

Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes
Monday, November 2, 2020
Remote Audio and Video Meeting Participation, 6:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Garrett Allen, Patrick Huber (Vice Chair), Roberta Millstein (Chair), Carrie Shaw, Marc Vayssieres

Vacant Positions: Three (Two Regular and One Alternate)

Commissioners Absent: None

Assigned Staff: Tracie Reynolds, Manager, Open Space Program (Present)

Council Liaison: Brett Lee (Regular) (Present), Lucas Frerichs (Alternate)

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

Commissioner Millstein opened the meeting after a quorum was achieved and called roll call.

2. Approval of Agenda

On a motion by Commissioner Huber, seconded by Commissioner Shaw, the Commission voted 5-0-0-0 to approve the November 2020 regular meeting agenda (Ayes – Allen, Huber, Millstein, Shaw, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

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

Tracie Reynolds, staff to the Commission, updated the Commission on (1) the next steps after a failed planning grant application with the California Wildlife Conservation Board related to the Davis wetlands, (2) a streambed alteration agreement with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife related to the South Fork Preserve public accessibility improvements, (3) an upcoming subordination agreement related to one of the City’s agricultural conservation easements along County Road 29 and a Yolo County bridge widening project, (4) possible habitat conservation easements that might be purchased by the Yolo Habitat Conservancy on the City’s Los Rios agricultural parcels along the South Fork of Putah Creek, and (5) the latest developments related to a possible acquisition of 437 acres south and east of Davis at the end of County Road 36.

Commissioner Shaw mentioned that she had talked to two highly motivated and somewhat frustrated volunteers on the North Davis channel who are still having land management issues with the City’s Public Works Department and the City’s Fire Marshal. She said she wondered if this channel could be designated an open space area by the City Council to (1) free up funds for open space staff time and planting materials, and (2) better balance the uses along the channel so that open space goals (i.e., wildlife habitat) were considered in the City’s land management decisions in addition to public works goals (i.e., stormwater conveyance, fire suppression).

4. Public Comment

This item was taken out of order. Jean Jackman, founder of the Friends of North Davis Ponds, requested that the City’s Open Space staff make a Covid-19 training video available for open space volunteers as a way to make it easier for volunteers to work at the North Davis Upland Habitat Area. She said that it was difficult to become a volunteer at the North Davis Uplands Habitat Area and that her group has had to fight for the opportunity to volunteer there. She said the situation has gotten even more difficult during the coronavirus pandemic. She urged the City’s Open Space staff to make a Covid-19 training video available to make it easier for more people to volunteer. Gayna Lamb-Bang, a member of the Friends of North Davis Ponds, seconded what Jean Jackman said and stated that she didn’t understand why the City’s Open Space staff was limiting the number of volunteers at the site.

5. Consent Calendar

There was one item on the consent calendar: approval of the October 5, 2020 regular meeting minutes. Commissioner Millstein had one edit to the draft minutes. On a motion by Commissioner Vayssieres, seconded by Commissioner Allen, the Commission voted 5-0-0-0 to approve the October meeting minutes, as amended (Ayes – Allen, Huber, Millstein, Shaw, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

6. Regular Items

Discussion Item – Receive an update from Chris Gardner, the City’s Open Space Lands Manager, about the three-acre habitat restoration project at F Street and Anderson Road (i.e., the North Davis Upland Habitat Area)

Chris Gardner, the City’s Open Space Lands Manager, updated the Commission on progress at the North Davis Upland Habitat Area, where the City is working with volunteers and partners to transform a vacant three-acre parcel owned by the City into an upland habitat area with trails accessible to people with disabilities. Mr. Gardner said the City was half-way through the second year of the project. He said the City is working with volunteers and partners on several ongoing tasks, including (1) establishing more than 200 plants in the hedgerow (planting, watering, mulching), (2) controlling weeds using non-chemical means (solarization, hand removal), (3) preparing new planting areas for the winter (mulching), (4) constructing trails on the south end of the project area, and (5) collecting and redistributing native seeds.

Commissioner Millstein asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) how Mr. Gardner currently trains volunteers to protect themselves from the coronavirus, and (2) whether the site was ever formally designated by the City Council as an open space area. Mr. Gardner expressed concerns about taking on additional responsibility to train more volunteers to protect themselves from the coronavirus.

Commissioner Millstein then took public comment. Jean Jackman, founder of the Friends of North Davis Ponds, reiterated her comments during Public Comment and again requested that the City’s Open Space staff make a Covid-19 training video available for open space volunteers as a way to make it easier for volunteers to work at the North Davis Upland Habitat Area. Gayna Lamb-Bang, a member of the Friends of North Davis Ponds, said she appreciated Mr. Gardner’s concerns and said someone in management should help staff establish Covid-19 training protocols.

Commissioner Millstein then closed public comment and opened the Commission discussion. Topics discussed included (1) how and if other City departments train volunteers to protect themselves from the coronavirus, and (2) what role the Commission might play in encouraging the City to establish formal protocols for training volunteers to protect themselves from the coronavirus.

After some discussion, the Commission drafted the following motion: *“The Open Space and Habitat Commission recommends to the City Council that it look into establishing (1) Citywide policies for continuing to incorporate volunteers into programs Citywide, and (2) Covid-19 protocols that can be standardized (e.g., videotaped or zoom meetings) and shared among City departments. These protocols also should give volunteer coordinators discretion to tailor them to specific projects within the general guidelines.”*

On a motion by Commissioner Shaw, seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres, the Commission voted 5-0-0-0 to approve the above motion (Ayes – Allen, Huber, Millstein, Shaw, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

Discussion Item – Receive a presentation from Bob Bowen, the City’s Public Relations Manager, about (1) the results of a survey of Cannery residents soliciting their input into future uses at the Cannery Farm, and (2) the public input process going forward for determining future uses at the Cannery Farm

Bob Bowen, the City’s Public Relations Manager, updated the Commission on the results of a survey of Cannery residents soliciting their input into future uses at the Cannery Farm, and (2) the public input process going forward for determining future uses at the Cannery Farm. He said the 3.5-acre agricultural buffer on the east side of The Cannery will no longer be used by the Center for Land-Based Learning (“CLBL”) as an urban farm and farm incubator site. The City-owned farm property is zoned as an urban agricultural transition area and future uses will be limited to those relating to urban farming, he said. The use that scored highest in the survey was community gardens. The second-favorite use was a fruit-and-nut orchard and the third highest vote-getter was some kind of horticultural operation. He said it will be important to find sustainable ways to manage and finance whatever uses are chosen for the Cannery Farm, both in the short-term and in the long-term. Ms. Reynolds also mentioned that the City is entering into a short-term license agreement with the Bike Campaign to use the tractor shed at the Cannery Farm for the time being for a “bike welcome center.” She said that temporary license agreement will be going to the City Council for consideration on November 10.

Commissioner Millstein asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) who owns the land on which the Cannery Farm sits, (2) whether the community gardens would be open to the entire City or be reserved just for Cannery residents, and (3) whether the developer of the Cannery had any outstanding obligations to ensure that the Cannery Farm was successful. Commissioner Millstein then took public comment.

- Ira Bray said the public should be allowed to see the soil tests, and the survey results should be better summarized and consolidated. He also asked whether CLBL left any tangible assets and noted that the Cannery Farm does not have any parking. He also noted that nothing was currently planted and asked that the City designate a single City department to be responsible for the Cannery Farm.
- Ian MacGregor said he felt that he did not have enough information to complete the survey in a meaningful way. He said he would have liked to have been given a set of guidelines that better explained what the City's goals are for the property. For example, he said, these guidelines could have established that (1) the ag buffer is open space, (2) the area is natural habitat, (3) no industrial uses are allowed, (4) there needs to be an entity to manage the land, (5) the use needs to minimize the drain on natural resources, (6) the land can be used for education purposes, and (7) the final land use should address more than one of these goals. Knowing these things would help people provide better input, he said.
- Andrew (last name not given) said the Cannery Farm was advertised and marketed as a "farm to fork" operation. He said the required \$300,000 in start-up funds provided by the developer were not used properly because there is nothing to show for that money. He said the City should honor the original intent which was an organic farm operation. He also expressed concerns about community gardens, saying they can be unsightly and not organic.
- Vern Goehring said that an urban farm committee had been created within the Cannery homeowner's association ("HOA"), and that the HOA was committed to working collaboratively with the City to determine future uses for the Cannery Farm. He said the committee will help facilitate engagement with Cannery residents.
- Jessica Heuer requested that the public be given more opportunities to provide input on this topic.
- Batoara Zeiler said that she works with Alex Morton from Leaf and Lark Farm and requested that Ms. Morton be allowed to continue her agricultural operation at the Cannery Farm.
- Robert Ono, a member of the City's Parks and Recreation Commission, said he agreed with the previous public commenter about establishing clear goals and objectives for the property. He said costs need to be considered and parking is an issue. He said the public should consider these issues when looking at masterplan alternatives.

Commissioner Millstein then closed public comment and opened the Commission discussion. Topics discussed included (1) the stakeholder input process and who the major stakeholders are, (2) what the developer of the Cannery originally promised homebuyers, (3) whether the City has the responsibility and/or the means to fulfill a perceived commitment to farm-to-table options in the Cannery neighborhood, (4) whether a portion of the Cannery Farm should be converted to wildlife habitat, (5) whether agriculture was a sustainable and appropriate use for the Cannery Farm, and (6) what services a landscape architect could provide the City.

After some discussion, the Commission drafted the following motion: *"The Open Space and Habitat Commission recommends that a meeting take place with the following participants: two members of the Open Space and Habitat Commission, two members of the Parks and Recreation Commission, the HOA's Cannery Farm committee, and City staff from the City Manager's Office, the Parks Department, and the Open Space Program. This group should then decide (1) how to narrow the various land use options for the Cannery Farm, (2) identify constraints, and (3) suggest a decision-making process going forward."*

On a motion by Commissioner Millstein, seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres, the Commission voted 5-0-0-0 to approve the above motion (Ayes – Allen, Huber, Millstein, Shaw, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

Commissioners Shaw and Vayssieres volunteered to be the two members to participate in this discussion. The Commission also agreed that since the Cannery Farm is considered open space and an urban agricultural transition area, the City Council should designate the Commission as the advisory commission of record for recommendations.

Discussion Item – Discuss options for soliciting community input into the City’s Open Space Program in 2021, given the public-gathering limitations required by the coronavirus

After a three-minute break, the Commission discussed options for soliciting community input into the City’s Open Space Program in 2021 given the public-gathering limitations required by the coronavirus. Ms. Reynolds explained that the City’s Strategic Plan for the Open Space Program calls for soliciting input into the program every five years. The last community input process occurred in 2016 so the next one should occur in 2021. She said she was interested in hearing the Commission’s ideas about how the City could gather meaningful community input without hosting a large community meeting. Commissioner Millstein asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions and then took public comment. There was no public comment.

Commissioner Millstein then closed public comment and opened the Commission discussion. Topics discussed included (1) a possible large zoom meeting with a facilitator, (2) ways to gather on-going community input (e.g., a physical location for leaving notes or an on-line bulletin board), (3) writing a summary report of the last five years focusing on accomplishments/goals/opportunities/challenges that the public could then comment on, (4) ways to also gather community input on program priorities over the next five years, and (5) ways to encourage open and productive feedback. After some additional discussion, the Commission decided to move forward with the summary report and Ms. Reynolds agreed to start working on a draft.

7. Commission and Staff Communications

Commission Work Plan

The Commission work plan was not discussed.

Upcoming Meeting Date, Time, Items

The next regularly scheduled meeting is Monday, December 7. Possible topics discussed included (1) a presentation by the Yolo County Resource Conservation District on the draft carbon farm plan for Howat Ranch, (2) a discussion of a draft scope of services related to the long-term management and maintenance of the Davis wetlands, and (3) a discussion of the possible acquisition of 437 acres south and east of Davis at the end of County Road 36.

Upcoming Events

No upcoming events were discussed.

Working Groups

1. *Acquisitions*. No updates were reported.
2. *Habitat Restoration and Enhancement*. No updates were reported.
3. *Land and Resource Management*. No updates were reported.
4. *Public Access and Recreation*. No updates were reported.
5. *Financial and Program Accountability*. No updates were reported.
6. *Public Engagement and Partnerships*. No updates were reported.

8. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:49 p.m.