

Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes
Monday, December 7, 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) (Absent), Lucas Frerichs (Alternate)

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

Commissioner Millstein opened the meeting after a quorum was achieved and called roll call. Commissioner Shaw arrived during Brief Announcements from Staff, Commissioners, and City Council Liaisons.

2. Approval of Agenda

On a motion by Commissioner Huber, seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres, the Commission voted 4-0-1-0 to approve the December 2020 regular meeting agenda (Ayes – Allen, Huber, Millstein, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Shaw; Abstentions – None).

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

Commissioner Huber requested that the zoom link sent to Commissioners for the meeting be sent on the same day of the meeting so that Commissioners could more easily find the link in their inboxes. He said he had a very difficult time finding the zoom link for this meeting in his inbox because it was sent several days ago. He also suggested that the zoom link be sent as part of a calendar event invite so it could be linked to Commissioner calendars in one click. Commissioner Millstein suggested that the zoom link be sent twice: one a few days before the meeting and one the day of the meeting.

Tracie Reynolds, staff to the Commission, said the City and the Yolo Land Trust have been recommended to receive a \$701,000 state grant from the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program, or SALC, to purchase the Gill Orchard easement, an agricultural conservation easement on 124 acres of farmland east of Wildhorse, about a half mile from the city limits, that the Commission recommended to the City Council for purchase in April. She said there were 51 applications for easement acquisition funding, and only 20 were recommended for funding. The governing body that oversees the SALC program is expected to approve the recommendation on December 17, she said.

Ms. Reynolds also said the City and the Yolo Land Trust were expected to complete the purchase of an agricultural conservation easement related to the ag mitigation for the Bretton Woods residential development. The developer of Bretton Woods paid for the easement as required by the City's ag mitigation ordinance, she said. The easement is about 135 acres and is located west of Davis on property owned by the Schulers and the Wantzs, she said. The easement was related to one of the four scenarios recommended by the Commission to the City Council for approval, she said. Ms. Reynolds also informed the Commission that the City had issued a "Request for Proposals" to three firms on the City's landscape architecture panel on November 13 to design and manufacture interpretive panels at South Fork Preserve. Bids are due on January 15, she said. She also mentioned that the Commission will have four new regular members and one new alternate member in January. She also informed the Commission that, unbeknownst to her and Chris Gardner, the City's Open Space Lands Manager, the City has a video that staff can use to train volunteers to protect themselves from the coronavirus. Mr. Gardner said he had already used the video to train 10-12 volunteers, some of whom were students from U.C. Davis. Finally, Ms. Reynolds gave the Commission an update on the possible acquisition of 437 acres south and east of Davis at the end of County Road 36.

4. Public Comment

Patricia Price, the Commission's new alternate member, introduced herself, thanked the departing Commissioners for their service, and said she was looking forward to working with the remaining Commissioners.

5. Consent Calendar

There was one item on the consent calendar: approval of the November 2, 2020 regular meeting minutes. On a motion by Commissioner Vayssieres, seconded by Commissioner Allen, the Commission voted 5-0-0-0 to approve the November meeting minutes (Ayes – Allen, Huber, Millstein, Shaw, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

6. Regular Items

Discussion Item – Receive a presentation from the Yolo County Resource Conservation District on the draft carbon farm plan for the City’s 760-acre agricultural property commonly known as Howat Ranch located five miles east of Davis along the Interstate-80 freeway

Joanne Heraty of the Yolo County Resource Conservation District gave the Commission a presentation on the draft carbon farm plan for the City’s 760-acre agricultural property commonly known as Howat Ranch located five miles east of Davis along the Interstate-80 freeway. Her presentation focused on (1) an overview of the climate dilemma, (2) the carbon cycle process and carbon farming, (3) regional carbon farm planning efforts, (4) an overview of carbon farm plans and climate beneficial agriculture, (5) background on the City’s carbon farm plan, and (6) a summary of the draft carbon farm plan for Howat Ranch. She talked about possible wildlife habitat enhancements (i.e., hedgerow plantings and wetlands restoration) that could sequester more carbon on the property and possible cropland management practices (i.e., soil amendments, crop rotations, reduced tillage, and cover crop establishment) that could sequester more carbon on the property. She summarized all the options in several tables that estimated carbon capture potential, project benefits (i.e., wildlife habitat, agricultural, public education and recreation), and project feasibility, including estimated project costs.

Commissioner Millstein asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on what kind of feedback staff was asking them to provide. Ms. Reynolds said she would like general feedback from the Commission on the content of the draft report, but wasn’t expecting a specific motion in support of any particular land management practice proposed in the draft report. Commissioner Millstein then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Millstein then closed public comment and opened the Commission discussion. Topics discussed included (1) the cost implications of creating additional wetland habitat, (2) the possibility of using biosolids from the City’s wastewater treatment plant as a soil amendment for Howat Ranch, (3) the possibility of using recycled wastewater from the City’s wastewater treatment plant as part of a wetland restoration project at Howat Ranch, (4) the possibility of expanding the number of hedgerow areas identified in the draft report, and (5) the cost similarities between hedgerow plantings and wetland restoration.

After some additional discussion, the Commission drafted the following motion: *“The Open Space and Habitat Commission encourages staff to pursue the opportunities presented in the carbon farm plan for Howat Ranch, insofar as the plan would help the City achieve its sustainability goals and its carbon neutrality goals.”*

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).

Discussion Item – Receive a presentation from City staff on the draft scope of services for a consultant study investigating (1) the cost implications of owning and managing the City’s 400-acre wetlands, (2) what other entities could own and/or manage the wetlands, and (3) what funding sources might be available to help maintain the wetlands

Ms. Reynolds, staff to the Commission, gave the Commission a presentation on the draft scope of services for a consultant study investigating (1) the cost implications of owning and managing the City’s 400-acre wetlands, (2) what other entities could own and/or manage the wetlands, and (3) what funding sources might be available to help maintain the wetlands. She said the draft scope of services was related to a failed attempt to secure a planning grant from the California Wildlife Conservation Board (“WCB”) in the summer. She said WCB staff gave her feedback about how the City could make its grant application more competitive in the future, including having a clearer plan for financing the long-term maintenance of the wetlands. For this reason, she said, staff has decided to move forward with a consultant study that could be used to inform the City Council about the various options for financing the long-term maintenance of the wetlands. She also presented background information about the wetlands, including historic maintenance costs, public access limitations, and

repurchase rights available to the adjacent property owner. She said staff would like to send the scope of services to several consultants on one of the City's professional services panels after incorporating Commission feedback.

Commissioner Millstein asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on whether staff had reached out to any outside organizations, such as the Yolo Habitat Conservancy, the Yolo Basin Foundation, and Yolo Audubon, for feedback. Staff said that it had not reached out to these organizations yet. Commissioner Millstein then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Millstein then closed public comment and opened the Commission discussion. Topics discussed included (1) the public access limitations and whether the adjacent property might be willing to change those limitations, (2) how the wetlands is currently supplied with water, (3) the need to reach out to outside organizations for feedback on the draft scope of services, (3) the cost implications of transforming the wetlands into an open space area, and (4) whether or not the City should consider duck hunting as a possible revenue source for the wetlands. The Commission recommended that staff reach out to the Yolo Habitat Conservancy, the Yolo Basin Foundation, and Yolo Audubon for feedback on the draft scope of services. The Commission also recommended that staff reach out to the adjacent property owner to discuss the public access limitations.

Discussion Item – Express sincere gratitude and appreciation to Commissioners Roberta Millstein and Garrett Allen for their dedicated service to improving the City's open space and habitat areas during their tenure on the Open Space and Habitat Commission

Ms. Reynolds thanked Commissioners Millstein and Allen for giving generously of their time, energies, knowledge, and expertise toward the protection and enhancement of the City's open space and habitat areas. She said both had made significant contributions to the deliberations and recommendations of the Commission during their tenures on the Commission. Their knowledge and expertise have strengthened the City's Open Space Program and led to the protection of natural resources, sensitive habitat, and agricultural lands in and around Davis, she said. Commissioner Millstein, who served on the Commission for more than a decade, played a key role in finalizing the Strategic Plan for the City's Open Space Program, she said. Commissioner Allen, who served on the Commission for two years, played a key role in the Commission's recommendations to the City Council on the proposed Aggie Research Campus development, she said. Commissioners Huber, Shaw, and Vayssieres echoed Ms. Reynolds's comments and expressed their own gratitude and appreciation to Commissioners Millstein and Allen. Both Commissioners received certificates of appreciation.

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, January 4. Possible topics discussed included (1) introducing the four new regular Commission members and the one new alternate Commission member, (2) presenting an overview of the Open Space Program and current projects to the new members, and (3) electing a new chair and vice chair for 2021.

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 9:34 p.m.