

Open Space and Habitat Commission Minutes
Monday, April 6, 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), Marc Vayssieres

Vacant Positions: *Alternate*

Commissioners Absent: Eric Newman

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

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

Ms. Reynolds, staff to the Commission, updated the Commission on several pending conservation easements. She said she submitted two initial pre-proposals to the State of California for grants to help purchase conservation easements on two properties northeast of the city limits, known as Gill Orchard #3 and Bensen Farm. She said the full grant application for those properties was due in June. She also said work was underway on a conservation easement northwest of the city limits, known as Beoshanz Farm. The City and the Yolo Land Trust won a grant to purchase a conservation easement on that property in 2025, she said. Staff hopes to close on that easement in early 2027.

Staff also reminded the Commission that the second “Commissionpalooza” was scheduled for April 13 at 5:30 p.m. The meeting will be discussing various land use scenarios as part of the General Plan Update discussion, she said.

Staff also said that sheep had arrived at South Fork Preserve over the weekend to graze on the grasses and weeds within the oak savannah area. The sheep are an effective non-toxic land management tool, she said. The sheep would remain at South Fork Preserve for the next two weeks and would then move on to the El Macero ag buffer and the Wildhorse ag buffer, she said. Staff is working on a separate grazing contract with the City’s Public Works Department for the sheep to graze at the City’s stormwater detention basins and channels, she said. Also, staff is planning a second proscribed burn at South Fork Preserve this spring as a way to control invasive weeds.

She also said the Solano County Water Agency (“SCWA”) held a kick-off meeting for a planning effort about a possible vehicular crossing over Putah Creek at County Road 106A at the City’s Los Rios property. Several issues were identified that needed additional research, she said. SCWA recently won a \$1.2 million planning grant from the California Wildlife Conservation Board to fund this planning effort, she said. She said should would keep the Commission apprised of this effort.

Finally, Ms. Reynolds reminded the Commission of an upcoming volunteer opportunity hosted by the City of Davis in partnership with Tree Davis. She said volunteers would be working on oak tree saplings that have sprouted naturally along the Putah Creek Parkway, and were in need of pruning, spacing, and mulching. She said this was the sixth volunteer event hosted by City Open Space staff this spring. Anyone interested in volunteering should regularly check the websites of the Putah Creek Council and Tree Davis, she said.

4. Public Comment

There was no general public comment.

5. Consent Calendar

On consent was the approval of the February 2026 meeting minutes. Commissioner Vayssieres made a motion to approve the draft minutes. It was seconded by Commissioner Harrington. The Commission voted 6-0-1-0 to approve the motion (Ayes – Cabanillas-Ledesma, Geonczy, Greco, Harrington, Huber, Vayssieres; Noes – None; Absent – Newman; Abstentions – None).

6. Regular Items

Discussion Item – Receive report from the City Council-Requested Subcommittee (High-Priority Open Space Peripheral Parcels)

Commissioner Huber provided the Commission with a brief summary of the subcommittee's work to date. He said the subcommittee was still missing several critical data sets, and therefore its work product was not complete. Michelle Kalinkina, a UC Davis graduate student who is helping the subcommittee create maps of specific geospatial data sets, said the subcommittee was particularly interested in visualizing the overlap and interaction among the following 12 land attributes that are relevant to conservation planning:

1. Prime farmland are areas with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term agricultural production. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields;
2. Priority acquisition areas of the Yolo Habitat Conservancy identify strategic locations where land protection or restoration would maximize habitat connectivity, ecological function, and long-term conservation benefits;
3. Floodplains as defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, identify areas of natural hydrologic connectivity and disturbance that support high-value riparian and aquatic habitat;
4. Local creeks provide critical aquatic and riparian corridors that support biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and key life-stage functions for fish and wildlife;
5. Stormwater detention basins can provide opportunistic wetland and open-water habitat while offering restoration potential to enhance ecological function and connectivity;
6. Drainage ditches can function as modified aquatic corridors that provide limited habitat value and opportunities for restoration to improve connectivity and ecological function;
7. Existing open space and natural areas represent existing habitat cores that support biodiversity, ecological function, and landscape connectivity;

8. Conservation lands (i.e., lands protected by conservation easements) represent protected areas with long-term management intent that support habitat preservation, connectivity, and ecological resilience;
9. The presence of sensitive species indicates ecologically important areas that may require targeted protection and management to prevent further decline;
10. Certain identified land cover areas are essential to the survival and recovery of listed species, making them high priority for protection and management;
11. Areas identified as “community separator” areas provide protected open space buffers that can support habitat connectivity and prevent fragmentation between development areas; and
12. Watershed conservation areas protect hydrologic processes and large, intact landscapes that support water quality, habitat integrity, and ecosystem resilience.

A scoring methodology was developed for each land attribute, she said, and geospatial overlays were developed for each land attribute. The Davis Planning Area was then divided into thousands of five-acre hexagons, she said. The overlays were then combined with the map of hexagons, she said. Each hexagon was then given an overall score, depending on how many land attributes were present, she said. The resulting map shows the areas within the Davis Planning Area where the 12 attributes are concentrated, she said. But the map is currently not complete because more data is needed, she said. The missing data sets are: (1) the priority acquisition areas data base from the Yolo Habitat Conservancy, (2) the California Natural Diversity Database from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and (3) a proprietary land cover dataset, she said. Commissioner Huber said the subcommittee would be meeting soon to strategize about how to obtain the missing data sets. He said the subcommittee would discuss this work with the full Commission once the missing data sets were obtained and analyzed. No action was taken.

7. Subcommittee and Liaison Assignment Updates

A. Liaison Assignments

- (1) *Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee (“LPCCC”)*. Commissioner Huber informed the Commission about an experiment that took place in January when nearly one million young salmon were released into flooded rice fields near the Yolo Bypass. He said the fish will spend a few weeks bulking up in the rice fields and then they will be released into the Yolo Bypass. He said some of these fish will swim up Putah Creek in a few years to spawn in Winters. He also mentioned that the annual Putah Creek Long-term Monitoring Data Summit was scheduled for April 15, 2026, which is hosted by the Solano County Water Agency. He said attendees discuss topics include measuring water, counting salmon, and how to manage data over many decades.
- (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). The work of this subcommittee was discussed during Regular Items.
- 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 May 4, 2026. Ms. Reynolds said there are currently no possible agenda items scheduled for May, so it is possible the meeting will be cancelled. Ms. Reynolds said she would discuss the agenda with the chair.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:46 p.m.