

Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes
Monday, March 7, 2022
Remote Audio and Video Meeting Participation, 6:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Lindsay Correa, Patrick Huber, Patricia Price, Carrie Shaw (Chair), Emma Torbert, Marc Vayssieres (Vice Chair), and Sara Geonczy (Alternate)

Vacant Positions: None

Commissioners Absent: Ramiro Cabanillas-Ledesma

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

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

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

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

2. Approval of Agenda

On a motion by Commissioner Huber, which was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres, the Commission voted 7-0-1-0 to approve the March 2022 regular meeting agenda (Ayes – Correa, Geonczy, Huber, Price, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Cabanillas-Ledesma; Abstentions – None).

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

Tracie Reynolds, staff to the Commission, said that she expected a new agricultural conservation easement with the Gill family on 124 acres about a half mile from the City limits, east of the Wildhorse residential development, to close in a few weeks. She also said that American Tower had recently resurrected a hedgerow project around American Tower's cell tower on the City's Howat Ranch property. The project, which Yolo County is requiring as part of American Tower's planning entitlements for the tower, was paused a couple of years ago, she said. American Tower will pay for the installation and care of the hedgerow for three years, and the City intends to use the funds to hire the Yolo County Resource Conservation District to install and maintain the hedgerow, she said.

4. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

5. Consent Calendar

There was one item on the consent calendar: approval of the February 7, 2022 regular meeting minutes. On a motion by Commissioner Vayssieres, which was seconded by Commissioner Huber, the Commission voted 7-0-1-0 to approve the February 2022 meeting minutes (Ayes – Correa, Geonczy, Huber, Price, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Cabanillas-Ledesma; Abstentions – None).

6. Regular Items

Action Item - Recommend that the City Council approve an agricultural lease with Markus Kasbergen for a piece of City-owned agricultural land known as Clayton Ranch

Staff provided the Commission with a summary of the information contained in the staff report for this item. She summarized property information, the process for requesting bids, the bid from Markus Kasbergen, and the key terms of the proposed agricultural lease, including rent, term, maintenance responsibilities, pest management, sustainable farming practices and improvements, and protections for the giant garter snake and Swainson's hawk. She said staff intends to seek the City Council's

approval of the proposed agricultural lease at a meeting in March or April, so that Mr. Kasbergen can begin farming the property on June 15.

Commissioner Shaw asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) what the lease revenue pays for, (2) what Mr. Kasbergen's and the City's long-term vision for the property was, and (3) how the City might be able to document the carbon sequestration related to Mr. Kasbergen's no-till farming practices.

Commissioner Shaw then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Shaw then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. Topics discussed included (1) the terms of the proposed agricultural lease, (2) how often the property floods, and (3) the City's retained ability to possibly transform the property into wetland habitat in the future. Mr. Kasbergen also attended the meeting and introduced himself to the Commission. He said he planned to grow rye grass on the property using dry land, no-till farming practices.

On a motion by Commissioner Huber, which was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres, the Commission voted 7-0-1-0 to support the lease conditions in the staff report and recommend that the City Council approve the lease (Ayes – Correa, Geonczy, Huber, Price, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Cabanillas-Ledesma; Abstentions – None).

Action Item – Determine whether staff should prepare a preliminary acquisition report related to the possible acquisition of an agricultural conservation easement on 120 acres located near the intersection of County Roads 104A and 30

Staff provided the Commission with a summary of the information contained in the staff report for this item. She summarized property information, soil conditions, and the property's relationship to other protected open space areas around the City and the City's priority acquisition areas. She said the property (which is owned by the Gill family) is adjacent to the City's 359-acre Leland Ranch agricultural conservation easement, and the southeast corner of the property touches the City's Howat Ranch property, which the City owns in fee. She also said the property is mostly within the "Agriculture" priority acquisition area, which seeks to protect the highest quality agricultural lands facing the greatest risk of conversion, and within the "Scenic Resources" priority acquisition area, which seeks to protect land providing views and scenic vistas of significant landmarks, such as nearby and distant mountain ranges. She said the purpose of the discussion tonight was to determine whether the Commission would like the City to pursue this easement acquisition. If so, staff would return to the Commission with a preliminary acquisition report at a later date, she said.

Commissioner Shaw asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) what funds would be used to purchase the agricultural easement, (2) whether the Yolo Land Trust would be involved, (3) how many wells were on the property, and (4) whether the Gill family was donating any acres to the City.

Commissioner Shaw then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Shaw then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. Topics discussed included (1) the ecological costs of orchards, (2) whether the City could require some habitat improvements (such as hedgerows and other native plantings) as part of the easement acquisition, (3) how connected the farm was to the local community and how the Gill's orchard might impact small-scale farms, and (4) whether new agricultural wells would need to be drilled.

On a motion by Commissioner Vayssieres, which was seconded by Commissioner Price, the Commission voted 6-1-1-0 to move forward with a preliminary acquisition report (Ayes – Correa, Geonczy, Huber, Price, Shaw, Vayssieres; Noes – Torbert; Absent – Cabanillas-Ledesma; Abstentions – None). Ms. Reynolds said she would also contact the Commission's Acquisitions Subcommittee and organize a site visit.

Discussion Item – Discuss ideas for a draft communications strategy for the City's Open Space Program

Ms. Reynolds briefly introduced this item. Since the Commission's February meeting, she said she has been working with Barbara Archer, the City's Communications and Customer Service Manager, to develop a draft communications strategy to address certain knowledge gaps that came to light after the results of a recent on-line survey about the City's Open Space Program were published. She said the survey revealed that (1) very few people are familiar with the program and what it does and (2) people still seem to be confused about what constitutes an open space area. She said she would like the Commission's input into what should be the purpose and messaging of the communications strategy. She said she would discuss that input with Ms. Archer and work with her to refine the draft communications strategy. She said she would discuss the final draft communications strategy with the Commission when it is ready.

Commissioner Shaw asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. There were none. Commissioner Shaw then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Shaw then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. Commissioners Correa and Huber said the City should tailor the communications strategy to the problems the City would like to address. Commissioners Huber and Price said the strategy should focus on addressing any possible opposition to the 2030 renewal of Measure O, the City's open space parcel tax which pays for much of the Open Space Program. Commissioner Torbert said she would not support renewing Measure O as currently written and would only support it if certain changes were made to it.

Commissioners said the purpose of the communications strategy should be to: (1) expand access to the Open Space Program; (2) align the program with other City programs and goals; (3) clarify and communicate what the program is (i.e., branding) and increase awareness of program activities; (4) engage the broader community in program activities, including volunteer opportunities; (5) show the connection between Measure O and the open space areas that people enjoy.

Ms. Reynolds said the communications strategy should convey no more than three main messages. She said the draft strategy included the following three main messages: Open space (1) provides natural areas in town for people to enjoy, (2) preserves habitat and agricultural land, and (3) helps define the City's boundaries. The Commission generally supported these messages. Several Commissioners said it was important to convey to people that the Open Space Program provides natural areas that people can walk in, preserves habitat and farmland, and limits urban sprawl.

Ms. Reynolds said this communication strategy could be a multi-year process, where a different message was conveyed each year. She said she would send the revised draft communications strategy to the Public Engagement and Partnerships Subcommittee for input before bringing it to the full Commission for input.

7. Commission and Staff Communications

Upcoming Meeting Date, Time, Items

Ms. Reynolds said the next regularly scheduled meeting was Monday, April 4. Possible agenda items discussed for the Commission's April meeting included (1) a discussion of the carbon farm plan for Howat Ranch, and (2) a discussion of the preliminary easement acquisition report for the Gill family's property on County Roads 105 and 30.

Upcoming Events

Ms. Reynolds said the ribbon-cutting event for the South Fork Preserve public accessibility improvements would likely be held sometime in early April.

Subcommittee Reports

1. *Acquisitions*. Commissioner Huber said this subcommittee was trying to set up a meeting with staff to discuss a Geographic Information System database of all the properties within the levees between Old Davis Road and Mace Boulevard.
2. *Habitat Restoration and Enhancement*. No updates were reported.
3. *Land and Resource Management*. Commissioner Torbert said this subcommittee was very interested in working with staff and the tenant farmer to implement the Howat carbon farm plan.
4. *Public Access and Recreation*. Commissioner Correa said this subcommittee had sent staff ideas for topics for the interpretive panels for the North Davis Upland Habitat Area.
5. *Financial and Program Accountability*. Commissioner Shaw said she was working on a summary of her research effort to see how other open space programs function and operate compared to the City's open space program. She said she hoped to complete the summary by November.
6. *Public Engagement and Partnerships*. No updates were reported.
7. *Ad-Hoc Subcommittee to Improve Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the City's Open Space Program*. Commissioner Torbert said this subcommittee was doing some research and was planning to meet again next month.

Reports on Meetings Attended

Commissioner Huber summarized what happened at the recent monthly Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee meeting. He said only five returning salmon were counted in Putah Creek this year due to the massive salmon kill that happened earlier this year when runoff from a major storm deprived the fish of oxygen. He said the last two years have been terrible for the salmon. The count has declined from 2,000 spawning fish to five spawning fish. Commissioner Price said the City's annual "Loopalooza" bike ride around Davis would occur on Sunday, May 1. She said it was a good opportunity to bike and bird watch.

Update on Climate Action and Adaptation Plan ("CAAP") Update

There were no updates from staff. Commissioner Price said the CAAP update was discussed at the Natural Resources Commission ("NRC") on February 28th. She said the priority action items went to the City Council in December and the City Council asked for more information. She said the City's consultant, AECOM, was doing additional work to address the City Council's questions and, as a result, the process was delayed six months. Staff is also reaching out to targeted groups, she said. Staff intends to go back to the NRC in April and to the City Council in May, she said.

8. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:51 p.m.