

**Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes**  
**Monday, March 6, 2023**  
**Community Chambers, 23 Russell Boulevard, 6:30 p.m.**

Commissioners Present: Lindsay Correa, Patrick Huber (Chair), Patricia Price, Marc Vayssieres (Vice Chair), and Sara Geonczy (Alternate)

Vacant Positions: None

Commissioners Absent: Ramiro Cabanillas-Ledesma, Carrie Shaw, Emma Torbert

Assigned Staff: Tracie Reynolds, Manager, Open Space Program

Council Liaison: Josh Chapman (Regular), Bapu Vaitla (Alternate)

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**1. Call to Order & Roll Call**

Commissioner Huber opened the meeting after a quorum was achieved and called roll call. He noted that this was the first in-person Commission meeting in three years.

**2. Approval of Agenda**

On a motion by Commissioner Vayssieres, that was seconded by Commissioner Correa, the Commission voted 5-0-3-0 to approve the March 2023 meeting agenda (Ayes – Correa, Huber, Price, Vayssieres, Geonczy; Noes – None; Absent – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Shaw, Torbert; Abstentions – None).

**3. Brief Announcements from Staff, Commissioners, and Council Liaisons**

Tracie Reynolds, staff liaison to the Commission, said the City received eight proposals in response to its Request for Proposals for design/engineering services related to a wetlands habitat restoration project the City is working on with UC Davis on university-owned land along the South Fork of Putah Creek. She said the proposals were evaluated by a selection panel and ICF received the highest score. Staff is taking the proposed contract with ICF to the City Council for approval tomorrow night (March 7), she said. She also said a landscape design class at UC Davis, taught by Professor Brett Milligan, was using this project for a design studio. The students will be presenting their final design ideas on March 16, she said.

**4. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**5. Consent Calendar**

There was one item on the consent calendar: approval of the February 6, 2023 regular meeting minutes. Commissioners Correa requested one edit to the minutes. On a motion by Commissioner Price, that was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres, the Commission voted 5-0-3-0 to approve the February 2023 meeting minutes, as amended (Ayes – Correa, Huber, Price, Vayssieres, Geonczy; Noes – None; Absent – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Shaw, Torbert; Abstentions – None).

**6. Regular Items**

**Presentation -- Receive a presentation from staff about the latest findings from the ongoing consultant study of the Davis Wetlands**

Ms. Reynolds said the City had hired a consultant to develop options for owning and maintaining the 400-acre wetlands now that the City did not need the property to treat wastewater. These options will be discussed with the City Council at a later date, she said.

The consultant, Helix Environmental (“Helix”), had completed the first three tasks in their contract’s scope of services, she said. They had determined current baseline costs, estimated how baseline costs might change if the property was managed as an open space area, and researched alternative water sources, she said. The City has historically spent about \$400,000 a year to maintain the wetlands as a wastewater treatment facility, according to the consultant study, she said. By contrast, Helix estimated that it would cost about \$100,000 a year to maintain the wetlands as an open space area, she said.

In addition, Helix researched alternative water sources for the wetlands, including drilling a new groundwater well and accessing water rights from adjacent private properties, she said. Recycled water from the wastewater treatment plant may not be available in the future, she said, due to competing demands on its use. The best alternative water source seemed to be a new ag well, she said. Helix will continue its work in coming months, researching different ownership/management models for the wetlands, she said. When work is complete, staff will discuss the consultant’s findings and research with the City Council and seek direction on next steps, she said.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. There were no clarifying questions. Commissioner Huber then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. Topics discussed included (1) the quality and reliability of groundwater, (2) whether the Yolo Subbasin Groundwater Sustainability Agency would even approve a permit for a new groundwater well at this location, and (3) whether the City could dedicate some of the recycled water from the wastewater treatment plant to the wetlands. No action was taken.

**Action Item -- Decide whether the Commission supports staff’s efforts to purchase 250 acres of land between the levees along the South Fork of Putah Creek, east of South Fork Preserve, known as the “Paschoal Property” (Portion of APNs 033-130-006 and 033-110-008)**

Ms. Reynolds summarized the staff report on this subject. She said staff is currently working with a local broker to purchase a 250-acre portion of an 800-acre property that is for sale along the South Fork of Putah Creek. Of those acres, she said 146 are planted in walnut trees and 104 are open space/habitat. Staff would like to purchase these acres and transform them into habitat, with public access, over time, she said. The acres are located between the City’s 110-acre South Fork Preserve and the City’s 228-acre Los Rios properties, she said. They are also near several other conservation easements in that immediate area, she said. She also noted that the property is completely within the “Biological and Natural Resources” priority acquisition area, which seeks to protect land with unique habitat value and natural resources. The land could be an expansion of the preserve, she said.

She said the City Council directed staff in closed session on February 21 to pursue the acquisition of the 250 acres. The City has sent the property owner a “letter of intent,” she said. She asked if the Commission supports pursuing this acquisition. If so, staff could return to the Commission with a formal preliminary acquisition report, she said.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. There were no clarifying questions. Commissioner Huber then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment and the Commission briefly discussed this item. Commissioner Huber said this land was one of the most valuable parcels along the creek because it offered the chance to provide a dense, thick riparian corridor.

On a motion by Commissioner Vayssieres, that was seconded by Commissioner Correa, the Commission voted 5-0-3-0 to support pursuing this acquisition and ask staff to prepare a preliminary acquisition report (Ayes – Correa, Huber, Price, Vayssieres, Geonczy; Noes – None; Absent – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Shaw, Torbert; Abstentions – None). Ms. Reynolds said she would reach out to the Acquisitions subcommittee to schedule a site visit.

**Action Item -- Decide whether a preliminary acquisition report should be prepared for a potential agricultural conservation easement on 80 acres located near the intersection of County Roads 104A and 30, about a mile from the Mace Boulevard curve, known as “Billie’s Farm” (APN 042-130-004)**

Ms. Reynolds summarized the staff report on this subject. She said the property owner, Billie Bensen Martin, has expressed an interest in selling an agricultural conservation easement to the City and the Yolo Land Trust. She said the owner runs a certified organic farm on the property and grows organic alfalfa. The land has two agricultural wells, one residential well, and a 7,000-square-foot barn, she said. The property is adjacent to/north of the City’s second Gill family conservation easement, known as Gill #2, she said. It is within the “Scenic Resources” priority acquisition area, which seeks to protect land providing views and scenic vistas of significant landmarks, such as nearby and distant mountain ranges, she said. Although the land falls just outside the “Agriculture” priority acquisition area, she said the land is still a valuable agricultural resource because of its high-quality soil.

Staff would like to work with the property owner to purchase an agricultural conservation easement, she said. She asked if the Commission supports pursuing this acquisition. If so, staff could return to the Commission with a formal preliminary acquisition report, she said.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. There were no clarifying questions. Commissioner Huber then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment and the Commission briefly discussed this item, noting the benefits of its relatively small size and its adjacency to other protected lands.

On a motion by Commissioner Vayssieres, that was seconded by Commissioner Price, the Commission voted 5-0-3-0 to support pursuing this acquisition and ask staff to prepare a preliminary acquisition report (Ayes – Correa, Huber, Price, Vayssieres, Geonczy; Noes – None; Absent – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Shaw, Torbert; Abstentions – None). Ms. Reynolds said she would reach out to the Acquisitions subcommittee to schedule a site visit.

**Presentation -- Receive a presentation from staff about the status of the Request for Proposals for new signage in the City’s open space areas**

Ms. Reynolds said the Request for Proposals (“RFP”) for new signage had not been released yet because staff needed to ensure the scope of services was consistent with the City’s branding policy. She said the City’s Open Space Program could not have a separate logo from the official City logo. As a result, she said the RFP had to be revised to make sure the proposed program identity signs were designed to comply with the City’s branding policy. Staff intended to release the RFP in coming months, she said.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. There were no clarifying questions. Commissioner Huber then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment and the Commission briefly discussed this item. No action was taken.

## **7. Subcommittee and Liaison Assignment Updates**

### Subcommittees

- a. *Acquisitions*. No reports were given.
- b. *Habitat Restoration and Enhancement*. No reports were given.
- c. *Land and Resource Management*. No reports were given.
- d. *Public Access and Recreation*. No reports were given.
- e. *Financial and Program Accountability*. No reports were given.
- f. *Public Engagement and Partnerships*. No reports were given.
- g. *Ad-Hoc Subcommittee to Improve Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the City's Open Space Program*. No reports were given.

### Liaison Reports

- a. *Climate Action and Adaptation Plan*. Commissioner Price said the plan's environmental documents had been released and the plan was scheduled to go before the City Council for approval next month. She said the City Council had previously asked the City's consultant, AECOM, to assess how emission targets would be impacted if building electrification efforts were voluntary instead of mandatory.
- b. *Urban Forest Management Plan*. Commissioner Geonczy said the comment period was closed and the plan was scheduled to go before the City Council for approval on March 21.

## **8. Long Range Calendar: Upcoming Meeting Dates and/or Potential Agenda Items**

The next regularly scheduled meeting is April 3, 2023. Possible agenda items discussed included (1) the preliminary acquisition report for the Paschoal Property, (2) the preliminary acquisition report for Billie's Farm, and (3) a discussion of transforming the City's Clayton Ranch property into wetlands.

## **9. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:06 p.m.