

CONNECTICUT RIVER GATEWAY COMMISSION

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

January 4, 2021

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

Chester: *Tom Brelsford , Jenny Kitsen*
Deep River: **Jerry Roberts, Conal Sampson**
East Haddam: **Crary Brownell, Joel R. 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, Greg Futoma**
Old Saybrook: **Bill Webb, Tom Gezo**
Regional Rep: **Raul Debrigard** (joined at 5:40p)
DEEP: **David Blatt**
Staff: **J H Torrance Downes**
Guests: Margot Burns, RiverCOG (left before Executive Session)

Call to Order

This special meeting was convened by Chairman **Thompson** at 5:31pm on Monday, January 4, 2021 using the Zoom online platform. The agenda was formally posted in all eight member towns as required with information directing interested members of the public to join the meeting online.

Discussion and Potential Decision on Strategies and Engaging Professional Assistance on the Preservation Potential of the 87.4 acre Mount Saint John Property located at 135 Kirtland Street, Deep River, Connecticut

Chairman **Thompson** opened by offering Land Committee chairman **Futoma** the opportunity to explain the purpose and goal of this special meeting. **Futoma** explained that the 87-acre Deep River property known as Mount Saint John is for sale and has been for almost two years. The highly visible and iconic property is located on an elevated hilltop located above the Connecticut River on the border between Deep River and Chester. The scheduling of this special meeting results from a recent effort by Cushman & Wakefield, commercial real estate brokers representing the property owner Norwich Diocese, to reinvigorate the process of selling this property through the distribution of a multi-page sales brochure. It is generally recognized that the Diocese is quite anxious to divest itself of the 87-acre property. **Farina**, familiar with some of the operations of the school, offered some additional background on the circumstances surrounding the sale by the Norwich Diocese.

Woody stated that the possibility of development of this iconic property is likely the largest “crisis” faced by the Gateway Commission since its inception in 1973. **Roberts**, with assistance from **Farina**, summarized their knowledge of the site and the facility stating that, other than Gillette Castle, the Mount Saint John structure is likely the most iconic in the lower river valley. There are no ongoing activities or uses in existence at the site at the present time.

Futoma made a presentation using several maps of Deep River and the river valley in general, photographs taken from the river and the sales flyer. He explained that the land committee is recommending that the Gateway Commission sign a realtor’s contract with a local realtor who specializes in commercial purchases and has a conservation background. **Futoma** proposed a motion to enter the contract to engage in negotiations with the seller’s agent, Cushman & Wakefield. The motion was seconded by **Kitsen** and approved unanimously. **Woody** then moved to enter Executive Session, which was seconded by **Farina** and approved unanimously. **Thompson** addressed the attendance of RiverCOG representative Margot Burns in the executive session. Burns indicated that her interest is the preservation of the property and she will remove herself from the Zoom call, which she did. She would like to

keep abreast of the preservation effort as a part of her RiverCOG duties.

Executive Session

The Commission discussed the purpose of the meeting as described on the Special Meeting agenda and the motion to engage a realtor to negotiate with Cashman & Wakefield regarding the sale of the property.

End of Executive Session

A motion was made by **Woody** to end the Executive Session. **Thompson** seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Consensus

A consensus was reached as follows:

Land Committee member **Bement** – on behalf of chair Futoma - will further explore the hiring of a realtor and will present concerns and questions raised during the Executive Session. With the additional information, **Futoma** will call another meeting of the Land Committee to discuss and agree on a new recommendation. If an agreement is reached resulting in a contract with the realtor, the contract will be submitted to Gateway's attorney to determine if sufficient protections are included in the contract. If satisfactory, the Land Committee will again come before the Commission at a special meeting to be scheduled for Wednesday, January 12, 2021 at 5:30pm with a recommendation to enter into the agreement. If approved, Chairman **Thompson** will sign the contract on behalf of the Commission.

Adjournment: A motion was made by **Webb**, seconded by **Bement**, to adjourn the special meeting with the motion passing unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:22pm.