

Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes
Monday, May 2, 2022
Remote Audio and Video Meeting Participation, 6:30 p.m.

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

Vacant Positions: None

Commissioners Absent: Carrie Shaw (Chair)

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 Vayssieres chaired the meeting in Commissioner Shaw's absence. He 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 Correa, the Commission voted 7-0-1-0 to approve the May 2022 regular meeting agenda (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Geonczy, Huber, Price, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Shaw; 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 mid-May. She also said that an agreement with American Tower to install a hedgerow around the company's cell tower on the City's Howat Ranch property was close to being finalized and might begin in July. She also said three community meetings had been scheduled in May to gather initial community input on a proposed habitat restoration/public access project the City is working on with UC Davis. The meeting dates/times are May 11 at noon, May 14 at 10:00 a.m., and May 18 at 5:00 p.m., she said. Finally, she said the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new public accessibility improvements at South Fork Preserve was scheduled for May 21 at 10:00 a.m. She said the improvements had already been vandalized which was disappointing.

4. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

5. Consent Calendar

There were two items on the consent calendar: approval of the March 7, 2022 regular meeting minutes and an informational status report on the 2020-2040 Climate Action and Adaptation Plan. On a motion by Commissioner Huber, which was seconded by Commissioner Torbert, the Commission voted 7-0-1-0 to approve the consent calendar (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Geonczy, Huber, Price, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Shaw; Abstentions – None).

6. Regular Items

Action Item – Receive a Preliminary Acquisition Report discussing the possible purchase of an agricultural conservation easement on about 120 acres located near the intersection of

County Roads 104A and 30 (Assessor Parcel No. 033-650-004) and recommend that the City Council direct staff to pursue the acquisition of this easement

Ms. Reynolds provided the Commission with a summary of the information contained in the Preliminary Acquisition Report. 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 that three oil and gas leases would need to be removed from title before a conservation easement could be recorded against the property. She said the property owner was working to remove these leases from title. She said the Commission's Acquisitions Subcommittee visited the site in late March.

Commissioner Vayssieres asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) the property's zoning, (2) the oil and gas leases, (3) whether there were any risks associated with not putting an easement on this property, (4) whether spending money on this easement would mean other projects might not be funded, and (5) whether the views of the Sacramento skyline would be impacted by the future fully grown orchard trees.

Commissioner Vayssieres then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Vayssieres then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. Topics discussed included (1) a proposal to require the property owner to install a biodiversity buffer, or hedgerow, along the irrigation ditch that runs along the northern boundary of the property, (2) whether the City's open space parcel tax funds (i.e., Measure O) should be used to purchase this easement, (3) whether there were any public access opportunities on the property, (4) what was motivating the property owner to sell a conservation easement, and (5) whether nuts grown on the property were sold locally.

Commissioner Price put forward a motion recommending that the City Council direct staff to pursue the acquisition of this easement. Commissioner Huber seconded that motion, and asked for a friendly amendment to also direct staff to pursue the inclusion of a hedgerow or other habitat enhancements along County Road 30 on the northern edge of the property as part of this transaction. Commissioner Price accepted Commissioner Huber's friendly amendment. She did not accept a second friendly amendment from Commissioner Torbert to require the property owner to pay for the installation and maintenance of the hedgerow. The full final motion read as follows: "*The Open Space and Habitat Commission recommends that the City Council direct staff to pursue the acquisition of this easement with the understanding that it will include a hedgerow or other habitat enhancements along County Road 30 on the northern edge of the property.*"

The Commission approved the above motion by a vote of 6-1-1-0 (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Geonczy, Huber, Price, Vayssieres; Noes – Torbert; Absent – Shaw; Abstentions – None).

Discussion Item – Discuss possible ways to implement the 2020 Carbon Farm Plan for the City's 774-acre Howat/Clayton Ranch properties (Assessor Parcel Nos. 033-300-001, 033-300-015 and 033-650-006)

Ms. Reynolds said she had met with the City's tenant farmer, Bob Dettling, at the Howat Ranch property in April to discuss cropland management practices and how these practices might be changed to sequester more carbon in the farmland. She said Dettling Farms already follows some of the cropland management practices recommended in the carbon farm plan, such as rotating crops, reducing the depth and frequency of tillage, and using fuel-efficient farm equipment. She said the

fields are already rotated with a four- to five-year cycle of alfalfa, winter wheat (which also serves as a cover crop), and sunflower/safflower. She said the carbon farm plan estimated that rotating crops in this way sequestered about 3,718 metric tons of CO₂eq in the soil over the last 20 years. In addition, she said Dettling Farms uses technology and bigger equipment to minimize the number of times farm workers have to traverse the fields to make the planting beds. Dettling Farms only digs down about six inches, she said, and never deep rips or uses “field leveling” equipment which creates a lot of dust. Mr. Dettling said a “no till” policy at this location was not possible due to the clay soils which become too hard and compacted without some minimal tilling, she said.

One new recommended cropland management practice that could be implemented was installing hedgerows, she said. Mr. Dettling said hedgerows could be installed on the property with the help of grant funds, she said, and that they could be designed to minimize the maintenance cost. Another new recommended cropland management practice that could be implemented was adding compost. She said Bob Dettling was looking into how much the compost would cost. About 400 acres of Howat Ranch are suitable for compost, she said. Mr. Dettling said it would be possible to spread compost on a portion of those acres every year, she said.

One new recommended cropland management practice that wasn’t practical to implement at this time, according to Mr. Dettling, was planting cover crops, she said. Mr. Dettling said planting cover crops was too difficult given weather unpredictability and the limited time period available to plant the main crop, she said. Also, a lack of water at this location makes planting cover crops problematic, she said. Installing drip irrigation on some of the fields would make cover crops more feasible according to Mr. Dettling, she said.

Commissioner Vayssieres then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Vayssieres then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. Topics discussed included (1) how these practices might be financed, including what grants might be available, (2) how a wetland habitat restoration project might be implemented on the City’s Clayton Ranch property, (3) how the City might be able to monitor soil health and measure carbon capture, and (4) what the next steps might be. Ms. Reynolds said she would follow-up with Mr. Dettling. No action was taken.

7. Commission and Staff Communications

Upcoming Meeting Date, Time, Items

Ms. Reynolds said the next regularly scheduled meeting was Monday, June 6, the last meeting before the summer recess. Possible agenda items discussed included a discussion of (1) the budget for the City’s Open Space Program, (2) a draft “request for proposals” for new open space signage, and (3) the proposed design of the new culverts at Bretton Woods.

Upcoming Events

Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma said that he would be working at a table focusing on environmental policy at the Whole Earth Festival at UC Davis on May 6-8.

Subcommittee Reports

1. *Acquisitions.* No reports were given.
2. *Habitat Restoration and Enhancement.* Commissioner Price reported that this subcommittee met with Ms. Reynolds and Chris Gardner, the City’s Open Space Lands Manager, and John McNerney, the City’s Wildlife Biologist, to discuss possible turf conversion projects within the

City's network of parks and greenbelts. She said the subcommittee plans to meet with representatives from the City's Parks Department next.

3. *Land and Resource Management*. No reports were given.
4. *Public Access and Recreation*. No reports were given.
5. *Financial and Program Accountability*. No reports were given.
6. *Public Engagement and Partnerships*. No reports were given.
7. *Ad-Hoc Subcommittee to Improve Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the City's Open Space Program*. No reports were given.

Reports on Meetings Attended

No reports were given.

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

An update on the CAAP was provided to the Commission in the form of a staff report on the consent agenda. Ms. Reynolds said the Natural Resources Commission ("NRC") will have a Special Meeting on May 9 to make CAAP recommendations to the City Council on May 24. She said seven commissions have appointed a commission liaison to the NRC for CAAP discussions. She said there would be a substantive discussion at the NRC over the coming months as the Draft CAAP is completed, with anticipated release in July 2022. She asked if anyone on the Commission wanted to be the liaison to the NRC for the CAAP discussions. Commissioner Price volunteered to be the Commission's liaison. There were no objections.

8. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:04 p.m.