

# CONNECTICUT RIVER GATEWAY COMMISSION

## REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

April 25, 2019

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

**Chester:** **Margaret (Peggy) Wilson, Jenny Kitsen**

**Deep River:** **Nancy Fischbach, *Vacancy***

**East Haddam:** **Crary Brownell, Joel Ide**

*Essex:* **Claire Mathews, Mary Ann Pleva**

*Fenwick:* **Newton Brainerd, Borough Warden**

*Haddam:* **Susan Bement (E), Mike Farina**

**Lyme:** **J. Melvin Woody (E), Wendy Hill**

**Old Lyme:** **Peter Cable, Suzanne Thompson**

**Old Saybrook:** **Bill Webb (E), Tom Gezo**

*Regional Rep:* **Raul Debrigard (arr. 7:30pm)**

**DEEP:** **David Blatt**

**Staff:** J H Torrance Downes.

**Guests:** Jeanne Davies CTC&D, Margot Burns RiverCOG, Bill Cowan and Peter Smith of the Haddam Land Trust

### Call to Order

Chairman **Thompson** called the regular meeting of the Connecticut River Gateway Commission to order at RiverCOG offices located at 145 Dennison Road, Essex at 7:05pm.

### Approval of 3/28/19 Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve the minutes by **Cable**, seconded by **Kitsen**, passed unanimously. **Fischbach** abstained.

Discussion: Invasive Hydrilla in the Lower Connecticut River. Jeanne Davies of CT RC&D and Margot Burns of RiverCOG were present to continue discussion of the project to survey the lower river in the Gateway Conservation Zone to identify invasive subaquatic plants. Members reviewed a letter sent by Downes on behalf of the Commission with respect to certain aspects of the project. Discussion included clarification of collaboration partners which have committed so far and others that have yet to commit. Burns and Davies confirmed that the Eight Mile River Commission has, pending a final vote by that board, committed to contributing \$5,000 to \$6,000, primarily for a survey of the Eight Mile River (Hamburg Cove is the mouth of the Eight Mile River). Those funds would potentially pay for extension of that survey north and south in the Connecticut River opposite the mouth of the cove. Further, Davies and Burns indicated that there was potential for funding from the CT DEEP. The CT River Conservancy and The Nature Conservancy might be interested in a larger overview master plan for the entire river in Connecticut. Representatives of the effort also contacted CT Audubon and will approach CT Marine Trades, CT Council on Soil & Water and Conservation Districts. For parts of the river north of the Conservation Zone, it was suggested that the Capitol Region Council of Governments may be interested as well.

Davies confirmed that CT RC&D, as the principle partner in the collaboration, has committed to contribute \$9,500 in staff time to pursue and build partnerships in the effort. Burns indicated that there is a possibility of RiverCOG transportation funds being contributed as invasive plants can adversely impact the use of the river and coves for boating purposes.

Burns and Davies confirmed that approximately \$90,000 was needed to survey the entire river from Long Island Sound to the Massachusetts border, which is "part 1" of the project. Part 2 would be the effort to rid the river of the invasives found and mapped in part 1. Davies noted that the survey would identify ALL invasives found, not just Hydrilla.

Members discussed funding options including offering a \$20,000 grant (\$27,590 total minus the \$5,000/\$6,000 potentially provided by the Eight Mile River Commission and, minus the post survey costs of producing the report of the findings). Members felt that the \$20,000 should be sufficient in getting the survey work started by the

July/August timeframe. The provision of funds now will allow time for the hiring and training of those people who will be utilized in the summer project. Motion by **Fischbach**, seconded by **Matthews** to grant \$20,000, enough to get hiring started. If there are shortfalls, the partners can come back to the Gateway Commission in May or June. Motion approved with **Gezo** voting “nay”.

#### Haddam Land Trust

Bill Cowan, President of the HLT, spoke on behalf the Trust. The Town of Haddam and the Haddam Board of Education have offered to donate three parcels of land to the HLT for the purposes of conservation. One property, known as Swan Hill is presently a part of the property on which the Haddam Elementary School exists. The plan is separate 145 acres – the conservation portion of the property – and donate that to the HLT. The HLT would like to have the entire parcel surveyed as “good stewards”, but the survey is not necessary because the plan is to conclude the donation through “quit claim” deed transfer. Although the HLT would like to survey the property, such survey doesn’t have to be completed prior to the transfer (described to be completed by the end of June, 2019) and can’t be done until leaves are off tree later this year. Cowans indicated that the estimate for the survey is \$30,000. Further, the Haddam BOE may want a “free and clear” easement.

The Swan Hill property connects to another Town property at Higganum Cove (recently cleaned by the EPA). The two properties together will provide opportunity for access to the hiking trails of Swan Hill from the river. The HLT will be doing a fundraising campaign in town. Cowan says that they have the funds to conduct the survey but, honestly, would like to find a partner to help defray those costs if possible, hence the appearance before the Gateway Commission. **Debrigard** asked if adequate access exists on Route 154, to which Cowan responded that there is. **Brownell** asked about Gateway support for properties outside of the Gateway Conservation Zone. Members indicated that Gateway *has* provided grants for such properties when a demonstration could be made that protection of those properties in turn benefited protection of the Conservation Zone. Examples include The Preserve and Beavers Ledge.

**Hill** noted that she’d like to hike the property. Members asked Cowan to find a mutually agreeable date when the property could be hiked. Cowans will find such a date and communicate with members of the Gateway Commission. A motion was made by **Debrigard**, seconded by **Matthews**, to support the protection of these properties as such protection is consistent with the land preservation criteria developed by the Gateway Land Committee, as pointed out by **Wilson**. Cowan will keep in touch with the Commission as the effort moves forward.

#### Treasurers Report

**Matthews** presented the Treasurers Report. The finance committee met with Essex Financial on April 10, 2019. The portfolio was described as continuing to be well-balanced between equity and fixed income, providing both growth and reduced volatility. **Matthews** noted that the \$171,000 reimbursement from the Sogge land purchase was held in a cash-equivalent vehicle until the finance committee’s April meeting when it was decided to invest a portion of it in an ESF fund (environmental, social and governance-responsible). Essex Financial see investment trends going in a socially-responsible direction and was pleased to find a compatible fund from the Calvert options for Gateway investment ([www.calvert.com](http://www.calvert.com)).

Monthly expenses include the \$1,500 additional funding provided to the CT River Conservancy for the “Source-to-Sea” annual clean-up (total donation \$2,500) and \$65 for reimbursement for one attendee to the CLCC Land Trust Conference in March, 2019. Staff billing to RiverCOG totaled \$3,266 (\$1,274 JHTD; \$56 PF; \$1,936 overhead). Motion by **Matthews**, seconded by **Fischbach**, to pay bills. Passed unanimously.

#### Correspondence Report

- East Haddam Land Trust Calendar “Sponsor”. Additional \$175 will get Gateway the December page all by itself rather than just a logo on the inside of the front cover. Members decided not to take advantage of this offer.
- Annual Boat Trip. June 12<sup>th</sup>. Attendance list as of 4/24/19 attached.
- Connecticut River Conservancy. Thank you from Andy Fisk for \$2,500 in donations.
- Letter of Support, CT National Estuarine Research Reserve. Upon the request of John Forbis of Old Lyme, a letter of support (attached) was submitted to NOAA on behalf of the Gateway Commission. The Commission has hosted a discussion of the

“NERR” in the past, led by Claudia Weicker. The copy at the end of the report is in small type so as not to waste paper. If interested in a copy, let me know.

- Downes won't be in attendance at May 23, 2019 meeting, last meeting before the boat trip. I will be attending a recognition dinner on behalf of my lovely wife, who is retiring from the Region 18 school district on June 30, 2019.
- Haddam Land Trust Funding Request. HLT President Bill Cowan will be coming to the Commission to request funding for the “soft costs” (surveying) of one of three properties that the Town has apparently said they'd donate to the Trust. The largest – the one in need of surveying – is the Swan Hill property totaling 145 acres. This is the piece of property that is owned by the Board of Education that will be separated from the property which includes the elementary school. Gateway recently “approved” the rezoning of this property as the newly designated “Conservation Zone”. A small portion of the 145 acres extends across the boundary into the Gateway Conservation Zone over which the Gateway Commission has authority. HLT Bill Cowan will present the details of the situation and was informed about Gateway's needs in terms of information. The ERT one page summary submitted by Jeanne Davies of CT RC&D and which was sent on to you for tonight's meeting was forwarded to Cowan to give him an idea of what information Gateway will be seeking.

Variance Applications for Commission Review. None.

Special Exception for Commission Review. None.

Regulation Review and Approval pursuant to Section 25-102 G CGS. None.

#### Committees Reports

Land Committee. No report of significance.

Governance Committee. **Fischbach** asked **Webb, Thompson** and Downes to select three dates on which a meeting could be held to discuss the future of the Governance Committee. A meeting will be held at a time and place convenient to the participants.

Public Outreach Committee. Downes reported that there are presently approximately 45 people confirmed for the June 12<sup>th</sup> RiverQuest boat trip, which is close to the ideal number that the boat can accommodate. Downes noted that this is the soonest this many people have confirmed to date. He also reported that Cable has offered to purchase the wine for the trip and that there will need to be discussion regarding who will handle acquisition of the other refreshments and food. Downes reported that he will not be in attendance at the next Gateway meeting on May 23, 2019 as he will be attending a recognition dinner for his wife, who will be retiring as of the end of June. That means that final plans for the boat trip will have to be discussed at the meeting in Downes' absence.

#### Old Business:

Still attempting to find an ideal time to conduct the “Zoning 101” instruction for Commissioners. This effort will be prioritized following the June 12<sup>th</sup> boat trip.

New Business: None.

Adjournment: Motion to adjourn by **Hill**, seconded by **Matthews** at 8:25pm.