

Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes
Monday, March 4, 2024

Community Chambers Conference Room, 23 Russell Boulevard, 6:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present:	Ramiro Cabanillas-Ledesma, Lindsay Correa, Sara Geonczy, Patrick Huber (Chair), Emma Torbert, Marc Vayssieres (Vice Chair)
Vacant Positions:	One Regular Member, One Alternate Member
Commissioners Absent:	None
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. Commissioner Torbert arrived during Brief Announcements from Staff, Commissioners, and Council Liaisons

2. Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Vayssieres made a motion to approve the agenda. It was seconded by Commissioner Correa. The Commission voted 5-0-1-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Huber, Geonczy, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Torbert; Abstentions – None).

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

Tracie Reynolds, staff liaison to the Commission, said staff expects to complete the purchase of a 120-acre agricultural conservation easement on property owned by the Gill family in a few days. She also said staff and UC Davis representatives would be holding the second community meeting to gather public input on draft designs for a wetland habitat restoration project on March 13 at the Vet's Memorial Center. She said a third community meeting to discuss the draft designs would be held on the UC Davis campus in April in Hunt Hall.

Commissioner Huber said that Vice Mayor Bapu Vaitla would be coming to tonight's meeting, and that he wanted to ask Commissioners to help recruit qualified people to fill the Commission's two empty positions. He encouraged Commissioners to send the names of qualified people to Mayor Josh Chapman and Vice Mayor Bapu Vaitla, who both chair a subcommittee on commissioner recruitment.

4. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

5. Consent Calendar

Approval of the February 2024 meeting minutes was on the consent calendar. Commissioner Torbert made a motion to approve the minutes. It was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres. The Commission voted 6-0-0-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Huber, Geonczy, Torbert, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

6. Regular Items

Discussion Item – Review and provide comment on the proposed native plant and tree species in the urban forest adjacent to the Nishi student apartments project, as part of the project’s design review application, per the project’s Development Agreement dated June 6, 2018

Eric Lee, the City’s senior planner, summarized the staff report for this item. He said the project’s Development Agreement included a provision requiring the developer to review the landscape plan for the urban forest with the Tree Commission and Open Space and Habitat Commission, before the project goes to the Planning Commission. He said the urban forest was about 7.1 acres and stretched along the project’s southern edge, providing a 100-foot-wide buffer between Interstate 80 and the project’s residential area. The plant palette included a mix of tree species, including native trees and trees better able to filter particulate matter from the freeway, he said.

Don Shor, a local plant expert and special consultant to the developer of the Nishi project, said species were selected that would create a layered vegetated buffer between the project and the freeway, with a focus on evergreens and conifers. He said species were selected for their filtering ability, habitat quality, aesthetics, water use, and ability to fend off diseases. Mr. Lee said the Tree Commission did not have any comments on the tree species selected for the urban forest.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) why certain tree species were selected or not selected, (2) the potential fire risk, (3) whether there would be public access within the urban forest, and (4) how trees would be replaced over time. Commissioner Huber then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. Commissioner Huber said his concerns had been alleviated and he had a better understanding now of the multiple management objectives for this area. Commissioner Vayssieres said he appreciated the thought that went into the planting plan and how existing trees were integrated into the project.

The Commission informally recommended that (1) a management plan was created for the urban forest to ensure proper maintenance and make sure trees are replaced with similar species as trees die over time, and (2) the urban forest be planted as soon as possible so that the trees are somewhat established by the time the residential buildings are occupied. No action was taken.

Discussion Item – Discuss, in an introductory fashion, the City’s upcoming General Plan update process, what the Commission’s role in this process might be, what a general plan is and what it does, and what open space and habitat elements are part of the City’s current General Plan

Ms. Reynolds summarized the meeting materials for this item. She said Commissioners should familiarize themselves with the City’s current General Plan, especially the sections focusing on open space and habitat. She said the most recent update to the City’s current General Plan was approved in 2001 and took seven years to prepare. She said the City Council has decided that the General Plan is due for an update again, and will look to the commissions to help with updating the plan language and the community outreach. She said the City was not embarking on a full-scale rewrite of the plan, since much of the plan was still relevant, but was interested in updating it for current times.

Vice Mayor Bapu Vaitla said the City will be working with a consultant to create the plan update and help with the community outreach. He said the recent changes to the number and structure of the commissions was designed to align them with six of the key General Plan elements: circulation,

environmental justice, conservation, open space, land use, and housing. He said the Commission would be involved in the conservation and open space elements.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. Commissioners asked for clarification on (1) the nexus of the City's General Plan with county plans and county habitat conservation plans, (2) when the State of California will issue updated guidance on the required plan elements, (3) when the outside consultant will be hired, and (4) how commissions will interact with each other during this process.

Commissioner Huber then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment. The Commission then briefly discussed this item. No action was taken. Ms. Reynolds said she would put this topic on the agenda again soon to further discuss the current goals and objectives in the conservation and open space elements in the City's current General Plan.

7. Subcommittee and Liaison Assignment Updates

A. Liaison Assignments

(1) *Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee ("LPCCC")*. Commissioner Huber said there was nothing to report about the LPCCC.

(2) *Yolo Habitat Conservancy ("YHC")*. Commissioner Huber said there was nothing to report about the YHC's implementation committee.

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

The next regularly scheduled meeting is Monday, April 1, 2024. Possible agenda items discussed included (1) further discussion of the open space and habitat elements of the City's current General Plan, (2) a discussion of a consultant study focusing on the Davis wetlands, and (3) a discussion of the remaining action items needing attention in the 2030 Strategic Plan for the Open Space Program.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:19 p.m.