

**Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes**  
**Monday, October 7, 2024**  
**Community Chambers Conference Room, 23 Russell Boulevard, 6:30 p.m.**

Commissioners Present: Ramiro Cabanillas-Ledesma, Lindsay Correa, Sara Geonczy, Steve Greco, Christina Harrington, Patrick Huber (Chair), Marc Vayssieres (Vice Chair), *Christopher Alberts (Alternate)*

Vacant Positions: None

Commissioners Absent: None

Assigned Staff: Chris Gardner, Open Space Lands Manager

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

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

Commissioner Huber opened the meeting after a quorum was achieved. Chris Gardner, the City's Open Space Lands Manager, said he would be acting staff liaison in Tracie Reynolds's absence.

**2. Approval of Agenda**

Commissioner Correa made a motion to approve the agenda. It was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres. The Commission voted 7-0-0-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Geonczy, Greco, Harrington, Huber, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

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

Mr. Gardner said he did not have any announcements, but he provided the Commission with a brief summary of his job duties, and the organizations that partner with the City's Open Space Program.

**4. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**5. Consent Calendar**

Approval of the September 2024 meeting minutes was on the consent calendar. Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma made a motion to approve the minutes. It was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres. The Commission voted 7-0-0-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Geonczy, Greco, Harrington, Huber, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

**6. Regular Items**

**Action Item – Receive preliminary acquisition report about a potential agricultural conservation easement on 80 acres owned by the Beoshanz family located near the intersection of County Roads 31 and 96, along Dry Slough (APN 037-010-035)**

Mr. Gardner summarized the information contained in the preliminary acquisition report. He said the subject property included about one acre of habitat along Dry Slough, and is adjacent to the City's 86-acre Mclsaac Farms conservation easement along Dry Slough. He said the subject's site's location and characteristics satisfied three, possibly four, priority acquisition areas: "biological and natural resources," "scenic resources," "agriculture," and possibly "public access and recreation." He said the subject site provides an opportunity to possibly extend the City's limited public access rights along

Dry Slough. The adjacent Mclsaac Farms conservation easement includes a provision that allows the City to offer one guided tour per year along Dry Slough, limited to 20 people, he said. A similar provision could perhaps be included in the Beoshanz conservation easement, he said. He asked the Commission if it would like staff to seek the City Council's permission to pursue this acquisition. He said pre-applications for acquisition grants are due January 31, 2025 to the State of California.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. The Commission asked for clarification on (1) the purpose of the conservation easement, (2) whether the easement could prohibit the planting of orchards and/or require habitat restoration, (3) the basis for the City's priority acquisition areas, and (4) what other conservation easements were in this general area. Commissioner Huber then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma then made a motion to recommend that staff seek the City Council's permission to pursue this acquisition with specific land use restrictions attached. The motion was not seconded and Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma withdrew his motion. He then made a second motion to recommend that staff seek the City Council's permission to pursue this acquisition with the following two suggestions: (1) that the agricultural land uses allowed under the easement align with the Yolo Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan ("Yolo HCP/NCCP") if possible (for example, allowing row crops but not permanent crops), and (2) that the easement language support habitat enhancements on the riparian corridor. It was seconded by Commissioner Harrington. The Commission voted 7-0-0-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Geonczy, Greco, Harrington, Huber, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

**Action Item – Receive preliminary acquisition report about a potential agricultural conservation easement on 320 acres owned by Dhir Capital located adjacent to Grasslands Regional Park, on County Road 35 (APN 033-130-011)**

Mr. Gardner summarized the information contained in the preliminary acquisition report. He said the subject property was adjacent to Yolo County's Grasslands Regional Park and the Yolo Land Trust's 160-acre Schmid Family Trust conservation easement. He said the subject's site's location and characteristics satisfied two priority acquisition areas: "agriculture" and "scenic resources." He said the property owner was also willing to sell the City a conservation easement on an additional 320 acres to the south of the subject site. However, those 320 acres are just outside the Davis Planning Area, and staff is unsure whether open space parcel taxes could be used to purchase a conservation easement outside the Davis Planning Area, he said. All 640 acres were recently planted in pistachio and almond trees, he said. He asked the Commission if it would like staff to seek the City Council's permission to pursue this acquisition. He said pre-applications for acquisition grants are due January 31, 2025 to the State of California.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. The Commission asked for clarification on (1) the estimated cost of the easement and the available budget, (2) whether there was an opportunity cost to pursuing this easement, and (3) conservation priorities and how to rank easement choices. Commissioner Huber then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. Commissioner Vayssieres made a motion to recommend that staff seek the City Council's permission to pursue this acquisition with the following two suggestions: (1) that the agricultural land uses allowed under the easement align with the Yolo HCP/NCCP if possible (for example, allowing row crops but not permanent crops), and (2) that the easement language support habitat enhancements. It was seconded by Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma. The Commission voted 7-

0-0-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Geonczy, Greco, Harrington, Huber, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

Commissioner Huber then made a second motion to encourage the City to explore the ability to purchase a conservation easement on the additional 320 acres owned by Dhir Capital that lies south of the 320 acres in Item 6B, outside the Davis Planning Area. It was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres. The Commission voted 7-0-0-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Geonczy, Greco, Harrington, Huber, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

**Action Item – Receive staff report and decide whether staff should prepare a preliminary acquisition report for a potential land acquisition along the South Fork of Putah Creek, between the levees west of South Fork Preserve, owned by HM Clause and the William Schoeningh Trust (portions of APNs 0110-060-080 and 0110-120-010)**

Mr. Gardner summarized the information contained in the staff report. He said this possible acquisition involved buying about 130 acres of land along the South Fork of Putah Creek, between the levees west of County Road 104 and west of the City’s South Fork Preserve. The 130 acres are currently part of two larger parcels in Solano County owned by two different owners, HM Clause Inc. and the William A. Schoeningh Trust, he said. About 110 of the 130 acres are planted in row crops and the remaining 20 acres are part of the riparian habitat of the South Fork of Putah Creek, he said. Both properties are part of larger parcels, so this possible acquisition would involve two different lot line adjustments to separate the 130 acres from the two existing parcels, he said.

He said the Solano Multispecies Habitat Conservation Plan had designated this area as a priority acquisition area because it contains multiple conservation elements, such as riparian vegetation, covered species occurrences (i.e., Chinook salmon and steelhead), watershed integrity and water quality. This area is also noted for its major riparian vegetation stands, he said. Staff would like to purchase these acres and transform them into habitat, with public access, over time, he said. He said the subject’s site’s location and characteristics satisfied three priority acquisition areas: “biological and natural resources,” “scenic resources,” and “public access and recreation.” He asked the Commission if it would like staff to prepare a formal preliminary acquisition report for further discussion.

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 discussed this item. Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma made a motion to ask staff to prepare a full preliminary acquisition report on this possible acquisition. It was seconded by Commissioner Geonczy. The Commission voted 7-0-0-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Geonczy, Greco, Harrington, Huber, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

**Action Item – Receive staff report and decide whether staff should prepare a preliminary acquisition report for a potential agricultural conservation easement on 120 acres located near the intersection of County Roads 104A and 30, owned by the Gill Family Trust (APNs 033-650-003 and 042-130-003)**

Mr. Gardner summarized the information contained in the staff report. He said this possible acquisition involved buying a conservation easement on about 120 acres of farmland located near the intersection of County Roads 104A and 30. The 120 acres is comprised of two separate legal

parcels, he said. One parcel is about 35 acres and was planted in almond trees in 2022, he said. It includes a farmhouse and a 5,500-square-foot ag office/warehouse, he said. The second parcel is about 85 acres and is currently planted in row crops, he said. The Gills plan to plant nut trees in 2026, he said. It also has a remnant vacant homestead area, he said. He said the subject's site's location and characteristics satisfied two priority acquisition areas: "scenic resources" and "agriculture." He asked the Commission if it would like staff to prepare a formal preliminary acquisition report for further discussion. He said pre-applications for acquisition grants are due January 31, 2025 to the State of California.

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 discussed this item. Commissioner Greco made a motion to ask staff to prepare a full preliminary acquisition report on this possible conservation easement. It was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres. The Commission voted 7-0-0-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Correa, Geonczy, Greco, Harrington, Huber, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

### **Discussion Item – Receive a staff presentation about the City's land management practices and site conditions at certain open space areas**

Mr. Gardner gave the Commission a presentation about how the City manages more than 200 acres of open space in and around the City. He said these areas are owned by the City to preserve local habitat and provide recreational opportunities for the public. He said staff tries to work with the ecosystem and manage the land in a way that best mimics the existing natural processes to promote native biodiversity, in particular native grasses and forbs. At South Fork Preserve, he said targeted grazing is an important part of controlling invasive species and managing the grasslands at the nature preserve. He also talked about new hedgerows at the City's Howat Ranch property off County Road 105. He said the City partners with local service organizations, the Yolo Resource Conservation District, student interns, and volunteers to help get its restoration work done.

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 discussed this item. Commissioner Harrington asked about the City's monitoring and mapping efforts. Mr. Gardner said some of the City's partners do monitoring and mapping at certain sites, but the City is not able to do it at all sites. Commissioners Harrington and Correa offered to connect staff to local citizen-science groups who might be able to expand the City's capacity in this area. No action was taken.

## **7. Subcommittee and Liaison Assignment Updates**

### **A. Liaison Assignments**

- (1) *Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee ("LPCCC")*. Commissioner Huber said the Solano County Water Agency ("SCWA") was currently releasing pulse flows to provide enough water for migrating salmon to clear the check dam at the end of Putah Creek. He said SCWA had also installed a temporary wooden fish ladder at the check dam to help salmon get past the check dam and enter the creek. He said the temporary fish ladder would stay in place until a more permanent solution is funded and finalized.
- (2) *Yolo Habitat Conservancy ("YHC")*. Commissioner Huber said there was nothing to report from the YHC's implementation committee.

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

The next regularly scheduled meeting is Monday, November 4, 2024. Possible agenda items discussed included (1) a discussion of a preliminary acquisition report about another Gill family property, (2) a discussion of a preliminary acquisition report about a possible land acquisition along the South Fork of Putah Creek, and (3) a discussion of the final draft design for the wetlands habitat restoration project the City is working on with UC Davis. The Commission also asked for a budget update at a future meeting.

**9. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:20 p.m.