

Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes

Monday, March 6, 2017

Community Chambers Conference Room, 23 Russell Boulevard, 6:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present:	Rachel Aptekar, Jason Bone, Marc Hoshovsky, Patrick Huber (Chair), Joy Klineberg (Alternate), Stephen Layton, Lon Payne
Vacant Positions:	None
Commissioners Absent:	Roberta Millstein
Commission Liaisons:	Vanessa Richter, Liaison to the Recreation and Park Commission
Assigned Staff:	Tracie Reynolds, Manager of Leases and Open Space
Council Liaison:	Lucas Frerichs

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

Commissioner Huber opened the meeting. Commissioners Hoshovsky and Payne came during Public Comment.

2. Approval of Agenda

On a motion by Commissioner Aptekar, seconded by Commissioner Bone, the Commission voted 4-0-3-0 to approve the agenda (Ayes – Aptekar, Bone, Huber, Layton; Noes – None; Absent – Hoshovsky, Payne, Millstein; Abstentions – None).

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

There were no brief announcements.

4. Public Comment

Catherine Portman, the president of the Burrowing Owl Preservation Society, submitted a letter to the Commission that asked the Commission to recommend burrowing owl protections and conservation measures to the City Council for adoption. Ms. Portman presented these measures to the Commission in December 2016. She said the Commission had agreed in December to form a working group on this subject, but she said she did not see such a working group included on the Commission's draft list of working groups up for discussion later in the agenda. Commissioner Huber said this topic would be discussed later in the agenda.

Christian Coulon of the group Circle of Bees said he would be interested in placing bee hives on City-owned open space areas. Circle of Bees aims to help improve the health of the insects in Davis. Circle of Bees works with another group, the Bee Charmers, to install and maintain the hives. Commissioner Huber said the native pollinator working group would be very interested in working with Circle of Bees to install bee hives on City-owned open space areas.

5. Consent Calendar

Two items were on the consent calendar: approval of the January and February 2017 meeting minutes. On a motion by Commissioner Payne, seconded by Commissioner Bone, the Commission voted 5-0-1-1 to approve the January and February meeting minutes. (Ayes -- Bone, Hoshovsky, Huber, Layton, Payne; Noes – None; Absent – Millstein; Abstentions – Aptekar).

6. Regular Items

Discussion and Action – Approval of Commission work plan and working groups for the upcoming year

The Commission discussed the draft list of working groups and work plan, and decided that the work plan should include projects that weren't assigned to any particular working group and should follow the template recommended by the City Clerk's office. The issue of protecting and enhancing burrowing owl habitat on City open space lands will be handled in the Land Management Plans working group. The issue of burrowing owl mitigations under the California Environmental Quality Act may be taken up by the Commission as a whole in the future.

Commissioner Payne suggested the Commission approve the draft list of working groups but not the draft work plan. He also requested edits to the draft list of working groups. On a motion by Commissioner Payne, seconded by Commissioner Hoshovsky, the Commission voted 6-0-1-0 to approve the draft list of working groups, as amended, but not the draft work plan. (Ayes – Aptekar, Bone, Hoshovsky, Huber, Layton, Payne; Noes – None; Absent – Millstein; Abstentions – None).

The Commission also asked staff to create a list of ongoing projects not assigned to any particular working group and to prepare a draft work plan based on the template recommended by the City Clerk's office, for the Commission's review and approval at the next meeting. The Commission also asked staff to find out when the City Council needed to see the Commission's final work plan.

Discussion – Presentation by project applicant of the proposed West Davis Active Adult Community, with an emphasis on the open space and habitat components of the proposed project

The Commission received an overview presentation from the project applicant, David Taormino, of his proposed senior housing development in West Davis, located west of Highway 113 and north of Covell Boulevard. The proposed project, called the West Davis Active Adult Community, is about 75 acres and will include 325 for-sale units, 150 affordable rental units, an activity/wellness center, greenbelts, and an agricultural buffer. Approval of the project would require a General Plan Amendment, and voter approval under Measure R. An Environmental Impact Report ("EIR") also will be required, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act.

Commissioners asked questions and provided feedback to Mr. Taormino. Commissioners encouraged the project applicant to: (1) develop and manage the detention basin as a habitat area and community amenity similar to North and West Davis Ponds, (2) enhance the drainage ditch next to Covell Boulevard to provide better habitat and wildlife connectivity, (3) make the ag buffer with its detention basin a habitat and recreational jewel without fences, similar to lush sections of Putah Creek Parkway, (4) plant rare and native plants throughout the project, including on the internal greenbelts, and (5) redesign the project to include higher-density development, more natural features, and larger open spaces that provide views of the surrounding landscape (as opposed to pathways with buildings on both sides).

During public comment on this item, Alan Pryor said he opposed the project because it was unremarkable and represented the epitome of suburban sprawl. He said he favored a higher density project. Eileen Samitz submitted a letter to the Commission in which she expressed her great concern that the project applicant was trying to fast track the project through the entitlement process, including through a Measure R vote, before all the project details had been defined. She said the project should not be allowed on the ballot without completion of a tentative map, specific conditions of approval, and a development agreement.

This was the first time the Commission was given an opportunity to comment on the proposed project. The Commission will have a second opportunity to comment when the draft EIR is released in late spring/early summer, and a third opportunity to comment before staff brings the proposed project to the City's Planning Commission and City Council for approval later this year. The project applicant hopes to bring the proposed project before the voters in the fall.

Discussion and Action – Approval of Commission feedback to the Natural Resources Commission's Hazardous Materials Subcommittee (the "Subcommittee") on the Subcommittee's final report dated January 23, 2017 on the City's use of pesticides on City-owned land (the "Discussion Paper")

The Commission provided the Subcommittee with the following feedback on the Discussion Paper:

1. The Discussion Paper mentions alleged incidents when City staff used pesticides in parks when they weren't supposed to use them. These statements were not backed up with any factual information. The Subcommittee should include more factual information and documentation in the Discussion Paper to back up these statements.
2. Regarding Recommendation #b (Immediately ban use of neonicotinoids), the Discussion Paper should make it clear that the proposed ban would apply to City property only and not private property within the City of Davis.

3. The Discussion Paper should include a qualitative trade-off analysis. For example, if pesticides were banned, what are the pros and cons? Would there be more weeds? Would the City's maintenance costs go up? It would be helpful to the public discussion if the pros and cons of these proposed recommendations were presented.
4. Regarding Recommendation #e (Concurrent public education plan, activities, and signage to notify residents), the Discussion Paper should clarify what subjects the recommended public education plan should focus on. What exactly would the public be educated about?
5. The Discussion Paper should include a comparative analysis for context. How does the City's current pesticide use compare to the City's usage over the last 30 years? How does the City's current pesticide use compare to usage at other comparable cities? Where is the City on this scale? Comparatively speaking, is the City currently using a large amount or a small amount of pesticides?

Staff said it would transmit this feedback to the Subcommittee and relevant City staff who are involved in updating the City's Integrated Pest Management ("IPM") Policy. The Commission will have an opportunity to comment on the draft update to the City's IPM Policy at a later date, during a joint meeting with the Recreation and Park Commission and the Natural Resources Commission.

Discussion -- Update on the City's process for issuing a possible request for proposals to farmers and/or farming operations to lease 25 acres of City-owned agricultural land off Mace Boulevard

Staff briefed the Commission on the City's standard request for proposals ("RFP") process. She said in this case staff would first need to check in with the City Council before any RFP was issued to make sure the City Council would support leasing this particular property to a farmer engaged in a community farm operation as opposed to a conventional farm operation, which is the status quo situation.

She also said the ag well on this particular property is dead and it may be cost-prohibitive to repair. She said the City had recently hired a consultant to assess the condition of all the City's ag wells, and she would make sure this particular ag well was included in the assessment. She said she would get back to the Commission about the ag well and about the most appropriate process for discussing this issue with the City Council. During public comment on this item, Alan Pryor expressed his support for converting all of the City's ag leases to certified organic farming operations in the future.

7. Commission and Staff Communications

Commission Work Plan

This item was discussed as a regular agenda item.

Upcoming Meeting Date, Time, Items

The next meeting is April 3, 2017. Possible agenda items include approving the Commission's work plan, hearing a presentation by Yolo County on improvements to Grasslands Regional Park, hearing an overview presentation about the City's open space areas and how they are managed, hearing an overview presentation on the open space program budget, and discussing the goals in the draft Open Space Program Strategic Plan, which will guide actions over the next 15 years.

Upcoming Events

Staff mentioned an upcoming workshop hosted by the Yolo County Board of Supervisors on commercial and tourism uses in agricultural zones on Tuesday, March 7 at 10 a.m. in the Board Chambers at 625 Court Street in Woodland.

Working Groups

Commissioner Huber gave the Commission a brief update on recent actions taken by the native pollinator working group. He also updated the Commission on recent actions taken to collaborate with the University of California on an open space restoration project (i.e., create a bike path along the levee between Old Davis Road and Brooks Road).

Commission Liaison Reports

- *Recreation and Parks.* The Commission's liaison from this commission, Vanessa Richter, had to leave the meeting early and was unable to give the Commission a report.
- *Finance and Budget.* Currently, the Commission does not have a liaison to this commission.

8. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:30 p.m.