

**Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes**  
**Monday, May 1, 2023**  
**Community Chambers, 23 Russell Boulevard, 6:30 p.m.**

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

Vacant Positions: None

Commissioners Absent: Sara Geonczy (Alternate)

Assigned Staff: Tracie Reynolds, Manager, Open Space Program

Council Liaison: Josh Chapman (Regular), Bapu Vaitla (Alternate)

---

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

Commissioner Huber opened the meeting after a quorum was achieved and called roll call. Commissioner Vayssieres arrived during Item 3: Brief Announcements from Staff, Commissioners, and Council Liaisons.

**2. Approval of Agenda**

On a motion by Commissioner Price, that was seconded by Commissioner Torbert, the Commission voted 6-0-1-0 to approve the May 2023 meeting agenda (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Huber, Price, Shaw, Torbert; Noes – None; Absent – Vayssieres; Abstentions – None).

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

Tracie Reynolds, staff liaison to the Commission, said that staff had finished work on the new open space interactive map and that it would be available to the public soon. She said she would send the Commission a link when it was up and running on the City's website. In addition, she said the Commission's June meeting would be the last before the summer recess. That meeting will be the last meeting for Commissioners Shaw and Price, who are leaving the Commission at the end of June, she said. Finally, she said staff had hired a new sheep grazer, Perennial Grazing, to help manage the invasive weeds and restore function to the oak savannah habitat at South Fork Preserve. She said Perennial Grazing will bring a flock of sheep to the preserve during May and June to reduce the unwanted vegetation, break up a thick layer of thatch, and help cycle nutrients back into the soil. She said the City is excited to partner with this sheep grazer because the company specializes in healthy grazing practices that help stimulate the growth of native grasses.

**4. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**5. Consent Calendar**

There was one item on the consent calendar: approval of the March 6, 2023 regular meeting minutes. On a motion by Commissioner Torbert, that was seconded by Commissioner Shaw, the Commission voted 7-0-0-0 to approve the March 2023 meeting minutes (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Huber, Price, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

**6. Regular Items**

**Action Item -- Receive preliminary acquisition report about potential purchase of 250 acres of land between the levees along the South Fork of Putah Creek, east of South Fork Preserve, known as the "Paschoal Property" (Portion of APNs 033-130-006 and 033-110-008)**

Ms. Reynolds summarized the preliminary acquisition report, highlighting its location within three priority acquisition areas and between two City-owned properties, including South Fork Preserve. She said she was recommending pursuing this transaction because (1) the property has the potential to provide 250 acres of rich, valuable habitat (i.e., riparian, upland, and oak/savannah habitat) along both sides of a mile-long stretch of the South Fork of Putah Creek, (2) the property provides a rare opportunity to extend the trails from South Fork Preserve eastward, along a mile-long stretch of the creek, greatly increasing public access and recreation opportunities, (3) the property could provide rare access to scenic views of the creek and riparian habitat, (4) the property is adjacent to two large City-owned properties, meaning it provides the opportunity to protect almost three continuous miles of the creek for habitat restoration and public recreation, (5) the property's location and characteristics satisfy more than one priority acquisition criteria, and (6) the quality of the soil (Class 1, prime farmland if irrigated) increases the likelihood that a habitat restoration project would be successful. She said staff, at the direction of the City Council, had sent the property owner a "letter of intent" to purchase the 250 acres and was waiting to hear back from the property owner. She asked the Commission if it supported pursuing this transaction.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) the estimated cost to remove the walnut trees, (2) the location of the property's ag wells, and (3) the estimated cost to maintain the property. Commissioner Huber then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. Topics discussed included (1) possible entities the City could partner with to remove invasive species and manage the riparian habitat, (2) the agricultural potential of the property and possible entities the City could partner with to create community gardens and/or a demonstration project blending habitat and farming, and (3) the unique habitat values that the property offers.

Commissioner Shaw then made the following motion: *"The Open Space and Habitat Commission is very excited about this potential acquisition and recommends that the City Council direct staff to continue formal negotiations with the property owner over the terms of the fee title acquisition, and also look at creative financing, partnerships and potential long-term uses for the property."* The motion was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres.

Commissioner Torbert said she wanted this property to specifically include an agricultural element. Commissioners Shaw, Vayssieres and Huber said they did not think this site was appropriate for agriculture. Commissioner Correa said the Commission should first wait and see how the negotiations go with the property owner.

Commissioner Torbert then offered the following substitute motion: *"The Open Space and Habitat Commission is very excited about this potential acquisition and recommends that the City Council direct staff to continue formal negotiations with the property owner over the terms of the fee title acquisition, and also look at creative financing, partnerships and potential long-term uses for the property, and also explore acquiring the entire property with partnerships with the hope of establishing a community farm, with farming and trails."* The substitute motion was seconded by Commissioner Price. The substitute motion failed by a vote of 2-4-0-1 (Ayes – Price, Torbert; Noes – Correa, Huber, Shaw, Vayssieres; Absent – None; Abstentions – Cabanillas-Ledesma).

Commissioner Shaw's original motion then passed by a vote of 6-0-0-1 (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Huber, Price, Shaw, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – Torbert).

**Action Item -- Receive preliminary acquisition report about potential purchase of an 80-acre agricultural conservation easement located near the intersection of County Roads 104A and 30, about a mile from the Mace Boulevard curve, known as “Billie’s Farm” (APN 042-130-004)**

Ms. Reynolds summarized the preliminary acquisition report, highlighting its location within two priority acquisition areas and adjacent to other City-owned conservation easements. She said she was recommending pursuing this transaction because (1) the property is located a mile from the city limits and a mile from the “urban fringe” priority acquisition area, (2) the property consists of prime agricultural land (if irrigated), (3) the property protects views of the Sacramento skyline, (4) the property is adjacent to of the second agricultural conservation easement the City is currently working on with the Gill family, (5) the property’s location and characteristics satisfy more than one priority acquisition criteria, (6) the property’s organic farmland (no trees or vines) provide habitat for Swainson’s hawks and other birds and animal species, and (7) the property’s size and soils support farming. She said staff intended to discuss pursuing this transaction with the City Council on May 16 and asked the Commission if it supported pursuing this transaction.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. There were no clarifying questions. Commissioner Huber then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment and the Commission briefly discussed this item.

Commissioner Vayssieres then made the following motion: “*The Open Space and Habitat Commission is interested in pursuing this acquisition and recommends that the City Council direct staff to begin formal negotiations with the property owner over the terms of the agricultural conservation easement.*” The motion was seconded by Commissioner Shaw. The motion passed by a vote of 7-0-0-0 (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Huber, Price, Shaw, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

**7. Subcommittee and Liaison Assignment Updates**

- a. *Acquisitions.* Commissioner Huber discussed the two site visits.
- b. *Habitat Restoration and Enhancement.* Commissioner Huber reported on efforts by the Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee to (1) improve outreach to landowners about the Putah Creek Accord, (2) build a bypass for salmon around the Los Rios check dam, and (3) realign the creek channel west of Pedrick Road.
- c. *Land and Resource Management.* Commissioner Price mentioned that the City’s Climate Action and Adaptation Plan Update had been approved by the City Council and it included an action item to complete carbon farm plans for all City-owned farmland.
- d. *Public Access and Recreation.* No reports were given.
- e. *Financial and Program Accountability.* No reports were given.
- f. *Public Engagement and Partnerships.* No reports were given.
- g. *Ad-Hoc Subcommittee to Improve Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the City’s Open Space Program.* Commissioner Torbert mentioned a meeting with City Councilmember Vaitla and an upcoming meeting with the Center for Land-Based Learning staff.

**8. Long Range Calendar: Upcoming Meeting Dates and/or Potential Agenda Items**

The next regularly scheduled meeting is June 5, 2023. Possible agenda items discussed included (1) Commissioner farewells, and (2) a discussion of the proposed 2023-24 Open Space Program budget.

**9. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:09 p.m.