

CONNECTICUT RIVER GATEWAY COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

April 23, 2020

Present/Absent: [Excused absence (E); Unexcused absence (U)]

Chester: Margaret (Peggy) Wilson , Jenny Kitsen

Deep River: Vacancy, Conal Sampson

East Haddam: Crary Brownell, Joel Ide

Essex: Claire Mathews, Misha Semenov

Fenwick: Newton Brainerd, Borough Warden

Haddam: Susan Bement, Mike Farina

Lyme: J. Melvin Woody, Wendy Hill

Old Lyme: Suzanne Thompson (7:08p), Greg Futoma

Old Saybrook: Bill Webb, Tom Gezo

Regional Rep: Raul Debrigard

DEEP: David Blatt

Staff: J H Torrance Downes

Guests: John Forbis, Ralph Wood, Allison Black, NERR committee members; Kelsey Wentling, CT River Conservancy; Margot Burns, RiverCOG; Kevin O'Brien, DEEP.

Call to Order

This meeting was convened using the Zoom online platform. The agenda was formally posted in all eight Gateway member towns as required with information directing interested members of the public to join the meeting online. Chairman **Thompson** called the online regular meeting of the Connecticut River Gateway Commission to order at 7:03pm.

Approval of 2/27/20 and 3/26/20 Regular Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve the 2/27/20 minutes by **Debrigard**, seconded by **Farina**, passed unanimously. **Bement** abstained. The 3/26/20 meetings were tabled until Gateway's next meeting on May 28, 2020.

Update on the Effort to Establish a NERR in Connecticut.

John Forbis, Ralph Wood and Allison Black joined the Zoom meeting to update Gateway members on the status of the effort to have a National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) establishing in Connecticut. The area of the nomination exists from Lords Cove in the lower Connecticut River to Stonington in southeastern Connecticut. Cited locales (state properties) within the identified area include Lords Cove Wildlife Management Area, Goose Island Sparrow Murmuration area, CT DEEP Marine Headquarters, Great Island Wildlife Area, University of CT Avery Point Campus, Bluff Point State Park Coastal Reserve and Natural Area Preserve, and the Haley Farm State Park. The waters and shoreline between Lords Cove and the Stonington locales are included.

Forbis, Wood and Black took turns narrating a Power Point presentation reminding members of the reasons and benefits of having a NERR in Connecticut. A site selection team was established in Spring of 2015, the nomination letter was submitted for consideration in December of 2018, the nomination was accepted in October of 2019. The MP(?) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are expected to be completed in Spring of 2021 with the anticipated designation is in Spring of 2022.

Significant issues identified include recreation, climate change/rising sea level, endangered species protection, bringing carbon to market (carbon sequestration and trading), pollution control, water quality improvements, light pollution, and habitat protection.

Members provided suggestions and asked questions. Subjects noted included the potential changes to waterflow in the river due to changes in snow pack resulting from climate change, monitoring stations, invasives plants, and

coordination of all stakeholders in the lower river. **Woody** suggested contact of Pat Young of the Eight Mile Wild & Scenic River organization.

Debrigard suggested that the presenters should be aware of studies done by geologist and former Wesleyan professor Peter Patton on sediment transport in the lower Connecticut River.

Wood finished stating that a press release was expected shortly from the DEEP on the status of the NERR.

Correspondence and Staff Report

Downes summarized the report, highlighting the subject of the webinar that is being developed by CT RC&D and the stakeholders of the invasive plant survey conducted in the lower Connecticut River last summer by the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (Greg Bugbee and Summer Stebbins). Gateway provided a grant totaling \$20,000 for the effort. Although the results of the survey have been presented to various stakeholders, the project has not been presented to the public at large. The webinar is intended to result in such a broad public “rollout”.

Variance Applications, Special Permit Applications and Map/Regulation Change Petitions

There were no applications or petitions on which to report.

Chairman’s Report

Thompson asked for members to keep in touch with their local counterparts in their towns.

Committee Reports

Financial/Treasurers Report. **Matthews** reported that the finance committee met through teleconference with Gateway financial advisors. The decision was made to “stay the course” during the current market swings, although small adjustments were made. **Matthews** then presented the staffing bill in the amount of \$2,122,71 for payment. A motion to approve payment of the staffing bill was made by **Bement** and seconded by **Woody**. The motion passed unanimously.

Land Committee. **Wilson** there isn’t a report as little to no activity has occurred given quarantining. **Bement** mentioned that the property formerly known to Gateway as “Messina-Dessina” was in the process of development for a single-family dwelling (reported on in February, 2020). At this point, the hillside is being cleared for the construction of the driveway up to the upper elevations of the property where the cottage-sized structure will be built. **Wilson** asked **Bement** to provide alerts if she hears of information regarding property purchase or development in the Haddam Neck area. **Bement** indicated that the Danaher property (the trustee is Terry Danaher) – 19.5 acres located on the west side of Ague Road - may be for sale. The property was originally purchased for \$480,000. **Bement** suggested that Gateway should be interested in this sale.

Governance Committee. No report. The committee will work to move forward on issues brought up by Governance at Gateway’s May meeting.

Public Outreach Committee. **Gezo** presented a summary document reporting that (1) the annual river trip has been canceled for June and dates are being sought for the September/October period, (2) the Haddam “Mucket” event has been postponed. Haddam officials have contacted Gateway in search of possible support for the event, which will involve property along Higganum Cove in the Conservation Zone. Although details aren’t available yet, the “ask” may be in the area of \$5,000, (3) **Gezo** pointed out the new logo that has been sent to representatives of the Tour de Lyme, which is now scheduled for the fall.

The Facebook “campaign” continues with **Gezo** posting photos about once a week. Photos of the river are welcomed and should be sent for posting. Gateway still searches for clear Conservation Zone boundaries for large map presentation and for use on the Gateway website. A smaller map was forwarded for use on the

Outreach “overview” document. Downes reported that he had begun replicating the Essex Canoe and Kayak Trail guide using Adobe web-based products.

National Heritage Corridor Ad hoc Committee

Woody summarized his contact with Peter Samuel, the National Forest Service manager of the National Heritage Area program in the Northeast. At **Woody's** request, Samuel provided the NPS document describing the updated criteria for the feasibility studies required as a basis for Congressional establishment of Natural Heritage Areas. The NPS document describes two methods for composing a feasibility study. Either the National Park Service sends an agent who composes the study or the local conducts the study and composes the document itself. **Woody** reported that he has enlisted the aid of Anthony Irving of Lyme, who headed the very similar process involved in establishing the Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Watershed, which is also supported by the NPS and depended upon a similar act of Congress. **Woody** noted that the Gateway ad hoc committee was only charged with investigating the process for seeking National Heritage Corridor Status for the Connecticut Estuary and that Rivercog was the obvious local institution to initiate a feasibility study and, eventually, administer the program. Sam Gold has expressed an interest in exploring that possibility.

Old Business:

Downes asked members if they had any comments to offer regarding the webinar that is being developed for the invasive plant survey performed in the lower Connecticut River in the fall of 2019. **Gezo** mentioned that the rollout of the webinar can be leveraged as an Outreach event for Gateway to publicize.

New Business: None presented.

Adjournment: A motion to adjourn at 8:36pm by **Bement**, seconded by **Farina**, was approved unanimously.