

Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes
Monday, February 2, 2026
Community Chambers, 23 Russell Boulevard, 6:30 p.m.

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

Vacant Positions: *Alternate*

Commissioners Absent: None

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 Cabanillas-Ledesma. The Commission voted 7-0-0-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Geonczy, Greco, Harrington, Huber, Newman, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

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

Ms. Reynolds, staff to the Commission, said the Solano County Water Agency was awarded a \$1.2 million planning grant from the California Wildlife Conservation Board to study a possible permanent vehicular crossing over the South Fork of Putah Creek at County Road 106A at the City's Los Rios property. She also said pre-proposals for grant applications were due now to the California Department of Conservation, under the Sustainable Agricultural Land Conservation program, for grants to purchase agricultural conservation easements. She said staff intended to submit two pre-proposals in coming weeks, one for the Gill Orchard #3 property and the other for the Bensen Farm property. She noted the Commission already considered both properties and had recommended to the City Council that staff pursue these acquisitions. If the City is asked to submit full grant applications, staff will bring resolutions to the City Council for its consideration, she said. Finally, she said that "Commissionpalooza #2" is scheduled for April 13, 2026 at 5:30 p.m.

4. Public Comment

There was no general public comment.

5. Consent Calendar

On consent was the approval of the December 2025 meeting minutes. Commissioner Harrington made a motion to approve the draft minutes. It was seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres. The Commission voted 7-0-0-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Geonczy, Greco, Harrington, Huber, Newman, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

6. Regular Items

Action Item – Provide recommendations on the open space and habitat features of the proposed Willowgrove development project

Eric Lee, a planner in the City's Planning Department, started staff's presentation by giving the Commission an overview of project elements and the timeline for project approvals. Ms. Reynolds then summarized the open space and habitat features in the Willowgrove proposal, including (1) compliance with the City's agricultural land mitigation ordinance, (2) the features of the agricultural buffer, including the four stormwater detention basins, the existing segment of Channel A that runs through the project, and the open space trail system, and (3) native plantings in the ag buffer and in the project as a whole. She said staff was seeking the Commission's feedback on these features. The project applicant team then gave the Commission a presentation about the project in general and additional details about the project's open space and habitat features. The project applicant team also addressed staff's recommendations in the staff report.

Commissioner Huber then asked if Commissioners had any clarifying questions. The Commission asked for clarification on (1) why Channel A was considered a "water of the United States" by the project applicant team, thereby triggering permit restrictions, (2) whether additional improvements to Channel A could be added to the permit application, (3) why the dirt culvert currently in Channel A could not be removed, (4) where the project's urban forest was located, and (5) the design of the project's trail system and drainage system. Commissioner Huber then took public comment.

- Sarah (last name not given) said she supported the Willowgrove project and she appreciated the developer's commitment to preserve Channel A as a natural feature for the Davis community. She said she wanted the project to be approved. She said the project had set aside housing for adults with intellectual development disabilities like her son, Charlie, who she said deserve a place to live that has open space for the family to enjoy together.
- Kelly Safford strongly urged the Commission to increase the width of the Wildhorse agriculture buffer. She said it was a Davis treasure with sensitive and unique habitat, enjoyed by lots of people. She said the proposed Willowgrove project planned to build residential lots right next to the buffer and that would undermine the habitat in the existing ag buffer. She said building right next to the existing ag buffer will create a much less animal-friendly environment.
- Victoria Linney said she loved all the open space that Davis offers, unlike typical suburban communities. She said the Willowgrove project should include undeveloped land next to the existing Wildhorse ag buffer, otherwise the existing ag buffer would be grossly changed. She said the existing Wildhorse ag buffer is precious and expanding its width would be a minimum concession to keep the existing natural area viable as a wildlife area.
- Hugh Safford (Statement read by Marjorie Longo) said his major concern was the impact the proposed Willowgrove project would have on the existing Wildhorse ag buffer. He said it was a very special place and hosts a variety of wildlife. He said he would like the project to expand the existing ag buffer to at least 328 feet in width, incorporate other measures to soften the western edge of their project, and restore native habitat in the expanded buffer.
- Jessica Guerrieri said the project reflects a thoughtful balance between needing housing and community benefit. She said the connected trail design enhances access to open space for the Davis community, strengthens the City's existing path network, and encourages active transportation. She said the overall design of the project clearly shows a consideration for habitat, connectivity, long-term stewardship, and amenities that reflect the City's values.

- Jeff Merritt said he supported the Willowgrove project because the development team has included open space and habitat as a core part of the project and not something that's added at the end of the project approvals. He said the development team is trying to balance the need for housing with the community's open space and habitat desires. He said the development team has earned trust by making actual commitments, not just future promises.
- Lisa McDaniel said the City's ag buffer ordinance has a goal to permit public views of farmland. She said after the Willowgrove project is built, residents will lose those views of farmland. She said the existing Wildhorse ag buffer will still be a sensitive habitat area after the Willowgrove project is built. She said building houses on its border would negatively impact that sensitive wildlife area, and asked the City to prevent homeowners from installing gates into that area.
- A person who did not identify himself said earthen pathways can be a risk to older people. He said his 78-year-old wife tripped and fell on an earthen pathway. He said earthen pathways can work if they are compacted and suitable for walking and biking.

The Commission also received written comments from Cathy Carter, Vicki Link, Kate Muir, Hugh Safford, Kelly Safford, and Russ Townsley. Commissioner Huber then closed public comment and the Commission discussed this item. Discussion topics included (1) the request from residents to expand the width of the Wildhorse agricultural buffer, (2) the value of enhancing the riparian habitat along Channel A, (3) whether the grazing of goats and sheep could be used as a management tool in the agricultural buffer, (4) the pros and cons of concrete trails within the agricultural buffer, (5) the value of trees planted around the stormwater detention basins, (6) whether the City should have a policy to protect the habitat value of existing agricultural buffers once development occurs on the undeveloped side of the agricultural buffer, (7) the value of removing the existing dirt culvert and antiquated pump infrastructure from the channel, and (8) what locally native tree species should be planted along the channel and within the agricultural buffer.

During the discussion on this item, the Commission passed all of the following motions by a 7-0-0-0 vote (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Geonczy, Greco, Harrington, Huber, Newman, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None):

1. *"The Open Space and Habitat Commission strongly suggests a valley oak woodland and California native sycamore grove of more than 100 trees in the northwest corner of the project site."* (Motion made by Commissioner Greco and seconded by Commissioner Newman.)
2. *"The Open Space and Habitat Commission sees value in removing the existing dirt culvert to open the channel to improve the movement of animals and increase the ability of water to flow through the channel."* (Motion made by Commissioner Vayssieres and seconded by Commissioner Greco. Commissioner Huber proposed a friendly amendment to add the clause underlined above and it was accepted by the main mover and seconder.)
3. *"The Open Space and Habitat Commission recommends that in those open space areas of the project site where the planting of trees is appropriate, the forest cover should be maximized."* (Motion made by Commissioner Newman and seconded by Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma.)

4. *"The Open Space and Habitat Commission recommends that the landscaping planted on the full project site, including any offsite improvements that might be done within the Wildhorse Agricultural Buffer, be maximized to be California native species ~~that can be found within 100 miles of the City of Davis~~ from the Central Valley or Central Valley foothills."* (Motion made by Commissioner Huber and seconded by Commissioner Greco. Commissioner Greco proposed a friendly amendment to replace the crossed-out clause above with the underlined clause above and these changes were accepted by the main mover and seconder. Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma proposed another friendly amendment to add the clause double underlined above and it was also accepted by the main mover and seconder.)
5. *"The Open Space and Habitat Commission recommends that the developer be required, to the extent the removal process does not substantially hinder or slow down the project, to remove the existing defunct pump infrastructure in the channel."* (Motion made by Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma and seconded by Commissioner Newman.)
6. *"The Open Space and Habitat Commission recommends that the developer minimize concrete pavement on the east pathway in the agricultural buffer."* (Motion made by Commissioner Geonczy and seconded by Commissioner Vayssieres.)
7. *"The Open Space and Habitat Commission recommends that the developer explore the option of expanding the planting of native plants in the buffer zones along Channel A."* (Motion made by Commissioner Newman and seconded by Commissioner Greco.)
8. *"The Open Space and Habitat Commission recommends that the four drainage basins in the agricultural buffer be seeded purely with a seed mix of California native grasses and forbs."* (Motion made by Commissioner Vayssieres and seconded by Commissioner Newman.)
9. *"The Open Space and Habitat Commission recommends that any irrigation installed in the open space areas are not permanent, landscaping-level irrigation but are sufficient to provide access to water for temporary irrigation and watering when necessary."* (Motion made by Commissioner Harrington and seconded by Commissioner Cabanillas-Ledesma.)
10. *"The Open Space and Habitat Commission recommends that trees be planted along all the edges of the three drainage basins, around the three drainage basins, on the eastern side of the agricultural buffer."* (Motion made by Commissioner Greco and seconded by Commissioner Newman.)
11. *"The Open Space and Habitat Commission recommends that the developer minimize any fencing around the four drainage basins in the agricultural buffer."* (Motion made by Commissioner Vayssieres and seconded by Commissioner Harrington.)

Action Item – Elect new chair and vice chair for 2026

After a brief discussion, Commissioner Vayssieres made a motion to elect Commissioner Huber as chair and Commissioner Harrington as vice chair for another year. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Greco. Commissioners Huber and Harrington said they were willing to serve another year. The Commission voted 7-0-0-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Geonczy, Greco, Harrington, Huber, Newman, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – None; Abstentions – None).

7. Subcommittee and Liaison Assignment Updates

A. Liaison Assignments

(1) *Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee ("LPCCC")*. Commissioner Huber said that a record number of salmon were counted in Putah Creek this fall, which he said was very heartening to see. He said all the hard work the LPCCC is doing with its partners along the creek is really paying off.

(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 said the subcommittee was still evaluating the data sets it had received and discussing how it wanted to best present the information.

C. General Plan Committee (General Plan Update). Commissioner Huber said there was nothing to report.

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

The next regularly scheduled meeting is March 2, 2026. Ms. Reynolds said there are currently no possible agenda items scheduled for March, so it is likely the meeting will be cancelled. Ms. Reynolds said she would discuss the agenda with the chair.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:20 p.m.