

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

Commissioners Present: Ramiro Cabanillas-Ledesma, Lindsay Correa, Patricia Price, Carrie Shaw (Chair), Emma Torbert, Marc Vayssieres (Vice Chair), and Sara Geonczy (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) (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 Price, which was seconded by Commissioner Correa, the Commission voted 7-0-1-0 to approve the June 2022 meeting agenda (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Geonczy, Price, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Huber; Abstentions – None).

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

Tracie Reynolds, staff to the Commission, said that the City completed the purchase of 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, on May 31. She said the State of California, which funded 75% of the purchase, wants to do a special tour of the Gill family property on June 22. She said she intended to discuss the possible purchase of another agricultural conservation easement on a different property owned by the Gill family with the City Council in closed session on June 14. A pre-application for grant funds is due to the State of California on June 15, she said.

Also, an agreement with American Tower to install a hedgerow around the company's cell tower on the City's Howat Ranch property was executed, she said, and site prep should begin in July with planting in January 2023.

Also, three community meetings were held in May, she said, to gather initial community input on a proposed habitat restoration/public access project the City is working on with UC Davis. She said about 20 people in total attended these meetings. Staff is currently drafting an access easement and letter of intent with UC Davis, which will go before the City Council for approval as soon as possible, she said. The next step will be hiring a design/engineering firm to design the improvements, perform the required engineering work, and prepare the construction drawings, she said.

Also, the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new public accessibility improvements at South Fork Preserve occurred on May 21, she said. She said about 25 people attended, including Yolo County Supervisor Jim Provenza, Mayor Gloria Partida, and City Councilmember Josh Chapman.

Finally, she said she would not be able to discuss the Open Space Program budget with the Commission this evening because the numbers aren't available yet. She said she would give a budget presentation to the Commission in the fall.

4. Public Comment

Alan Hirsch said that he was glad the City was finally updating the Urban Forest Management Plan but he said the review process is rushed so it is important for people to provide input or the City will get a “vanilla plan.” He said the plan should focus on (1) increased funding and staff training for effective tree pruning that will increase the longevity and safety of the City’s urban forest, (2) planting the right trees in the right strategic locations, such as downtown, along bike/pedestrian paths, and within apartment complexes, (3) increased funding for enforcement of the City’s Tree Planting, Preservation, and Protection Ordinance, and (4) creating milestones to measure progress.

5. Consent Calendar

There were two items on the consent calendar: approval of the May 2, 2022 regular meeting minutes and an informational staff report on the Urban Forest Management Plan (“Plan”) and the invitation to City commissions to provide input into the Plan. On a motion by Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma, which was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres, the Commission voted 7-0-1-0 to approve the consent calendar (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Geonczy, Price, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Huber; Abstentions – None).

6. Regular Items

Discussion Item – Receive a presentation from staff about the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s plan to monitor for and control, if necessary, invasive nutria along the South Fork of Putah Creek and Davis Wetlands

John McNerney, the City’s Wildlife Resources Specialist, gave the Commission a presentation about this topic. He said nutria are large semi-aquatic rodents from South America that can weigh up to 25 pounds. They look similar to beavers and muskrats but have a stiffer, rat-like tail. He said the invasive rodents were first detected in the San Joaquin Valley in 2017 and have spread rapidly throughout the state since then. They are incredibly destructive to levees, wetland habitat, and water conveyance infrastructure, he said. Nutria restricted in California and cannot be imported, transported, or possessed without a permit, he said. They are also labeled a top-rated agricultural pest by the federal government, he said.

He said the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (“CDFW”) had detected nutria at 500 sites within the southern Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. State biologists, he said, are expecting the animals to move up the Sacramento River watershed into the Yolo Bypass and its tributaries. He said the City was planning to work with the CDFW to control these animals on two City-owned properties: (1) the Davis wetlands, and (2) the farmland properties along the South Fork of Putah Creek known as the “Los Rios properties.” He said CDFW is requesting access to these City properties so that state biologists can monitor these sites using cameras, scat dogs, and detection platforms. If the animals are detected, he said state biologists intend to kill them using guns, snares and kill traps. No rodenticides will be used, he said.

Staff will recommend to the City Council that the City allow state biologists to access these two City-owned properties under the following conditions: (1) access to the Davis wetlands shall be during the hours of 7 a.m. and 3 p.m., Monday through Friday, (2) shooting will not be permitted at the Davis wetlands during public access hours, (3) state biologists must notify the City at least five business days prior to any planned shooting, (4) the use of scat-detecting dogs at the Davis wetlands must be avoided during the avian nesting season, and (5) game cameras shall be installed in a manner that prevents them from recording human activity.

Commissioner Shaw asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) what types of vegetation nutria eat (2) how the presence of scat-detecting dogs might impact the surrounding wildlife habitat, (3) whether any nutria had been spotted in the area, and (4) what happens to the nutria once they have been killed.

Commissioner Shaw then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Shaw then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. Commissioner Shaw said that she understood the need to control these rodents because it would be horrible to lose what little aquatic herbaceous vegetation we have left. No action was taken.

Discussion Item – Receive an update from staff on the proposed design of the new culverts at the Bretton Woods residential development

Ms. Reynolds said the Conditions of Approval for Bretton Woods require the developer to install two wildlife connectivity culverts in the stormwater conveyance channels that circle the property. Both culverts are supposed to have natural creek bottoms and include one or more ledges to allow for below-grade passage of various species. One of these culverts will be maintained by the City, she said, and the other will be maintained by the Bretton Woods homeowners' association. During the design review process, it was determined that dirt bottoms would be problematic because the dirt will support the growth of weeds and other vegetation. Over time, that vegetation will block water flow through the culvert and present maintenance challenges, she said. She said staff proposed a compromise between dirt and smooth concrete bottoms, which don't look natural at all. Staff proposed concrete stamped with a river-rock pattern, she said, so that the culvert bottoms would look natural but also prevent the growth of vegetation. The developer, however, recently informed the City that he wants the culverts to have smooth concrete bottoms and no wildlife ledges, she said. Staff believes the developer's proposal does not comply with the Conditions of Approval, she said. Staff told the developer that if he wants to amend the Conditions of Approval he would need to return to the Open Space and Habitat Commission for advice and to the Planning Commission for approval.

Commissioner Shaw asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) whether the features were designed with input from studies or surveys, (2) how often water will flow in the channel, and (3) who will be maintaining the channel.

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 developer's obligation to comply with the Conditions of Approval as written and explain the need for any proposed changes to the Commission, and (2) how a natural dirt bottom would provide continuous habitat, vegetation and cover for animals using the channel as a wildlife corridor. No action was taken.

Discussion Item – Receive an update from staff on the effort to install new signage in all of the City's open space areas

Ms. Reynolds summarized the proposed scope of work for a consultant to design and manufacture new signage for the City's open space areas. She said she was thinking of asking a consultant to design three types of signs: (1) a medallion-shaped logo/branding sign for the Open Space Program, (2) signs identifying the names of the City's open space areas, and (3) interpretive signs focusing on the open space network and how Measure O funds are used to maintain the open space areas. She showed the Commission some examples of medallion-shaped logo signs and location signs. She

said should would like to issue a Request for Proposals and get a consultant started on this work as soon as possible.

Commissioner Shaw asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) whether the City had considered how to engage the community and UC Davis students in this sign project, and (2) how this sign project relates to the City's on-going work to develop a communications strategy for the Open Space Program.

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) a recommendation for staff to discuss this project with the Public Engagement and Partnerships subcommittee, (2) ideas for the medallion-shaped logo, (3) ways to engage the community in this project, like organizing scavenger hunts or allowing community members to vote on their favorite logo, and (4) ways to engage UC Davis students, like asking a graphic design class to come up with their own designs for the logo. Ms. Reynolds said she would schedule a meeting with the Public Engagement and Partnerships subcommittee to discuss these ideas. No action was taken.

7. Commission and Staff Communications

Upcoming Meeting Date, Time, Items

Ms. Reynolds said the Commission historically takes July and August off so the next regularly scheduled meeting was Monday, September 12, since the first Monday of the month is a holiday. Possible agenda items discussed included a discussion of (1) the budget for the City's Open Space Program, (2) a proposed update to the regulations in the Municipal Code governing the City's open space areas, (3) an update on a consultant study of the wetlands, (4) an update on the draft communications strategy, and (5) the proposed design of the new culverts at Bretton Woods.

Upcoming Events

There were no upcoming events.

Subcommittee Reports

1. *Acquisitions*. No reports were given.
2. *Habitat Restoration and Enhancement*. Commissioner Price reported that this subcommittee met with staff from the City's Parks Department to discuss possible habitat enhancement projects within the City's network of parks and greenbelts. She summarized some of the habitat enhancement projects already underway and said the Commission would be able to provide input into the City's draft park design standards when the draft document is ready for review.
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

Commissioner Shaw reported on the ribbon-cutting ceremony that was held on May 21 for the new public accessibility improvements at South Fork Preserve.

Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (“CAAP”) Update

Commissioner Price, the Commission’s liaison to the Natural Resources Commission (“NRC”), said that the NRC made CAAP recommendations to the City Council on May 24. She said the City will need to do every single action to meet its greenhouse gas-reduction targets so prioritization is a moot point. She said there will be more discussion in coming months before the Draft CAAP is completed, with anticipated release in the fall of 2022.

Urban Forest Management Plan

Ms. Reynolds said City staff was working with the Tree Commission on the Urban Forest Management Plan (“Plan”) and that substantive discussions about the Plan would be taking place at Tree Commission meetings in coming months. She said if the Commission wished to provide input into the Plan, it should appoint a liaison to the Tree Commission. The liaison would only be asked to attend Tree Commission meetings when the Plan was on the agenda, she said. Commissioner Geonczy volunteered to be the Commission’s liaison to the Tree Commission. There were no objections.

8. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:28 p.m.