

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

Commissioners Present: Ramiro Cabanillas-Ledesma, Lindsay Correa, Patrick Huber, Patricia Price, Carrie Shaw (Chair), Emma Torbert, Marc Vayssieres (Vice Chair), and Sara Geonczy (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) (Absent)

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

Commissioner Shaw opened the meeting after a quorum was achieved and called roll call. Commissioners Correa, Torbert and Vayssieres 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 Price, the Commission voted 5-0-3-0 to approve the February 2022 regular meeting agenda (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Geonczy, Huber, Price, Shaw; Noes – None; Absent – Correa, Torbert, Vayssieres; Abstentions – None).

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

Tracie Reynolds, staff to the Commission, said the kick-off meeting for a study looking at options for owning and managing the Davis wetlands occurred on January 6. She said City staff met with the consultant, Helix Environmental, at the wetlands for a site visit on January 19. Helix will be compiling information about existing conditions and also fleshing out options for funding the maintenance of the wetlands, she said. The final report will be brought to the Commission for input before staff discusses it with the City Council, she said. She also mentioned that the agricultural conservation easement on the Gill orchard property is expected to close in a couple of weeks. Finally, she said she had issued a “Request for Bids” for a piece of agricultural land owned by the City, commonly known as the Clayton property, and bids were due on January 28. The City’s current tenant farmer on this property is retiring, she said. The City received two responses, she said. The draft agricultural lease with the selected tenant farmer will be brought to the Commission for a recommendation before staff brings it to the City Council for approval, she said

Commissioner Shaw reminded Commissioners to turn in their conflict-of-interest forms to the City Clerk’s Office as soon as possible. Commissioner Torbert informed the Commission about a four-day conference February 27 to March 3 held by the Community Alliance for Family Farmers focusing on small farms. She said she organized a panel for the conference entitled “Land Conservation & Land Equity” that will be held on Sunday, February 27, at noon. She said the panel will focus on discussing recent efforts to push land conservation groups, such as land trusts, to better support beginning farmers and other disadvantaged farmers. Commissioner Huber informed the Commission that the Solano County Water Agency (“SCWA”) hired a new Streamkeeper for Putah Creek and his name is Max Stevenson. He said Mr. Stevenson will make a great contribution to conservation activities along the creek. The SCWA’s former long-time Streamkeeper, Rich Marovich, recently retired, he said.

4. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

5. Consent Calendar

There were two items on the consent calendar: (A) approval of the draft "*Principles of Civility for City Council, City Commissions, and Other Legislative Bodies Authorized and Governed by the City Council*", and (B) approval of the draft December 6, 2021 regular meeting minutes. There was no discussion on Item 5A. Commissioner Shaw requested some edits to Item 5B. On a motion by Commissioner Vayssieres, which was seconded by Commissioner Huber, the Commission voted 7-0-0 to approve both items on the consent agenda, with the requested edits to Item 5B (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Huber, Price, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

6. Regular Items

Discussion Item - Receive a staff presentation and provide feedback on a proposed collaborative habitat restoration/public access project with UC Davis on a 32-acre parcel of land owned by the Regents of the University of California along the South Fork of Putah Creek near Old Davis Road

Staff provided the Commission with a summary of the information contained in the staff report for this item. She summarized the history of the site, including its past life as a source of fill dirt for the California Department of Transportation. This former excavation work means the property is about 10-12 feet lower than surrounding land. It also means the existing elevation is too high for riparian vegetation to establish and too low for oak woodland to establish, she said. As a result, she said the land hosts invasive grasses and broadleaf weeds, as well as eucalyptus trees.

Over the last several months, she said staff has met several times with Andrew Fulks, Director of U.C. Davis's Putah Creek Riparian Reserve and Campus Naturalized Lands, and Matt Dulcich, Director of Local Government Relations for UC Davis, to develop a draft conceptual plan and summary description for a proposed habitat restoration/public access project on this site. She summarized the key elements of the proposed project, including an off-channel wetland area, expanded riparian forest, new trails, a possible footbridge, and wetland/creek overlooks. She said staff was seeking the Commission's input before reaching out to the broader community later this spring. She also said staff was working with UC Davis officials to develop a strategy for securing the required permitting, environmental clearance, and grant funding for this proposed project. She said staff had set up a meeting with staff from the California Wildlife Conservation Board which was the most likely grant funder for this proposed project.

Commissioner Shaw asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) who would maintain the improvements and how much they would cost, (2) how the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation would be involved, (3) what other state resources might be available for project implementation, (4) whether an existing creek impoundment could be removed as part of the project, and (5) whether the proposed trail on the north side of the creek could be extended.

Commissioner Shaw then took public comment. Marc Hoshovsky said focusing on improving habitat for anadromous fish, such as salmon, might be a good way to get grant funding. He said the proposed footbridge might significantly increase the project's price tag and complicate the permitting

process. He also said the project should include (1) foot access to the creek for fishing, (2) a diversity of flood elevations, and (3) temporary shade structures until the trees grow up and provide shade.

Commissioner Shaw then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. Topics discussed included (1) the value of adding boat access to the creek, (2) ways to speed up the process, including eliminating the footbridge and not waiting for grant funding, (3) what the habitat objectives are and how those objectives should be backed-up by science, and (4) how the Commission could stay engaged with, and supportive of, the project over time. No action was taken.

Discussion Item – Receive a staff presentation and discuss the results of the recent on-line survey to gather feedback from the community about the Open Space Program

Staff provided the Commission with a brief summary of the information contained in the staff report for this item. The City received 288 responses to its survey, she said. In general, she said the survey results showed general support for the current direction of the Open Space Program, and the action items in the Strategic Plan. The survey also showed continued strong support for Measure O, the City's special open space parcel tax, she said. However, she said the feedback also exposed a few areas that need improvement: (1) very few people are familiar with the Open Space Program and what it does, (2) people still seem to be confused about what constitutes an open space area, and (3) very few people know that information about the Open Space Program exists on the City's website. She said she would like to have further discussions with the Commission about these three areas and what can be done to address them. She also said she will post the staff report, along with the full results of the survey (with email addresses redacted), on the City's website as soon as possible.

Commissioner Shaw asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) whether it was appropriate for Commissioners to reach out to the media, and (2) how the number of respondents compared to past surveys.

Commissioner Shaw then took public comment. Marc Hoshovsky thanked staff and the Commission for conducting the survey to keep the program in a healthy condition. He said the survey was a good way to get feedback and publicize the program and he was heartened by the strong response.

Commissioner Shaw then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. Topics discussed included (1) what kind of budget and resources were available for a communications and public outreach strategy, (2) the challenges of explaining the multi-faceted program to the public, (3) how the City might use the collaborative habitat restoration project with UC Davis to advertise the City's Open Space Program and Measure O, and (4) other ways the City might be able to advertise the program and its open space sites, such as better signage. The Commission requested that Barbara Archer, the City's Communications and Customer Service Manager, come to the next meeting to discuss a communications strategy for the Open Space Program. Ms. Reynolds said she would talk to Ms. Archer about this request. No action was taken.

Action Item – Election of Chair and Vice Chair for 2022

Commissioner Shaw offered to continue serving as Chair. Commissioner Vayssieres also offered to continue serving as Vice Chair. On a motion by Commissioner Huber, seconded by Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma, the Commission voted 7-0-0-0 to elect Commissioner Shaw as Chair and Commissioner Vayssieres as Vice Chair for 2022 (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Huber, Price, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

7. Commission and Staff Communications

Commission Work Plan

The Commission work plan was not discussed.

Upcoming Meeting Date, Time, Items

Ms. Reynolds said the next regularly scheduled meeting was Monday, March 7. Possible agenda items discussed for the Commission's March meeting included (1) a discussion with Ms. Archer about a communications and public relations strategy for the City's Open Space Program, (2) a discussion about a possible new agricultural conservation easement, and (3) an action item recommending City Council approval of the new agricultural lease for the City's Clayton Ranch property.

Upcoming Events

Commissioner Torbert again mentioned the upcoming four-day conference February 27 to March 3 held by the Community Alliance for Family Farmers focusing on small farms. She said her panel for the conference was titled "Land Conservation & Land Equity" and would be held on Sunday, February 27, at noon. She said pricing was on a sliding scale. Ms. Reynolds said the ribbon-cutting for the South Fork Preserve public accessibility improvements would likely be held some time in April.

Working Groups

1. *Acquisitions.* Commissioner Huber said this working group met in January and created a Geographic Information System ("GIS") database of all the properties within the levees between Old Davis Road and Mace Boulevard. He said the GIS database includes the size of each parcel and ownership info. He said he would email the database to Ms. Reynolds.
2. *Habitat Restoration and Enhancement.* Commissioner Price said this working group met in January and reached out to the Yolo County Resource Conservation District ("Yolo RCD") to get pricing for hedgerow installation and maintenance. She also said the working group discussed possibly working with the City's Parks Department to convert turf to native plants.
3. *Land and Resource Management.* Commissioner Torbert said this working group met in January and discussed the carbon farm plan for the City's Howat Ranch property. She said the working group would like to know if the City's tenant farmer is interested in implementing any of the recommended farming practices. The group also discussed signage for crowd management within the City's open space areas.
4. *Public Access and Recreation.* Commissioner Correa said this working group met in January and discussed topics for interpretive panels at the North Davis Upland Habitat Area. She said the working group intends to visit the site for ideas and would like to meet with the Friends of North Davis Ponds. She also said the working group would be happy to help with the Request for Proposals for new signage at all the City's open space areas.
5. *Financial and Program Accountability.* Commissioner Shaw said this working group met in January and discussed a research effort to see how other open space programs function and operate compared to the City's open space program. She said she would take the lead on this effort and share the research results with the Commission before the end of the year.

6. *Public Engagement and Partnerships.* Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma said this working group met in January and discussed how to create a mechanism for people to share real-time information on the City's website and on the City's open space interactive map.
7. *Ad-Hoc Working Group to Improve Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the City's Open Space Program.* Commissioner Torbert said this working group met in January and developed five potential priority topics, which have been discussed with staff twice. She said she is tasked with researching whether there is a way to do an agrarian land trust model on city land and, if so, what other cities may have implemented such a model already.

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

There were no updates from staff on the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan update.

8. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:22 p.m.