League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission Date: 10/21/2026

Observer Reporting: Chambers-Fox Shelley Length of Meeting: 1 hr 10 min

Members Present: Brian Davies (Chair), Bill Myers (Colfax), Dean Kinzer (Pullman)

Members Absent: Chris Melhus (Malden). Tammy Southern (Garfield), David McKeirnan (Pullman), Weston Kane (LaCrosse).

Others Present (e.g., media, public): County Staff: Grace DiBiasi (Whitman County Planner), Brandon Johnson (Public Works), David Werner, clerk, Mark Storey Online (Public Works Director). Public: Carol Black, Tom Thompson, Roger Cainey, Lloyd Jeffries and 2 others.

Business pertaining to League Positions or Topics of Interest: *Include in this section 1) issues discussed that relate to League priorities or positions. Do you recommend local league action? If so, please refer to the League position that supports your suggestion. 2) links to further information available on an issue, if available.*

Notes are taken from the video recording of the meeting. Grace DiBiasi reported that the Critical Area Ordinance and the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinances recommended to the Board of County Commissioners on Oct 7 are still in the 60 day comment period. The plan will be for the BOCC to consider the ordinances on November 16.

Douglas Yormick, consultant with Facet presented on the Natural Resource Lands Ordinance which will now be required for partially planning counties under the Growth Management Act in Washington State. First Commissioners will need to designate where the Natural Resource lands (agricultural, forest and mineral resources) are in the County, develop mapping and create standards that enable the land resources to remain productive long term. While it is expected that these resources will remain in private hands, the ordinance is intended to provide guidance for land use decisions while supporting resource industries. Roughly ¾ of the Whitman County economy is in agricultural production. The goal would be to preserve farms and agricultural character, protect private property rights, maintain rural character and quality of life. Mineral resource lands in Whitman County provide gravel resources for roads. The work on the NRL ordinance includes reviewing the Growth Management Act requirements, evaluating current County policies, looking at what other counties do and then developing designations, maps and regulations for Whitman County. They expect to have drafts in February and have the regulation available for public review and adoption in May.

Mr. Yormick asks what thoughts Commissioners and community members have about the resource lands project. Bill Myers is pleased to see the acknowledgment that Whitman County needs to value its agricultural lands. Grace agrees that we are mostly an agricultural county and don't extract forest resources. Mark Storey would like to know what criteria could be used to determine whether land remains in production and what land is not. Grace notes that Whitman County has been fairly restrictive about land uses that are not compatible with continuing agriculture like using land for housing. Dean Kinzer asks if the NRL ordinance will have 'teeth' to restrict land uses. Doug Yormick states that the ordinance may prohibit certain uses or disallow neighboring uses that are incompatible with dry land agriculture. Commissioners ask for a map of where rock quarries currently are in the county. Carol Black asks about forestry in the north Palouse River corridor. This area tends to overlap with places where people want to build houses. Tom Thompson notes that the Rathdrum Prairie used to be predominantly agricultural but now has become housing and argues that agricultural lands in Whitman County should be protected. Roger from Garfield has heard that Washington is losing farmland faster than any state in the nation and would like to see that stop. Lloyd Jeffries would also like to protect agricultural land. Dean Kinzer states that the breakeven price on wheat is $8/bushel but because of expenses right now most farmers get $5.30/bushel in their pocket once they get it to market.

Commissioners discuss the memo that Grace drafted to explain the Natural Resource Lands ordinance project and the schedule that is still in flux. The Planning Commission will continue to meet twice a month at least through January to allow for review and discussion of Solar and BESS and the Natural Resource Land Ordinances.

There will be some discussion of the Critical Areas Ordinance starting in January to have it reworked in the spring of 2027 after the 60 day comment input from state agencies.

Next meeting will be November 4, 2026. Rachel Granrath will talk about the Solar Energy Facility Ordinance. BESS (Battery Energy Storage Systems) will be a separate ordinance although it is likely that the 2 ordinances will have similar standards. Grace will ask Rachel to clarify how Commissioners should think about them differently. Tom Thompson notes that BESS facilities are more prone to fire than a solar facility and would like Commissioners to be careful about siting them due to the fire concerns that the facilities present. Mark Storey notes that the County will not be able to hire an assistant planner in the new year.

Public Meetings of Interest to League: *Were there any public meetings announced that you think League members may be interested in attending and/or becoming involved with that relate to League positions?*

BOCC meeting November 16 to consider the Critical Areas Ordinance and the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinances

Process & Protocol: (Observations about participants and procedures of the meeting**)** *e.g.,*

Did the members appear to have done their "homework"? Were members courteous to each other and the public? Was access to materials for certain agenda items available to you?

Members are courteous to each other and the public. The presentation and draft ordinance materials were displayed on Zoom while being discussed and copies sent via email before the meeting.

Your additional comments/opinions:

Reminders ☺

A LWV Observer is impartial, silent, and respectful. It is, however, acceptable to ask questions for clarification following the meeting.
Remember to wear your awesome ID Badge!
Please attach any materials, or links to such, received at the meeting that you feel are important to your report. Please submit your report to the LWV Observer Chair within one week of the meeting.
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