorable result. The town of Lyme has not reviewed the Lighting Standards yet, due to other regulations it is considering. The town is waiting for information from the CRGC.

The CRGC Commissioners discussed receiving input from all towns prior to having the public hearing or moving forward with the public hearing on May 25, 2023 without input from all towns. The public hearing date for the town of Chester has not been set yet, but there is an impression that there will be a positive outcome.

Chair Thompson noted there are four towns that have either already incorporated the standards or are favorably viewing the standards and noted that towns still considering the standards have asked for a status update on what other member towns have done. The town of Deep River is also viewing the lighting standards favorably but would like to address treatment of areas within the Zone in its town that are not visible from the river. Chair Thompson recommended getting statements from organizations such as Connecticut Audubon Society in favor of the updated lighting standards for additional support.

The Commissioners decided to move forward with scheduling the public hearing on the lighting standards for May 25, 2023 and requested staff to check statutes and rules governing the hearing scheduling and noticing requirements. Chairman Thompson requested staff to prepare a listing of the status of 8 member towns' consideration and language they have adopted if it is different than the proposed Gateway Commission language. This is needed for May 8 Old Lyme Zoning Commission public hearing.

4. Referrals

a). 22/23-26C Robert & Carmela Larosa request a variance of Par. 58.2 & Par 58.6 (Gateway riparian buffer & structure setback/100' required/85' proposed) of the Zoning Regulations to permit the demolition of existing house and construction of a 3,478 SF house and 1,904 SF attached garage with workshop at 15 Mallard Drive, Map 63/Lot 90, Residence AA-1 District, Coastal Area Management Zone, Gateway Conservation Zone.

Mr. Don Lucas, Engineer, and Mr. Bob Larosa, homeowner, were at the meeting to discuss the site plan. A site walk was conducted prior to the CRGC meeting. Mr. Lucas confirmed that the site plan calculated lot coverage and gross floor area coverage is within the Old Saybrook Zoning requirements and within the CRGC suggested limits. Mr. Lucas also noted that existing trees would remain per the current plan. The Commissioners questioned further extending the proposed house into the 100-ft setback. The Commissioners also expressed concern about the increase of impervious surface due to larger building footprint.

Mr. Semënov-Leiva made a **motion**, seconded by Ms. Matthews, for the CRGC to write a letter to the Old Saybrook Zoning Board of Appeals noting the CRGC does not approve of the request for the variance due to it further encroaching into the 100-ft. setback.

Voting in favor: T. Brelsford, J. Roberts, C. Matthews, D. Langdon, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, D. Stober, K. Perzanowski; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 9-0-0.

5. Correspondence/Staff Report

Mr. Gold informed the Commission that CRGC March Regular Meeting Agenda Item 4, 107 River Rd., was inaccurate and must be corrected as the report he presented was incorrect. The consultant planner John Guskowski for the town of Deep River contacted Mr. Gold noting the site plan had changed, making it necessary to perform a recalculation of the square footage of the house. The house had already been redesigned to make it less than 4000 SF, but that information was not sent to Mr. Gold. Because of the error, Mr. Gold retracted the letter sent to Deep River staff and requested a withdrawing of the statement from the CRGC March Meeting Minutes (as an addition to these meeting minutes) concerning how the consultant planner calculated square footage. Mr. Gold further noted that the record will be corrected because of the inaccurate report. An apology was issued to Mr. Guskowski and Steve Hnatuk, Co-ZEOs of Deep River, from Mr. Gold and Mr. Downes.

108 River Road, Deep River: Mr. Gold reported there was significant clearing of this lot. The trees identified to be saved were saved, but little else was saved. Mr. Gold recommends that the CRGC clearly requests documentation on the trees that will be removed and what trees will be saved in the future.

277 River Rd. in Deep River: A 20+ acre site is being subdivided into three sites. CRGC Commissioners noted that they need to be diligent when that plan comes before them for review to avoid unnecessary clear cutting, and any other areas of concern with the clearing of these properties.

The discussion led to land trusts, how the Lower CT River land trust does not have the legal funds to protect certain areas in the future. It was noted there are difficulties in protecting the land when future landowners purchase properties that have already been reviewed by CRGC.

Mr. Gold informed the Commissioners that a project has been started using GIS and mathematical calculations to understand the average size of houses by decade and by town in the Conservation Zone. CRGC cannot regulate houses under 4000 SF per Mr. Gold, but the statute does allow this regulation. Mr. Gold presented data gathered and noted the CRGC can possibly start a legal argument that when the statute was passed in 1973, the average size of the house was a certain average square footage and houses that are much larger today are not part of that traditional river scene when the statute was created. Mr. Gold noted the data will be collected for all the towns in the Gateway Zone to understand the average increases in house size.

Ms. Beckman informed Commissioners that three applications came in from Essex and based on review of them by the Essex Commission members, these meet the Gateway Standards and can be approved administratively without needing to come before the full Commission. She was preparing letters with the Essex Commission members.

6. Chairman's Report

Ms. Matthews and Ms. Bement will be retiring from the CRGC in coming months. Chair Thompson thanked them for their years of service and contributions.

Chair Thompson noted that the CT Land Conservation Conference (CLCC) on March 25 was successful and there was a lot of interest in what the CRGC had to say during the conference. The Effects of Light Pollution workshop was well-attended, too.

7. Committee Reports:

a). Communications

Committee Chair Futoma reported the marketing project for the CRGC 50th Anniversary is winding down. For future marketing activities, the person(s) receiving website updates and eNewsletter training needs to be identified and training needs to be scheduled. There is also a basic flyer that needs to be finished. Marketing invoices are caught up and there is sufficient budget left to finish the marketing initiative. Additionally, an article was created for each town's quarterly Events Magazine. The article and image will be sent to each town representative. Futoma requested that town representatives contact the person responsible for their town's Events magazine for deadline dates. The deadline for Old Lyme Events is May 5, the article and photo will be submitted before then.

The Commission's social media presence needs to be re-established. The Communications committee would like to contract with a marketing professional to do these and other communications tasks. A qualified candidate has been identified to work on the CRGC marketing and possibly other administrative tasks as well.

The CRGC received a Conservation Hero award at the CLCC conference, and the CLCC has requested the CRGC hold an event where this can be recognized. The Communications Committee and CLCC had the idea of having a reception at Gillette's Castle that includes the Gateway towns. The event will be held sometime in June 2023. There might also be a reception at the Connecticut Audubon Society's Roger Tory Petersen Estuary Center in Old Lyme in August. Chairman Thompson asked Commissioners to reserve the dates of Thursday, Aug. 3 and 10 for that event.

The Communications Committee will also attempt to get a Proclamation from the Governor in time for the CRGC event. Mr. Gold noted that the General Assembly could provide a Proclamation as well.

The Committee is brainstorming summer activities to further celebrate the CRGC 50th Anniversary.

The CT River Conservancy requested that the CRGC to again be a sponsor for their Source to Sea Cleanup. The Communications committee voted unanimously that they recommend it be done, but it will be the last sponsorship that the CRGC takes on an ad hoc basis. The Committee recommends creating guidelines for reviewing sponsorship requests on an annual basis.

The Communications Committee requested a motion be made that the CRGC fund the Source to Sea Cleanup at the Tributary Sponsorship Level of \$2500 for 2023.

A **motion** was made by J. Roberts, seconded by M. Woody, to approve the Tributary Sponsorship Level donation of \$2500 to the CT River Conservancy for the Source to Sea Cleanup for 2023.

Voting in favor: T. Brelsford, J. Roberts, C. Matthews, D. Langdon, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, D. Stober, K. Perzanowski, J. Preston; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

Chair Thompson reminded Commissioners that Committee and Commission meeting dates and agendas are posted on the ctrivergateway.org website, instead of expecting repeat reminders and Zoom link emails from Committee chairs or Commission staff. She urged Committee Chairs to schedule regular

meeting dates and post these dates and times on the website so all Commissioners know the schedule and are welcomed to participate. Mr. Gold noted that Commission meetings agendas are sent in advance to the 8 member towns.

b). Finance

Finance Committee Chair Matthews reported that it is time to prepare the Commission’s annual budget and she will be requesting budgets from the Committee chairs. She suggested more detailed summaries from RiverCOG of its staff support hours and expenses so the Committee may monitor and understand what RiverCOG will be doing for the year now that new staff has been hired being trained. Mr. Gold suggested creating a scope of work for the RiverCOG staff as well.

The Finance Committee requested that the Commission vote to pay the following bills: River COG: \$13,096.99; Amy Huot, two sets of minutes (January and Special Meeting): \$287.00; Halloran and Sage: \$536.50; W Design: \$9,650; and Bryan Ingram: \$200; for a total of \$24,276.74 for the month of April.

A **motion** was made by M. Woody, seconded by M. Semënov-Leiva, to pay the April 2023 bills.

Voting in favor: T. Brelsford, J. Roberts, C. Matthews, D. Langdon, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, D. Stober, K. Perzanowski, J. Preston; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

c). Rules of Procedures

Lighting Standards update in East Haddam: The town’s regulations are already mostly compliant. If any items need to be reconciled, Ms. Beckman will help Ms. Langdon. No other Rules Committee news.

d). Land: no Executive Session needed.

Mr. Woody will be retiring as Chair of the Land Committee and a replacement will be named.

8. Old Business: None

9. New Business: None

10. Adjournment

A motion was made by S. Bement, seconded by D. Stober, to adjourn the meeting.

Voting in favor: T. Brelsford, J. Roberts, C. Matthews, D. Langdon, S. Bement, M. Woody, S. Thompson, D. Stober, K. Perzanowski, J. Preston; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None. The motion **passed** unanimously, 10-0-0.

Meeting adjourned at 9:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Huot, Clerk

PLEASE NOTE this new email address to reach the Connecticut River Gateway Commission:

contact@ctrivergateway.org

The next regular meeting of the Gateway Commission is scheduled for Thursday, May 25, 2023 at 7:00 PM at RiverCOG, 145 Dennison Rd, Essex, CT. Please see the agenda posted at <https://ctrivergateway.org> for the link.