

Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes
Monday, November 3, 2025
Community Chambers Conference Room, 23 Russell Boulevard, 6:30 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Steve Greco, Christina Harrington (Vice Chair), Patrick Huber (Chair), Eric Newman, Marc Vayssieres

Vacant Positions: *Alternate*

Commissioners Absent: Ramiro Cabanillas-Ledesma, Sara Geonczy

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.

2. Approval of Agenda

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

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

Ms. Reynolds, staff to the Commission, said that on October 21 the City Council had selected the individuals who will be serving on the General Plan Committee, which is comprised of commissioners from several city commissions. She said Commissioners Huber and Greco were selected to serve as the two representatives from the Open Space and Habitat Commission to serve on the committee.

She also mentioned that new open space signage was being installed in the City's open space areas. Signs had already been installed at the North Davis Upland Habitat Area and in the northern leg of the Wildhorse Agricultural Buffer, she said. Crews from the Sacramento Regional Conservation Corps would be installing the signs at all open space areas in coming months, she said.

Finally, she updated the Commission on the status of several conservation easements. She said the City was awarded a \$420,000 grant from the State of California to purchase a conservation easement on 79 acres owned by the Beoshanz family. She said she expected the grant agreement to be executed in January and for the transaction to close by the end of 2026. She also said the owner of El Molino Farm had decided not to subdivide his property and was pursuing a conservation easement on the agricultural value of his 217-acre property. The Solano Land Trust was working on the updated appraisal for that property, she said, and expected to close that transaction by the end of 2026. She also said staff was finalizing a 106-acre conservation easement on the Tauzer family farm, which will serve as mitigation for the loss of agricultural land and Swainson's hawk foraging habitat related to the Nishi student housing development. A couple more easements were in the pipeline, she said, but staff didn't have enough information to update the Commission at this time.

4. Public Comment

There was no general public comment.

5. Consent Calendar

On consent was the approval of the October 2025 meeting minutes. Commissioner Newman made a motion to approve the draft minutes. It was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres. The Commission voted 4-0-2-1 to approve the motion (Ayes – Greco, Huber, Newman, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Geonczy; Abstentions – Harrington).

6. Regular Items

Discussion Item – Receive a presentation from staff and City consultants about the 2025 General Plan Update and discuss key natural resources and conservation issues and potential strategies to bridge the gap between these issues and the proposed vision and project outcomes

The Commission received a presentation on this topic from the City's consultants: Eric Yurkovich of Raimi + Associates and Paul Stephenson of Environmental Science Associates. Mr. Yurkovich said tonight was about gathering feedback on open space issues and brainstorming strategy ideas, and that they would come back to the Commission in the Spring to discuss land use in more detail. He said land use and mobility are the two key issues in every general plan. He noted recent legislative changes related to open space, which now require all general plans to address open space equity, climate resilience, and rewilding opportunities. He then gave the Commission a broad overview of the timeline, draft vision, and the City's demographics and trends. He said the City has a robust system of farmlands and habitat areas and many existing policies that advance conservation goals. But future threats such as climate change and development pressures could potentially contribute to the loss of farmland and habitat areas, he said. Mr. Stephenson then presented a broad overview of the Natural Resources and Conservation Existing Conditions Report, focusing on agricultural land, habitats, ag buffers, special status species, and existing open space areas and conservation easements. Mr. Yurkovich concluded the presentation by discussing a few critical issues related to biological resources, agricultural resources, financial concerns, and development pressures. He then proposed a few draft strategies to address those issues to start the discussion, such as requiring new developments to provide open space amenities. He then asked the Commission (1) if there were any open space issues the consultants missed, and (2) what key strategies there were for open space conservation that bridge the gap between the key issues and the aspirational vision.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. There were no clarifying questions, but during the presentation several Commissioners suggested edits to a couple of the maps the consultants showed that depicted agricultural areas and habitat areas. Commissioner Huber suggested that the map showing agricultural lands should include agricultural land the City owns that isn't protected by a deed restriction or conservation easement, such as Howat Ranch. Commissioner Greco suggested that UC Davis's Russell Ranch properties should be removed from the map depicting open space and natural areas within the Davis Planning Area.

Commissioner Huber then took public comment. Ning Wan asked how a person could access Putah Creek west of UC Davis's West Village and which areas were publicly owned. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment and the Commission provided the following feedback:

- Climate change is a real issue and there should be mandatory tree canopy requirements;
- Thought should be given to where the tree canopy should be located;
- Increasing access for disadvantaged groups to open space should be highlighted as a critical issue;

- People want more public access to open space but that requires the City to buy more land. Thought should be given to maintenance costs and how those costs will be funded;
- Davis residents love their stormwater detention ponds that are vegetated and also serve as habitat areas, and they want more of them. Thought should be given to maintenance costs and how those costs will be funded;
- The habitat restoration that the City completed several years ago along a portion of Channel A (aka North Davis Channel or North Davis Ditch) should be highlighted as a “rewilded” area;
- The headwaters of Channel A, the City’s most important urban habitat feature, should be included on the map showing ecological corridors within the Davis Planning Area;
- The City’s vast drainage system, which includes stormwater detention basins (aka ponds) and stormwater channels, should be managed for habitat and considered ecological corridors. For example, stormwater channels should include native trees and shrubs to increase roughness;
- Willow Slough and Dry Slough should also be included on the map showing ecological corridors within the Davis Planning Area;
- Measure O, the City’s open space parcel tax, should be highlighted in the discussion about the preservation of agricultural land in the Davis Planning Area;
- Restoration of open space should be a key strategy for enhancing existing and future open space areas;
- New development projects should be required to enhance and integrate existing habitat into the built environment;
- The City should apply for grants to implement open space priorities;
- The City should promote conservation easements as a way for farmers to lower their property tax bills and offset the rising costs associated with accessing groundwater;
- The crop map for the Davis Planning Area should be updated with more accurate data from the California Department of Water Resources;
- Thought should be given to showing the City’s “community separator” priority acquisition areas in the visuals for the community discussion on future land use patterns; and
- The City’s Public Works staff and Open Space staff should coordinate more closely to make sure flood control channels and basins are managed as habitat corridors.

Ms. Reynolds also provided the following feedback as manager of the City’s Open Space Program:

- Thought should be given to what agricultural buffers become when the other side of the buffer gets developed, and they are no longer functioning as ag buffers; and
- Thought should be given to soil borrow sites, what they should become, and where they should be located within the Davis Planning Area.

City staff and the consultant team thanked the Commission for its feedback. No action was taken.

7. Subcommittee and Liaison Assignment Updates

A. Liaison Assignments

(1) *Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee (“LPCCC”)*. Commissioner Huber said the October meeting was cancelled. He also said there was a great turnout for the Winters Salmon Festival this year that honored 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. Several local political figures attended, he said. This year, 350 salmon have been documented swimming in the creek, which is a big improvement from last year, he said.

(2) *Yolo Habitat Conservancy (“YHC”)*. Commissioner Huber said there was nothing to report from the YHC’s implementation committee.

B. City Council-Requested Subcommittee (High-Priority Open Space Peripheral Parcels). Commissioner Huber, chair of this three-member subcommittee, said the subcommittee met today. Commissioner Greco said they discussed general topics related to the Commission’s discussion today. Commissioner Huber said he was meeting with the City’s Geographic Information Systems (GIS) person tomorrow to discuss data sharing. He also said the subcommittee will likely be making its own open space and natural areas map.

C. General Plan Committee (General Plan Update). Commissioner Huber said there was nothing to report other than he and Commissioner Greco were appointed to this committee.

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

The next regularly scheduled meeting is Monday, December 1, 2025. Possible agenda items discussed included a report from the City Council-Requested Subcommittee (High-Priority Open Space Peripheral Parcels). The Commission also agreed with staff that the January 5, 2026 Commission meeting should be cancelled. Staff said the Commission will likely discuss the open space and habitat features of the proposed Willowgrove project at its February 2026 meeting.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:47 p.m.