

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Pullman City Council

Date: 3/26/2024

Observer Reporting: Crawford Roger

Length of Meeting: 3 hours

Members Present: Trymaine Gaither; Nathan Weller; Pat Wright; Eric Fejeran; Megan Guido; Carla De Lira; Francis Benjamin; Ann Parks;

Members Absent:

Others Present (e.g., media, public): Thad o'Sullivan (City Attorney); Mike Urban (City Administrator); Dee Stiles-Elliott (City Employee); Bobbie Ryder (Pullman Civic Trust); Kara Riebold & Kristine Meyer (Port of Whitman Co); Cara Lee (City Engineer); Lane Thompson (Pullman Transit); Sean Wells (Public Works Director); Matt Gillis (Welch Comer)

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.*

B. Project Downtown Pullman Project (PDP) begins May 1. Traffic revisions begin April 1. Go to projectdowntownpullman.org.

C. Liz Siler spoke about disability access in downtown Pullman. She argued that while the proposed downtown project (PDP) is being portrayed as beneficial for the disabled community, it won't actually improve accessibility. She emphasized that disabled people have the right to park within 200 feet of their destination, regardless of the project's implementation.

- Pamela Lee urged the council to create two designated parking spaces for disabled individuals on East Main Street, at the intersection with Kamiaken (presumably) and Olson. She stressed the importance of considering a change order to create these spots, especially since citizens have previously testified about the need and the council promised to address it.
- Bobbie Ryder, representing the Pullman Civic Trust, spoke about the bike lane in the Pine Street Plaza area of the PDP. She requested that the lane be straightened and that the existing pavers on Pine Street be retained. Regarding the bike lane color, while red is currently planned, the Trust recommends a dark gray or, at least, a brown color. PCT urges preserving and reusing the existing pavers whenever possible.

J. 1. Port of Whitman Co Exec Dir. Kara Riebold. with Kristine Meyer. Purpose of Port and current projects. 2. Lane Thompson, Pullman Transit Manager, presenting on pilot project to Pullman-Moscow Regional Airport (PMRA). to begin May 15, 2024. Asking Council approval to start service. Council approved although start date depends on the opening of new airport terminal.

<Metropolitan Park Meeting was presented a veterans memorial park to be built between Walmart and the cemetery.>

N. Cara Lee. 1. Canyon View Trail. Request the council to accept low bid. Work expected spring or summer and complete by mid-October (will the park be closed?) 2. Request council to accept a bid to repave Hall Drive. To start mid-June and be complete by mid-August. Both passed

O. Change Orders for the Downtown Project (PDP):

- Sean Wells and Matt Gillis presented a summary of citizen comments gathered at two winter meetings. They condensed the comments into 32 entries categorized by 8 themes. The comments were reviewed in relation to the project's goals, regulations, and cost. Welch Comer, the contractor, recommends that the city accept only 9 of the comments.
- The council debated each comment, deciding whether to incorporate it into the project design. De Lira and Weller emphasized the need for flexibility in the criteria used to evaluate change requests.
- Staff and Welch Comer seemed to discourage changes by implying they would delay the project schedule. Their response to most questions was that changes would "require time and money," even for requests as simple as creating ADA parking from existing spaces. There was no information provided about the mysterious "bogeyman infrastructure" that supposedly prevents these changes.
- Ann Parks pointed out the inefficiency of finalizing a design without considering potential changes, as this would necessitate finding additional funds to address them later. She argued for getting it right the first time. Liz and other callers had previously contacted the council with disability access requests and information.
- Weller mentioned ongoing conversations about ADA parking since at least November 2022, including discussions he and Eileen MacColl had with the city. Notably, there are currently zero ADA parking spots on the block of Main Street directly south of Grand Avenue (which includes businesses like Rico's and Black Cypress). The only nearby spot is by Porchlight Pizza, which seems inadequate.
- De Lira questioned the process for obtaining ADA parking after the PDP is complete. Apparently, citizens would have to go through the existing procedures for the city's ADA backfill project. However, this would divert funds from other backlog projects, which haven't been built since 2018 (or possibly even 2022). The implication here is that addressing disability access needs will likely be put on hold indefinitely.

P. Request for agenda items for April 3 joint meeting with ASWSU. De Lira - public transit update. Weller - mental health, food insecurity, veterans affairs, Parks - ASWSU's thoughts on PDP (um a little late for that. and again communication is absent). Gaither - sexual assault.

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?*

At the meeting scheduled for April 16, the council will vote on accepting the TIB grant and vote on Welch Comer's recommended change orders generated from citizen comments.

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?*

- The meeting was disrupted by repeated door banging.
- Pat Wright, a council member with 20 years of experience and 50 years living in Pullman, seemed confused about the difference between the Pullman Industrial Park and the WSU Tech Park. Additionally, she was unsure of the meaning of the term "scale up."
- Lane Thompson's comments were inaudible due to his very quiet speaking volume.

Your additional comments/opinions:

The city council endures a lot of presentations. Can the agenda be changed to put business before presentations?

There was an interesting summary of citizen comments on the proposed downtown project (PDP). However, it seems like two-thirds of those comments were disregarded. This suggests that the entire project is quite unpopular.

If the city has \$9 million to spend, surely citizens have better ideas than digging up downtown. The comments themselves seem like attempts to salvage a bad idea from the start.

The engineers and staff, however, don't seem to see it that way. They appear to want to push the project through without any public interference. Their priorities seem to be the road itself over features like sidewalks, a bike path, trees, or even pop-outs for pedestrians.

Incredibly, as of the meeting this afternoon, the design didn't even include benches! Apparently, because a Transportation Investment Bringing Access (TIB) grant was announced on March 26th, bike racks and benches are now included. This is ironic because cost was a supposed reason for not implementing changes, yet the project isn't even fully funded anyway. So, does cost even matter?

There seems to be a big issue with the trees. Neither the city nor Welch Comer, seems to know what kind of trees are specified in the design. Pat Wright identified the existing trees as purple mountain ash, a suitable species for streets, but no one knows what type of tree will be planted in the new design.

- There are existing bike racks, and some citizens have requested that they not be powder-coated because the coating might flake off. However, Welch Comer wants to powder-coat them because they believe it looks better. It's unclear whether benches were ever part of the plan or if citizens suggested them and were denied.
- Nathan Weller criticized the staff for not including ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant parking and failing to incorporate ADA considerations into the PDP plan altogether. He later apologized, seemingly frustrated.
- The Welch Comer engineer's response comes across as dismissive. They basically say they can make any changes the council wants, but it will cost more time and money. They also claim their design already exceeds the required amount of ADA parking.
- Council members are quick to downplay their own expertise with comments like "I'm not an

expert" or "I'm not an engineer." This seems unproductive.

- Communication seems to be a major problem. Traffic revisions will be made in less than a week. Welch Comer will be sending communication to Main Street businesses about changes tomorrow, Wednesday. This gives businesses only a week to prepare for whatever those changes might be. It's worth noting that the city administration apparently told Welch Comer to copy the council on its letter to the businesses.