

Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes
Monday, October 6, 2025
Community Chambers Conference Room, 23 Russell Boulevard, 6:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Ramiro Cabanillas-Ledesma, Sara Geonczy, Steve Greco, Patrick Huber (Chair), Eric Newman, Marc Vayssieres

Vacant Positions: *Alternate*

Commissioners Absent: Christina Harrington (Vice Chair)

Assigned Staff: Tracie Reynolds, Open Space Program Manager

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 took roll call. Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma arrived during Brief Announcements.

2. Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Geonczy made a motion to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres. The Commission voted 5-0-2-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Geonczy, Greco, Huber, Newman, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Harrington; Abstentions – None).

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

Ms. Reynolds, staff to the Commission, said staff from the State Department of Conservation's Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation ("SALC") program were recommending that the City receive a grant to help purchase an agricultural conservation easement on 79 acres owned by the Beoshanz family. She said SALC staff would make the recommendation at a meeting on October 8 of the Strategic Growth Council. The City's easement was one of 39 easements that were being recommended for funding, for a total of \$91.5 million in grants, she said. The Yolo Land Trust won three additional grants, and the Solano Land Trust one additional grants, she said. In total, five easements in our area are expected to win grants, she said, for a total of 875 acres protected.

She also reminded the Commission of two upcoming meetings this week. She said on October 8 there is a mini "Commissionpalooza" to discuss possible amendments to Measure J/R/D. She asked Commissioners to read the meeting materials and come prepared to provide input on any possible amendments within the Commission's purview that they would like the City Council to consider. She also mentioned that on October 9 there would be a training for commission chairs and vice chairs.

Finally, she said that a City Council subcommittee was currently reviewing all the applications for the General Plan Committee. She said she had turned in all the applications she had received. The City Council plans to formally select the individuals for the committee on October 21, she said.

4. Public Comment

There was no general public comment.

5. Consent Calendar

On consent was the approval of the September 2025 meeting minutes. Commissioner Vayssieres made a motion to approve the draft minutes. It was seconded by Commissioner Newman. The

Commission voted 6-0-1-0 to approve the draft minutes (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Geonczy, Greco, Huber, Newman, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Harrington; Abstentions – None).

6. Regular Items

Discussion Item – Receive an informational staff presentation about the City’s efforts to support American kestrels on City open space lands and on other lands

The Commission received a presentation on this topic from John McNerney, the City’s Ecological Resources Program Manager. Over the last two years, the City has been collaborating with local partners to build, install, acquire, replace, monitor and collect data from artificial kestrel nest boxes on several City-owned properties and private properties within the Davis Planning Area, he said. The primary goal of the project, he said, is to provide critical nesting habitat for these small falcons to help increase their population. The number of American kestrels has declined significantly in North America over the last 30 years, he said. The project will also provide local researchers with data on the falcon’s nest site preference and breeding success, he said. The nest boxes are designed specifically to support the American kestrel, but they also benefit other cavity-nesting species, such as the western bluebird, the western screech owl, and the northern flicker, he said.

To date, he said the program is actively monitoring 28 kestrel boxes within the Davis Planning Area. In 2023, volunteers documented one occupied box with one successful nest, he said. This year, the results were better, he said, with volunteers documenting five occupied boxes with four successful nests. Nesting data collected is contributing to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s *NestWatch* database, he said, and is being used by staff and partners to predict which lands might be suitable for additional nest boxes. Students and researchers from UC Davis are using the nest boxes to collect valuable data on the movement of adult kestrels, their foraging and migrating habits, and how pesticides may be impacting the decline in birth rates, he said. The project has generated significant interest in regional American kestrel conservation from multiple groups, he said. Staff will continue to monitor project progress and report back with additional ways the City or others can be involved, he said.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. The Commission asked for clarification on (1) how the falcons interact with invasive bird species, (2) what the bird’s nest building and foraging habits were, (3) what kind of landowner interest and cooperation City staff had received, (4) whether other open space areas could serve as host properties for the nest boxes, and (5) what sound the falcons make. Commissioner Huber then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. The Commission thanked Mr. McNerney for the presentation and his work on this topic. No action was taken.

Discussion Item – Receive an informational staff presentation about the approved budget for the Open Space Program for the 2025-26 fiscal year

The Commission received its annual presentation on this topic from staff. Ms. Reynolds explained the baseline budget, additions to the baseline budget, and multi-year expenditures that are not shown in the annual budget. She also explained the main revenue sources the City’s Open Space Program relies on, such as the special open space parcel tax, known as Measure O. She said the program’s 2025-26 budget is about \$802,000. Of those funds, about 14% comes from the City’s General Fund, about 65% comes from the Measure O fund, about 6% comes from open space development impact fees, and about 14% comes from ag lease revenue, she said. That money will be spent on: personnel, including outside contractors (48%), maintenance, operating, supplies and equipment

(8%), allocated overhead (15%), and ongoing capital improvements (29%), she said. Other multi-year capital improvement projects not shown in the annual budget include a wetlands habitat restoration project the City is working on with UC Davis, an open space signage project, and an interpretive signage project for the North Davis Upland Habitat Area, she said. She also discussed about \$10 million in restricted fund balances that are available for open space acquisitions, maintenance, and capital improvements.

She concluded her presentation by giving the Commission a detailed look at the revenues and expenses projected to flow into and out of the open space parcel tax fund (Measure O) for the upcoming fiscal year and beyond. She said 39% of expenses from the Measure O fund during the 2025-26 fiscal year is budgeted to be spent on maintenance, including staff.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. The Commission asked for clarification on (1) how much lease revenue is generated from the Proposition 70 agricultural properties, (2) how much of the City's General Fund is used to support the City's Open Space Program, and (3) other revenue sources. Commissioner Huber then took public comment. There was no public comment. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment and the Commission briefly discussed this item. No action was taken.

Action Item – Select up to three Commissioners to serve on a special City Council-requested subcommittee looking at peripheral parcels that are high priority for open space and habitat conservation and agricultural easements

Staff reminded the Commission that on January 7, 2025, the City Council approved a contract with an outside consultant to prepare the required documents and help with community outreach related to an update to the City's General Plan. As part of this discussion and action, she said, the City Council also passed the following motion: *“Authorize and direct Open Space and Habitat Commission to form a subcommittee to look at peripheral parcels that are high priority for open space and habitat conservation and agricultural easements in a quasi-spatially explicit manner.”* The Commission could select up to three Commissioners to serve on this subcommittee, she said.

Commissioner Huber said the subcommittee would be pulling data from multiple sources to help inform the General Plan Update process. He introduced a UC Davis student who would be helping the subcommittee with the GIS (Geographic Information System) work. Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. The Commission did not have any 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 Huber asked for nominations. Commissioner Vayssieres said that he would like to serve on the subcommittee. Patrick Huber also said that he would like to be on the subcommittee, and also nominated Commissioner Greco to serve on the subcommittee.

Commissioner Greco then made the following motion: *“The Open Space and Habitat Commission selects Commissioners Huber, Greco and Vayssieres to serve on the subcommittee that will look at peripheral parcels that are high priority for open space and habitat conservation and agricultural easements.”* The Commission voted 6-0-1-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Geonczy, Greco, Huber, Newman, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Harrington; Abstentions – None).

7. Subcommittee and Liaison Assignment Updates

A. Liaison Assignments

(1) *Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee (“LPCCC”)*. Commissioner Huber said the LPCCC continues to look for solutions to the homeless encampment problem along the creek. He also said it was almost time for the salmon to make their way up Putah Creek to the Winters spawning grounds. He said there wasn’t time this year to remove an infestation of invasive water hyacinth so the fish will have to navigate through the dense vegetation. Finally, he mentioned that the Winters Salmon Festival this year would be honoring the 25th anniversary of the Putah Creek Accord, the landmark agreement that restored flows to the lower creek and made it possible for the salmon to return.

(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 3, 2025. Possible agenda items discussed included a discussion of issues related to natural resources and conservation in the General Plan Update.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:22 p.m.