

Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes
Monday, April 5, 2021
Remote Audio and Video Meeting Participation, 6:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Ramiro Cabanillas-Ledesma, Lindsay Correa, Sherman McFarland, Carrie Shaw (Chair), Emma Torbert, Marc Vayssieres (Vice Chair), and *Patricia Price (Alternate)*

Vacant Positions: None

Commissioners Absent: Patrick Huber

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

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

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

Commissioner Shaw opened the meeting after a quorum was achieved and called roll call. Commissioner McFarland arrived during the Consent Calendar. Commissioner Vayssieres arrived during Regular Items.

2. Approval of Agenda

On a motion by Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma, seconded by Commissioner Correa, the Commission voted 4-0-3-0 to approve the April 2021 regular meeting agenda (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Shaw, Torbert; Noes – None; Absent – Huber, McFarland, Vayssieres; Abstentions – None).

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

Tracie Reynolds, staff to the Commission, said that she and the City’s consultant, Helix Environmental Planning, met with representatives from the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation to discuss content and graphics for an interpretive panel at South Fork Preserve featuring Native American land management practices. The panel is one of 10 interpretive panels being designed and manufactured for South Fork Preserve. She said Helix was targeting the Commission’s June meeting to bring draft designs to the Commission for review. She also updated the Commission on progress completing the Gill Orchard conservation easement in North Davis and the Martin conservation easement in South Davis, and reminded Commissioners about the joint meeting with the City Council on May 18.

Commissioner Shaw reminded Commissioners to complete their required Form 700 disclosure forms and submit them to the City Clerk. Commissioner Price mentioned that she attended a listening session on Yolo County’s climate action plan which was led by Yolo County Supervisors Jim Provenza and Don Saylor. She encouraged Commissioners to keep a lookout for future listening sessions and get involved in the public process.

4. Public Comment

Dean Johansson asked to be informed about what is going on with the Cannery Farm. He said he was a volunteer board member of Three Sisters Gardens, a non-profit that operates gardens on four vacant lots in West Sacramento. He said the organization would be a perfect fit for the Cannery Farm.

5. Consent Calendar

There was one item on the consent calendar: approval of the March 1, 2021 regular meeting minutes. On a motion by Commissioner Torbert, seconded by Commissioner Correa, the Commission voted 5-0-2-0 to approve the March 2021 meeting minutes (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, McFarland, Shaw, Torbert; Noes – None; Absent – Huber, Vayssieres; Abstentions – None).

6. Regular Items

Discussion Item – Receive a presentation from Rich Marovich, Streamkeeper for the Solano County Water Agency, about a possible habitat restoration/public access project along the South Fork of Putah Creek east of the City’s South Fork Preserve

Ms. Reynolds said that this item stemmed from a meeting she had with City Councilmember Josh Chapman and Commissioner Huber about doing a habitat restoration/public access project in South Davis. She said the property in question is privately owned but sits between two City-owned properties along the South Fork of Putah Creek. The City offered to buy a conservation easement on this property several years ago but the property owner declined saying the offered price was too low, she said. One way to increase the value of this property, she said, is to create a valuable habitat for rare species covered under the Yolo Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Communities Conservation Plan like the Least Bell's vireo. The property then could possibly serve as an ag mitigation bank for the Yolo Habitat Conservancy, which also might be interested in purchasing a habitat conservation easement on this property. The City might also consider purchasing a public access easement through this property, to link up South Fork Preserve with other City-owned property further downstream, she said. She said this item was to introduce the Commission to this property and to the possibility of doing some kind of project on this property in collaboration with the property owner. Commissioner Shaw reiterated that this item was introductory and informational and that no specific project had been decided or vetted with the public.

Rich Marovich, Streamkeeper for the Solano County Water Agency ("SCWA"), then gave the Commission a presentation about a conceptual habitat restoration plan for this section of Putah Creek that the SCWA had developed in partnership with the Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee as part of a planning effort for the restoration of Lower Putah Creek that was partially funded by the State of California using Proposition 1 grant funds. His presentation focused on existing conditions and work that could be undertaken to improve the habitat on land and in the water, such as removing invasive species, realigning the stream channel, improving areas for fish to spawn, and planting additional native plants. He also read a letter of support from Melanie Truan, an ecologist with the U.C. Davis Museum of Wildlife and Fish Biology.

Commissioner Shaw asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) the emails that were sent to the Commission by members of the public, (2) the SCWA's experience with similar projects, (3) how public access would be achieved on the property, (4) what the project's primary goals were, and (5) what lessons were learned from the Winters project.

Commissioner Shaw then took public comment.

- Alan Pryor of the non-profit organization Friends of Putah Creek said he was strongly opposed to the project as described by Mr. Marovich because a similar project in Winters was "a quantifiable failure" in his opinion. He referred Commissioners to a letter he submitted, in which he said a similar project in Winters has led to extensive degradation of the creek, loss of habitat, loss of plant and animal life, and adverse impacts to groundwater and aquifer regeneration. He noted that the proposed project had not been vetted with the public or shared with the Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee and he asked for more transparency and open and honest disclosure.
- Jeffrey Ten Pas, also of the non-profit organization Friends of Putah Creek, said he lived next to the Winters creek restoration which he described as "bulldozer geomorphology." He said bulldozers have created impermeable fill in Winters that has killed trees and plant life along the creek. He said lots of species like the creek's deep pools. He said the creek's form and function are not "unnatural" but were created naturally by the flow of the water. He said the creek is mostly populated with non-native fish. He questioned whether the proposed changes to the creek alignment would bring native fish back to dominance.
- Tom Fitzgerald, a described himself as a landscape architect, said he visited South Fork Preserve and was in favor of improving and expanding public access in this area along the creek.

Commissioner Shaw then closed public comment and opened the Commission discussion. Topics discussed included (1) what the next steps would be and what the funding sources would be, (2) whether the City could secure public access before the habitat restoration was completed, (3) why juvenile Chinook salmon have a hard time navigating in deep pools/slack water, and (4) what kind of species would primarily benefit from the restored habitat.

No action was taken.

Discussion Item – Receive a presentation from Bob Clarke, the City’s Director of Public Works (Engineering and Transportation), about Yolo County’s Draft Project Study Report, which has identified four potential build alternatives and determined a preferred alternative for replacing and relocating the County Road 32A railroad crossing near the City’s Howat Ranch

Bob Clarke, the City’s Director of Public Works (Engineering and Transportation), gave the Commission a presentation about Yolo County’s Draft Project Study Report, which has identified four potential build alternatives and determined a preferred alternative for replacing and relocating the County Road 32A railroad crossing near the City’s Howat Ranch. He said he was asking the Commission to (1) identify the relative open space and habitat impacts of each alternative on the City’s property, (2) identify any preferred alternative or non-starter alternative, and (3) identify any mitigation measures, or conditions the City might request to maintain or even enhance the value of the City’s land in the future. He provided the Commission with information about the report, the problems with the existing crossing, and the four proposed build alternatives: (1) skewed overhead crossing, (2) perpendicular at-grade crossing, (3) skewed at-grade crossing, and (4) perpendicular overhead crossing. His presentation focused on the open space and habitat impacts of each alternative on the City’s property at Howat Ranch.

Commissioner Shaw asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) whether there already was a preferred alternative, (2) what the cost differential was between the alternatives, (3) and whether Yolo County had considered closing County Road 32A to cars. Commissioner Shaw then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Shaw then closed public comment and opened the Commission discussion. Topics discussed included (1) the possibility of doing something else with the remnant land created by the alternatives, like hedgerows or native plantings, (2) whether one option could be crossing the railroad tracks right at the exit off Interstate 80, and (3) which alternative had the least environmental impact to the City’s property.

No action was taken.

Action Item -- Recommend that the City Council approve/not approve adding additional action items to the Commission’s annual work plan

The Commission briefly discussed the following possible additional action items: (1) coordinate with City Council or other relevant Commissions to build a tunnel or safe zone for the wildlife crossing the curved stretch of road where Mace Blvd. turns into E. Covell Blvd (in East Davis near Harper Jr. High), and to avoid traffic accidents, (2) track the demographics of the recipients of easement money, (3) add a 9th principle to the list of the City’s Acquisitions “Fundamental Principles” on page 16 of the 2030 Strategic Plan: “Strive for racial and socio-economic equity,” (4) vote on the wildlife feeding ordinance, and submit for approval to City Council, (5) work with Parks and Recreation Commission to convert open grass areas all over the greenbelt into native plant habitat, (6) plant native vegetation near the North Davis Pond by North Davis Farms, and (7) potential wetlands creation on 18 acres of land that UCD owns along Putah Creek just east of Old Davis Road. There was no public comment.

On a motion by Commissioner Shaw, seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres, the Commission voted 6-0-1-0 to approve the following motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, McFarland, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Huber; Abstentions – None): *“The Open Space and Habitat Commission postpones a vote to approve/not approve adding additional action items to the Commission’s annual work plan and the Commission’s chair will work with staff to prepare a more detailed packet of information on these seven possible additional action items for the May meeting.”*

Discussion Item -- Discuss possible membership on the Yolo Habitat Conservancy Implementation Advisory Committee

Ms. Reynolds, staff to the Commission, asked Commissioners if any of them would be willing to serve on the Yolo Habitat Conservancy’s (“YHC’s”) Implementation Advisory Committee, which will advise the YHC Board of Directors on the development and management of the reserve system of public and private lands consistent with the biological goals and objectives in the Yolo Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Communities Conservation Plan. She said Commissioner Huber had expressed an interest in serving on this committee on behalf of the City of Davis. No other Commissioners expressed an interest at the meeting. Ms. Reynolds asked Commissioners to think about it and contact her by Wednesday of this week if they were interested in serving. There was no public comment. No action was taken.

Discussion Item -- Receive update from staff on the implementation of the Bretton Woods open space and habitat features

Ms. Reynolds updated the Commission on the implementation of the Bretton Woods open space and habitat features, including the agricultural buffer, the eastern detention basin, the project landscaping, the wildlife connectivity culverts, the arched pedestrian bridge, and the hedgerow. There was no public comment. No action was taken.

7. Commission and Staff Communications

Commission Work Plan

The Commission work plan was discussed during Regular Items.

Upcoming Meeting Date, Time, Items

The next regularly scheduled meeting is Monday, May 3. Possible topics discussed included (1) a discussion of a possible joint habitat restoration project with U.C. Davis, (2) a discussion of the City's agricultural leases, and (3) a discussion of adding action items to the work plan that are not from the Strategic Plan for the City's Open Space Program.

Upcoming Events

Commissioner Correa mentioned a virtual workshop on April 20 hosted by the California Natural Resources Agency to allow the public to provide input on how to meet the state's commitment to conserve 30% of California's lands and coastal waters by 2030 and accelerate nature-based solutions to address climate change.

Commissioner Torbert mentioned two online listening sessions on April 20 and April 28 hosted by the California Strategic Growth Council and the Department of Conservation to gather feedback and ideas from the public regarding the racial equity components of the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program.

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.

Update on Cannery Farm

At the second meeting of the Cannery Farm working group on March 16, Ms. Reynolds said the group decided that the City should send out a mailer to everyone in the Cannery asking for their input on the top six choices for the reuse of the Cannery Farm. On April 1, the City mailed out between 700-800 notices to every Cannery owner/renter/resident in English and Spanish, she said. In addition, a half-page insert written in Mandarin/Cantonese was included in the mailing that gave Mandarin/Cantonese speakers the opportunity to talk to a real person in Mandarin/Cantonese about the Cannery Farm, she said. The deadline for comments is April 30. Staff will then compile the comments and the working group will develop a recommendation to bring before the City Council for consideration, she said, based on the feedback received.

Update on Climate Action and Adaptation Plan Update

Ms. Reynolds reminded Commissioners about the first online survey that will be live on April 19. Commissioners were welcome to test the survey before April 17, she said, and provide feedback. She also reminded Commissioners about the first virtual workshop on April 22. She said the City needed workshop facilitators/note-takers so if any Commissioners were interested, they should let her know. She also gave the Commission the web address to the City's Climate Action and Adaptation Plan Update website.

8. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:13 p.m.