

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: January 16, 2019

Observer Reporting: Shelley Chambers Fox

Length of Meeting: 2 hrs 11 min

Members Present: Guy Williams, Chad Whetzel, Dave Gibney, Ryan Davies, Russ Jamison, Keith Paulson, Matt Sutherland, Alan Thomson (county planner), Ginny Ruminder (note taker), Katrin Kunz (assistant county planner)

Absent: Gary Moore, Robert Hill,

Others Present (i.e., media, public): numerous members of the public (17) and 1 member of the press.

Content:

1. Chad Whetzel reviewed **how the public meeting was to be conducted**. Proponents were allowed to go first, followed by the opponents. Each person should introduce him/herself and had 5 minutes to speak. After proponents and opponents were allowed to speak, each group was allowed time for rebuttal comments.
2. **Public hearing for Selway Holdings, LLC**, to change the zoning designation for a 3.5 acre area within an 8.5 acre parcel from the Agricultural District to a Limited Light Industrial District for a proposed marijuana processing business. Dewey Scientific is a research company started by 2 PhD plant scientists from WSU. They are interested in breeding and genomic characterization of cannabis plants particularly as it pertains to sustainable production of cannabidiol. Main product will be cloned plants for sale to local farmers (a nursery). The hearing took up 1 hour and 45 minutes.
 - a. Katrin Kunz assistant county planner reviewed the county's position that the project is consistent with the Whitman county comprehensive zoning plan.
 - b. Proponents: Four persons spoke about the research merits of the project. Both growing and processing of marijuana plants will occur and the facility will use special techniques to extract active principles that will not involve the use of solvents. The facility is 1+ miles from Country Club Road. Water use is expected to be about 1000 gallons per day for the purpose of watering plants. Processing marijuana uses almost no water. Growing marijuana can be done even if there is no zone change because it is an agricultural use of the land. The company is licensed to grow 30,000 sq. feet of plant canopy.
 - c. Opponents were concerned about the effect of the new facility on residential wells in the Country Club Road neighborhood, odors generated by the concentration of many marijuana plants in a small area (as is experienced on Airport Road) and possible health effects due to unspecified contaminants in air and water. There also was a concern about crime when the facility is unattended by employees (in the evening), and that the project will lower property values in the area. Another neighbor wanted to understand the different zoning designations, and how decisions are made such that contiguous areas are zoned differently rather than creating a region of light industrial, a region of heavy commercial, and a separate region that is residential.
 - d. Commissioners noted that the neighborhood in question is east of the dairy lagoons and given the prevailing winds this is likely to be the most prevalent odor. They also point out that the objections proposed by the public are to things that the company is able to do now, whether the property is rezoned or not (grow marijuana plants using water and concentrating the plants in a small place resulting in odor) because the land is currently zoned agricultural. Thus the rezone does not change these things. They stated that the guiding principle applied to zoning change decisions is whether the proposal is permitted by county code and NOT whether it makes sense in the overall land use plan of the county (residential contiguous with other residential and industrial contiguous with other industrial). The county is not completely 'planned' in the sense that there is one spot where industrial should go and one area where residential should go and one area where agriculture will be practiced. This is because the county desires to respect individual private property owners' preferences about how their land is used.

- e. Commissioners approved the request for rezone and will pass the proposal on to the Board of County Commissioners.
3. Commissioners briefly discussed the **County Critical Areas Ordinance**. Alan has sent the Commissioners the final draft. If the commissioners are satisfied with how it reads now they need to have a public hearing about it. Alan is proposing the first Wednesday in March.

Public Meetings of interest to League

1. **Board of Adjustment forthcoming hearings** – A conditional use hearing for Selway Holdings, LLC, to allow agricultural activity in a Limited Light Industrial District set for February 28, 2019.
2. The **McCoy Land Co. zone change hearing for property south of Dusty** scheduled for February 6, 2019 will be cancelled as the Planning Commission anticipates receiving an official notice that the zone change request has been withdrawn. The company will, however, request a conditional use permit. A conditional use permit requires review by the Board of Adjustment and a hearing examiner has been requested for this particular project since its value exceeds \$5 million. The Land Co in conjunction with PNW has addressed all the concerns that were expressed in the original public meeting using contract experts.
3. **AgGro** is requesting to set up a business to sell agricultural chemicals at the intersection of 195 and Old Wawawai road. Hearing date not yet set.

Process & Protocol (Observations about participants, conduct, and procedures of the meeting):

At the end of the meeting the Commissioners discussed how the public meeting went given the new procedures they used to run it and provided input on how to improve the process.