

# CONNECTICUT RIVER GATEWAY COMMISSION

## REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

October 24, 2019

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

<b>Chester:</b>	<b>Margaret (Peggy) Wilson, Jenny Kitsen</b>
<b>Deep River:</b>	<i>Nancy Fischbach(E), Conal Sampson</i>
<b>East Haddam:</b>	<i>Crary Brownell (E), Joel R. Ide</i>
<i>Essex:</i>	<b>Claire Matthews, Mary Ann Pleva (E)</b>
<i>Fenwick:</i>	<i>Newton Brainerd, Borough Warden</i>
<i>Haddam:</i>	<b>Susan Bement, Mike Farina</b>
<b>Lyme:</b>	<b>J. Melvin Woody, Wendy Hill</b>
<b>Old Lyme:</b>	<b>Peter Cable (last meeting), Suzanne Thompson</b>
<b>Old Saybrook:</b>	<b>Bill Webb, Tom Gezo</b>
<i>Regional Rep:</i>	<b>Raul Debrigard</b>
<b>DEEP:</b>	<b>David Blatt</b>
<b>Staff:</b>	<b>J H Torrance Downes</b>
<b>Guests:</b>	Kelsey Wentling.

### Call to Order

Chair Thompson called the regular meeting of the Connecticut River Gateway Commission to order at RiverCOG offices located at 145 Dennison Road, Essex at 7:13pm immediately following the adjournment of the annual meeting.

### Motion to Amend Agenda

**Thompson** made a motion to include the Approval of 8/22/19 and 9/26/19 Minutes item to the agenda as the item had been omitted. Motion by **Woody**, seconded by **Kitsen**, approved unanimously.

### Approval of 8/22/19 and 9/26/19 Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve the two sets of minutes with minor grammatical changes by **Woody**, seconded by **Matthews** (8/22/19), passed unanimously. Motion to approve minutes from 9/26/19 deferred until next meeting on December 5, 2019.

Correspondence/Staff Report. None to report.

### Regulation/Map Review and Approval pursuant to Section 25-102 G CGS.

Essex. Submission of Revised Zoning Regulations on which the Essex Zoning Commission has been working for several years. Downes reported that members who were on the Commission last year will remember that the Zoning Commission had previously voted to include the latest Gateway Standards to the regulations in August of 2018. The remaining reformatted regulations are the subject of this referral. **Matthews** reported on her involvement in this "iterative" process and reported that the discussions regarding the new book were long and thorough. Based upon her experience, she reported that she would be surprised if anyone comes forward that *doesn't* support the newly formatted regulations. **DeBrigard** offered that the Commission should approve the petition and include a positive, supportive message in the letter that reflects Gateway's appreciation of the inclusion of the Gateway standards and the overall effort to protect the lower river. Motion by **Cable**, seconded by **Woody** passed unanimously.

## Committees Reports

Thompson announced that moving forward, a Chairman's Report will be included among the Committee Reports provided toward the end of each meeting. The Chairman's Report is as follows:

### Chairman's Report.

- (1) **Thompson** recognizes and thanks Nancy **Fischbach** for organizing and teaching two sessions of "Zoning 101", a zoning "primer" for various members of the Gateway Commission. **Thompson** appreciates that the final version of the handout will be distributed for inclusion in the Gateway Handbook.
- (2) **Thompson** reminded members that at the September meeting, a table of contents was distributed for the handbook. Copies will be distributed to newest members **Sampson** and **Futoma**.
- (3) **Thompson** addresses recent media coverage of Essex Financial, which manages Gateway's endowment. She refers to an article in the New London Day dated September 30, 2019 regarding an erroneous headline stating that EF was forced to pay a \$645,000 penalty to the SEC. EF chose to "self-report" and made refund payments to clients, including a \$9.08 payment due to the Gateway Commission. **Thompson** reported that the issue revolved around the practice of how certain fees had been collected by financial firms prior to 2014. EF was not using the 12-b-1 calculation on any mutual funds GW had through EF. Instead, the Money Market account, managed by Pershing, a clearing house that many financial institutions use to hold cash in management accounts, was using the 12-b-1 practice. EF "self-reported" and had to make repayments of inappropriately collected fees. Those firms who did not "self-report" were fined over \$300,000.

### Financial/Treasurers Report.

**Matthews** reported that Thompson provided a good summary of the circumstances surrounding the SEC ruling and Essex Financial. The explanation was provided at a 10/14/19 meeting which was attended by **Bement**, **Matthews** and **Brownell**. The EF fee structure allowed some clients to get lower fees.

**Matthews** pointed out the growth of the Gateway investment portfolio. The growth occurred despite the unsure trade climate. **Matthews** suggested that **Ide** provided an astute summary of Gateway's investment goals – to preserve and grow in order to pay bills and make constructive moves to benefit the lower river.

**Matthews** reported that when she took over as Treasurer, EF was under different leadership. Gateway was investing in high-yield bonds. EF has recommended keeping and continuing with the same high yield bond investments that have performed so well in the past. **Webb** asked if more information could be presented on the individual investments as part of the financial report. **Matthews** explained that, rather than have individuals be involved in any financial decisions, in 2013 the Commission made the decision to have the finance committee perform oversight. **Webb** indicated that he wasn't interested in oversight, rather he was just curious and would instead attend a finance committee meeting to learn about the issues of which he has interest.

**DeBrigard** asked if there is a way to come up with how much endowment must be held in order to allow operation while still providing funds for projects. **Matthews** reminds members about the "three-year rolling average" that originated for just that purpose and is reported on the monthly Treasurer's Report and reported that the portfolio is "earning more than we're spending", even with the recent grants. Returns, it was reported, are fluctuating between 4% and 17%.

**Matthews** reviewed the bills totaling \$33,326 that are to be paid as follows:

\$20,000 Connecticut RC&D, payment awarded to support a subaquatic vegetation survey in the lower river in the Conservation Zone.

\$6,000 Richard Snarski, payment for work performed to remove "upland woody invasives" along the river on Lords Cove. The work included physical removal of invasives (with a front-end loader) followed by minimal hand-spraying of herbicide to the emergent vegetation after cutting. Following removal, TNC planted an addition

20 American Elm trees, adding to 20 previously planted the prior year. The Elms are disease-resistant.  
\$5,000 Lyme Land and Conservation Trust, final payment of three payments totaling \$30,000 for the eradication of phragmites in the Lords Cove marshes. The payments included \$20,000 in the first year and then \$5,000 in each of the succeeding two years.  
\$2,326 Staffing bill for September, 2019

Motion to approve bills by **Bement**, seconded by **Woody**, approved unanimously.

#### Land Committee

**Wilson** reported that she was told that the Deep River Land Trust, now that they have the experience of raising funds and applying for grants to acquire land, may be coming back to the Gateway Commission for a grant to purchase another piece of property. More information to follow at a later date.

#### Governance Committee

**Webb** reported that the Governance Committee will be scheduling a meeting in the near future to work on several issues, including the development of less-restrictive language for the use of Gateway funds that is written into the approved Rules of Practice, per **Matthews**.

#### Public Outreach

**Thompson** asked if members had any thoughts on a presentation for the March, 2020 annual CLCC Workshop at Wesleyan University.

*PowerPoint Presentation.* **Gezo** made a presentation summarizing the results of the survey recently forwarded to members (9 of the members responded). Following the presentation made the decision to have Downes reach out to the graphic designer, Ginger LaBella, who is participating with the “Green-Blue Way Project” in Haddam.

**Woody** commented on an idea discussed among local land trusts where the group could have a newsletter in which each individual organization had a page to present what’s happening in each land trust. The model could work as a newsletter for the entire lower river community where each organization has an individual page – CT River Museum, the Gateway Commission, etc, whoever wants to participate. Sharing services and resources.

**Thompson** stated that she feels the Gateway “assets” need updating and need to be “spiffed up”. **Woody** further commented on the possibility of the lower river becoming a “heritage corridor” much like the 8-Mile River group, which as a result has three staff members and a forester. **Debrigard** offered that he will join **Woody** in researching the idea, although he has some concerns (RE: Farmington River). He recognized that a “plan” was needed first, which includes recommendations for standards for the protection of the “resource” that is the subject of the corridor. Upon a motion by **Ide**, seconded by **Matthews**, it was agreed that an ad hoc committee would be formed to study the idea.

New Business: **Sampson** asked members if they are willing to authorize him to research the possibility of purchasing a drone for Gateway business. Numerous members expressed interest in how aerial photography – stills or videos – could be a great benefit to Gateway’s work, including providing images for new outreach materials. By consensus, members gave **Sampson** the go-ahead to investigate what’s available and what kind of legal requirements would be necessary for anyone who operates the drone.

Old Business: **Thompson** spoke about the new publication entitled “Estuary Magazine”, an online magazine that will have an initial publication in March of 2020. **Thompson** spoke to writer Bill Hobbs, who’s first big lower river article is about Rich Snarski and the Lords Cove phragmites eradication project. Downes reminded members that he spoke to Hobbs last month.

Adjournment: Motion to adjourn at 8:19pm by **Bement**, seconded by **Hill**, approved unanimously.