

Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes
Monday, March 4, 2019
Community Chambers Conference Room, 23 Russell Boulevard, 6:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Stephanie Holstege, Patrick Huber (Chair), Marc Vayssieres, Garrett Allen (Alternate)

Vacant Positions: None

Commissioners Absent: Erin Gooch, Joy Klineberg, Roberta Millstein, Carrie Shaw

Assigned Staff: Tracie Reynolds, Manager, Open Space Program

Council Liaison: Will Arnold (Regular), Lucas Frerichs (Alternate)

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

Commissioner Huber opened the meeting after a quorum was achieved.

2. Approval of Agenda

On a motion by Commissioner Holstege, seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres, The Commission voted 4-0-4-0 to approve the March 2019 agenda. (Ayes – Holstege, Huber, Vayssieres, Allen; Noes – none; Absent – Gooch, Klineberg, Millstein, Shaw; Abstentions – none).

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

Chris Gardner, the City's Open Space Lands Manager, announced that he would be running the meeting this evening for Tracie Reynolds who had to stay home due to a family emergency.

4. Public Comment

Six members of the public stated that they were attending the meeting to support the hedgerow presentation.

5. Consent Calendar

There was only one item on the consent calendar: approval of the February 4, 2019 regular meeting minutes. On a motion by Commissioner Vayssieres, seconded by Commissioner Holstege, the Commission voted 4-0-4-0 to accept the February 2019 minutes (Ayes – Holstege, Huber, Vayssieres, Allen; Noes – none; Absent – Gooch, Klineberg, Millstein, Shaw; Abstentions – none).

6. Regular Items

Discussion Item – The possibility of installing hedgerows on City-owned agricultural land

The Commission heard two presentations about installing hedgerows on City-owned farmland. The first presentation was by Greg House, a former Commissioner and organic farmer, and the second presentation was by Sam Earnshaw of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers and Hedgerows Unlimited, which works with farmers to locate, design and install conservation plantings including hedgerows. Mr. House discussed the possibility of creating a publicly accessible hedgerow from the City's 25 acres off Mace Boulevard to and through the City's Howat/Clayton ranch properties off County Road 105. Mr. Earnshaw discussed the multiple functions performed by hedgerows and grassed waterways. He said they can: (1) serve as habitat for beneficial insects, pollinators and other wildlife; (2) provide erosion protection and weed control; (3) stabilize waterways; (4) serve as windbreaks; (5) reduce non-point source water pollution and groundwater pollution; (6) increase surface water infiltration; (7) buffer from pesticide drift, noise, odors, and dust; (8) act as living fences and boundary lines; (9) increase biodiversity; and (10) provide an aesthetic resource.

Commissioners discussed this topic and asked several questions. Mr. Gardner, the City's Open Space Lands Manager, said the City supports the installation of hedgerows but has concerns about the cost to maintain the hedgerow plants. Mr. House asked the Commission to develop guidelines and a budget to install hedgerows on City farmland and recommend this hedgerow installation program to the City Council by June 2019, so that installation can begin by fall 2019. The Commission asked the Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Working Group to investigate this proposal further and identify/prioritize locations for new hedgerows on City-owned farmland.

Discussion Item -- The list of approved replacement trees for City hackberry trees

Rob Cain, the City's Urban Forestry Manager/Arborist, explained why there are not more native tree species on the list of approved replacement trees for City street trees that need to be removed because they are dead or diseased. He said most native trees planted in parks and greenbelts are not appropriate for residential yards. He said he evaluates each species on a number of factors, including the strength of the tree's core and structure, its ability to grow in urban environments, and the species' susceptibility to disease. For example, he said blue oaks (which are on the City's list) do better than valley oaks (which are not on the City's list). He said valley oaks are not on the City's list of approved replacement trees because they tend to drop limbs and therefore are a liability issue for the City. Steve Greco, a U.C. Davis professor of landscape architecture and environmental design, said he was not convinced valley oaks posed a liability issue and wanted to see the data. He also said a recent study he did showed that valley oaks in an urban area can provide substantial habitat value for a wide variety of migratory songbird species.

After some additional discussion, the Commission voted on a motion. On a motion by Commissioner Allen, seconded by Commissioner Holstege, the Commission voted 4-0-4-0 to approve the following motion (Ayes – Holstege, Huber, Vayssieres, Allen; Noes – none; Absent – Gooch, Klineberg, Millstein, Shaw; Abstentions – none):

“Considering that the valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) is the dominant native tree and a keystone species of the Sacramento Valley that supports extensive habitat and biodiversity, we encourage the City to include it on the approved City street tree list where appropriate and when stock is available.”

Action Item -- Approve draft designs for habitat restoration project on three acres of City-owned open space at the corner of F Street and Anderson Road

The Commission discussed draft designs for a habitat restoration project, funded in part by Measure O, the City's open space parcel tax, on three acres of City-owned open space at the corner of F Street and Anderson Road. The City's consultant, Olga Garzon of Melton Design Group, presented the draft designs which include pedestrian pathways and native tree, shrub and grass plantings. To make the pathways accessible year-round to people in wheelchairs, and to minimize maintenance costs and site impacts, staff is proposing a cellular confinement system (i.e., geocells) for the trails. Ms. Garzon also discussed the wheelchair-accessible gates or “switchbacks” proposed to control bike traffic on the site. Jean Jackman of the Friends of North Davis Pond expressed concerns about the geocells and the amount of fencing and infrastructure proposed for the site. She said she wanted to make sure the site still looked and felt like open space.

On a motion by Commissioner Vayssieres, seconded by Commissioner Allen, the Commission voted 4-0-4-0 to approve the draft designs for the habitat restoration project on three acres of City-owned open space at the corner of F Street and Anderson Road (Ayes – Holstege, Huber, Vayssieres, Allen; Noes – none; Absent – Gooch, Klineberg, Millstein, Shaw; Abstentions – none).

7. Commission and Staff Communications

Commission Work Plan

The Commission work plan was not discussed.

Upcoming Meeting Date, Time, Items

The Commission's next meeting is April 1. Mr. Gardner said he was not sure what items would be on the agenda.

Upcoming Events

No upcoming events were discussed.

Working Groups

1. *Acquisitions*. No updates were given.
2. *Habitat Restoration and Enhancement*. The working group met and discussed burrowing owl habitat and pollinator habitat.

3. *Land and Resource Management.* No updates were given.
4. *Public Access and Recreation.* No updates were given.
5. *Financial and Program Accountability.* No updates were given.
6. *Public Engagement and Partnerships.* The working group met and discussed public engagement issues related to South Fork Preserve and the habitat restoration project at F Street and Anderson Road.

8. Adjourn

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