

**Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes**  
**Monday, May 3, 2021**  
**Remote Audio and Video Meeting Participation, 6:30 p.m.**

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

Vacant Positions: None

Commissioners Absent: None

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

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

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**1. Call to Order & Roll Call**

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

**2. Approval of Agenda**

On a motion by Commissioner Huber, which was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres, the Commission voted 6-0-1-0 to approve the May 2021 regular meeting agenda (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Huber, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – McFarland; Abstentions – None).

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

Commissioner Torbert briefed Commissioners on what happened during an online listening session in April 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. Commissioner Huber mentioned a monarch butterfly restoration project led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and expressed hope that there is a nexus with monarch habitat restoration. Commissioner Price said she attended the first virtual workshop about the update to the City’s Climate Action and Adaptation Plan and encouraged other Commissioners to participate in the public input process. Commissioner Shaw briefed Commissioners on what she had learned from a discussion she attended about reimagining Russell Boulevard.

Tracie Reynolds, staff to the Commission, mentioned that the City may need to close South Fork Preserve during the construction of the public accessibility improvements this summer/fall. She also mentioned that she would be bringing drafts of the 10 interpretative panels related to this project to the Commission for feedback in June. Finally, Ms. Reynolds mentioned that the property the Commission had previously discussed as a possible southern access to the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, near the intersection of County Roads 106 and 36, was sold to a new owner with an agricultural conservation easement on it. She said the transaction served as agriculture mitigation for a West Sacramento project.

**4. Public Comment**

Chris Gardner, the City’s Open Space Lands Manager, said he would like to introduce four interns from American River College who have been helping him with open space maintenance for the last three months. He said he really appreciated all their help. He also said they wanted to listen in on the meeting to observe the Commission’s decision-making process.

Marc Hoshovsky, a docent at South Fork Preserve, said the preserve has hosted more visitors this past year due to the pandemic and that the public would benefit from more information about the upcoming project to construct public accessibility improvements at the preserve. He said he was happy to hear from staff that this topic would be on the June agenda for discussion. The docent program is a partnership between the Putah Creek Council and the City.

Alan Hirsch urged the Commission to provide input to the City about proposed revisions to the City’s Tree Protection Ordinance. He said the proposed revisions do not fix several “loopholes” in the existing ordinance that allow developers to remove trees without paying mitigation fees. He said the City Council will consider the revisions on May 18.

## 5. Consent Calendar

There was one item on the consent calendar: approval of the April 5, 2021 regular meeting minutes. On a motion by Commissioner Vayssieres, which was seconded by Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma, the Commission voted 7-0-0-0 to approve the April 2021 meeting minutes (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Huber, McFarland, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

## 6. Regular Items

### **Discussion Item – Receive an introductory presentation from Andrew Fulks, Director of U.C. Davis’s Putah Creek Riparian Reserve and Campus Naturalized Lands, about a possible joint habitat restoration project on university land along the South Fork of Putah Creek**

Andrew Fulks, Director of U.C. Davis’s Putah Creek Riparian Reserve and Campus Naturalized Lands, gave the Commission a short presentation about an 18-acre parcel of land owned by the Regents of the University of California (“University”) along the South Fork of Putah Creek near Old Davis Road. The property was formerly used by the California Department of Transportation as a source for fill soil for the adjacent freeway overcrossing so it is about 10-12 feet lower than surrounding land, Mr. Fulks said. It currently is populated by weeds, eucalyptus trees, and some riparian trees and shrubs. He said the University has wanted to restore the site into wetlands habitat in the past but hasn’t found the funding. If the site could be lowered a few feet more, he said, it could be restored to emergent wetland habitat with better riparian habitat and public access. He said the University could partner with the City to initiate a planning process to develop a site design that could then be used to apply for grant funding to help finance the restoration project. Mr. Fulks was joined by Matt Dulcich, Director of Local Government Relations for UC Davis focusing on land use, transportation, housing, planning, and environmental issues.

Commissioner Shaw asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) whether the creek channel would be altered as part of any proposed restoration project, (2) whether there are any other off-channel wetland ponds along the creek, (3) how the restored site would connect to the larger ecosystem, and (4) whether enhanced bike access to the site could be included in any proposed restoration project.

Commissioner Shaw then took public comment. Marc Hoshovsky said he supported the project and thought it was a good use of Measure O open space parcel tax money. He said the City should think about what kind of habitat it wanted (fish spawning vs. water birds) and what kind of grant funds were available (state fish restoration funds vs. federal wetlands restoration funds). He said the City should consider a long-term easement to protect the City’s investment. Cody Blanchard said the City and the University should also consider impacts from climate change on any proposed restored habitat. He said any proposed restored habitat must be able to weather changes to water supply and vegetation.

Commissioner Shaw then closed public comment and opened the Commission discussion. Topics discussed included (1) how this project relates to the City’s Strategic Plan for the Open Space Program, and (2) what the next steps might be.

On a motion by Commissioner Vayssieres, which was seconded by Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma, the Commission voted 7-0-0-0 to approve the following motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Huber, McFarland, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None): *“The Open Space and Habitat Commission heard a presentation on this floodplain parcel and expresses great interest in pursuing common action between the City and the University on this parcel to restore habitat and provide public access.”*

### **Action Item -- Recommend that the City Council approve/not approve adding additional action items to the Commission’s annual work plan (continued from April 5, 2021 meeting)**

At the Commission’s April 5, 2021 meeting, the Commission briefly discussed seven possible additional action items that certain Commission members suggested be added to the Commission’s annual work plan, pending City Council direction. The seven possible additional action items were: (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 Recreation and Park 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.

Ms. Reynolds reminded Commissioners that at their April meeting the Commission approved a motion to postpone a vote to approve/not approve adding additional action items to the Commission's annual work plan to give the Commission's chair time to work with staff to prepare a more detailed packet of information on these seven possible additional action items for the May meeting. Over the last several weeks, Commissioner Shaw talked to staff and the Commissioners who suggested the seven possible additional action items to get additional clarification and determine whether these action items were (1) within the Commission's purview, (2) were practical or feasible, (3) fell within the broad outlines of the goals and objectives of the City's Open Space Program, and/or (4) were ready for a discussion before the City Council, Ms. Reynolds said. Based on these discussions, staff recommended that the Commission (1) add possible additional action item #5 to the Commission's annual work plan because it is already in the City Council-approved Strategic Plan for the City's Open Space Program; and (2) not ask the City Council to add possible additional action items #1, #2, #3, #4, and #6 to the Commission's annual work plan at this time. She noted possible additional action item #7 is already in the Commission's work plan.

Commissioner Shaw asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) the exact wording and intent of possible additional action item #5, and (2) whether the Commission could appoint a liaison to the Recreation and Park Commission.

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 process for getting some of these possible additional action items on a future Commission agenda for discussion, and (2) whether it made sense to defer possible additional action item #5 to next year. The Commission then took the following actions:

On a motion by Commissioner Torbert, which was seconded by Commissioner McFarland, the Commission voted 7-0-0-0 to discuss possible additional action items #2 and #3 in September (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Huber, McFarland, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

On a motion by Commissioner Correa, which was seconded by Commissioner Huber, the Commission voted 6-1-0-0 to defer possible additional action item #5 to next year and not ask the City Council to add any possible additional action items to the Commission's annual work plan at this time (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Huber, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – McFarland; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

**Discussion Item – Receive an introductory presentation from staff about the City's agricultural leases**

Ms. Reynolds summarized a staff report she prepared for the Commission about the City's agricultural leases. She said the City owns about 1,270 acres of agricultural land outside the City limits. Those acres are leased to four different farmers under four separate agricultural leases, she said. Those leases, most of which require the farmers to give the City a percentage of crop revenues as rent, generate about \$278,000 a year for the City, she said. The four leases fall into three general geographic areas: (1) land around the municipal golf course, (2) land near the Mace Curve/Interstate 80, and (3) land along the South Fork of Putah Creek. She said only 25 acres along the Mace Curve, and about 300 acres along the South Fork of Putah Creek were purchased with open space funds for open space purposes. The rest of the acres were purchased with other funds for other purposes, such as drainage or a golf course expansion, she said. Ms. Reynolds also summarized lease rental rates, where lease revenues go, water availability, and special provisions for habitat areas.

She said staff needs to update a couple of these leases over the next few months. One tenant is retiring and the City will need to issue a "Request for Bids" to hay farmers to secure a replacement tenant. Another lease needs to be updated, she said, to update the rental rates, add language to allow the City to implement sustainable and wildlife-friendly farming practices and farm improvements (as long as yields are not significantly negatively impacted), add language to ban the use of second-generation anti-coagulant rodenticides, add language to allow for drip irrigation, and generally refresh the standard lease provisions.

Commissioner Shaw asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Hearing none, she then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Shaw then closed public comment and opened the Commission discussion. Topics discussed included (1) what the City's plan was for these leases, and (2) whether the City's agricultural lands could be offered for bids so that new farmers could be given an opportunity to farm the land. No action was taken.

**Discussion Item -- Discuss content for the joint meeting with the City Council on May 18**

The Commission discussed meeting protocols for the joint meeting with the City Council on May 18, given it will be an all-remote meeting, and the roles and responsibilities of Commissioners and staff for this joint meeting. The Commission also discussed the topics the Commission wanted to discuss with the City Council. There was no public comment.

**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, June 7. Possible topics discussed included (1) an update about the upcoming project to construct public accessibility improvements at South Fork Preserve and provide feedback on the content and design of the 10 draft interpretive panels to be installed at the preserve this fall, and (2) the 2021 annual financial review of the City's Open Space Program budget.

**Upcoming Events**

There were no upcoming events.

**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**

Ms. Reynolds said the third meeting of the Cannery Farm working group was scheduled for May 6. At that meeting, she said the working group would discuss the results of the April outreach effort to Cannery residents to solicit their input on the top six choices for the reuse of the Cannery Farm. In April, the City mailed out between 700-800 notices to every Cannery owner/renter/resident in English and Spanish, and a half-page insert in Mandarin/Cantonese. The working group will then develop a recommendation to bring before the Commission and the City Council for consideration, she said.

**Update on Climate Action and Adaptation Plan Update**

Ms. Reynolds said the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan ("CAAP") Update team was still analyzing the feedback received from the first workshop on April 22, where more than 100 people attended. She also said the online survey was now available to the public. She noted that she had sent the Commission the most recent staff report on this subject and that they could go to the CAAP Update website for more information. She asked if any Commissioner wanted to be liaison to the Natural Resources Commission. No Commissioner expressed an interest. She said the next workshop would be held on May 20. Its focus would be on equity, inclusion and cultural diversity in Davis on the eve of *World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development*, a day set aside by the United Nations to deepen the world's understanding of the values of cultural diversity.

**8. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:28 p.m.