

## League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

**Name of Agency:** Port of Whitman County

**Date:** 07/02/20

**Observer Reporting:** Carolyn Joswig-Jones

**Length of Meeting:** 1'10"

**Members Present:**

Commissioners: John E. Love (District 1)-Retiring July 15  
Kristine Meyer (District 2)  
Tom Kammerzell (District 3)

**Staff:**

Joe Poire - Executive Director	Brenda Stav - Finance Director
Kara Riebold - Chief Operating Officer	Sarah Highfield - Communications Director
Debbie Snell - Properties & Development Manager	Matthew Johnson - Port Attorney

**Others Present (i.e., media, public):**

James Thompson - WPPA (Washington Public Ports Association)  
Alex McGregor, Peggy Bryan - LaCrosse Community Pride non-profit organization

**Business pertaining to League Positions or topics of interest:**

(See below for full report of meeting)

- Draft for water temperatures in rivers report from John McKern expected in a couple of weeks.
- The Port staff have information and are available to assist city/town governments within the county in applying for Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act monies.
- Port is still working to gain funds to bring high speed fixed broadband service to rural homes and small businesses through Auction 904: Rural Digital Opportunity Fund.
- LaCrosse Rock Houses Project – VERY COOL PROJECT!
- Maintaining safe track structure and crossing surfaces for all vehicles accessing the Port of Central Ferry.
- Presentation in honor of John Love's retirement and service as a longtime Port Commissioner since 1996

To view FULL Meeting Agenda, Minutes and all supportive materials follow this link:

<http://www.portwhitman.com/about/commissionmeeting>

**Port meeting calendar:** [http://www.portwhitman.com/pdf/Port\\_Calendar\\_2020.01.01-2020.06.30\\_Revised.pdf](http://www.portwhitman.com/pdf/Port_Calendar_2020.01.01-2020.06.30_Revised.pdf)

Port of Whitman County Commissioners Meeting took place via video and teleconference. Participation could be online, by phone, or a combination of both.

**Commissioner and Staff Updates:**

Ms. Highfield reported that the **videography and images for website** are coming along nicely and will be ready by Monday for review.

Ms. Riebold reported that the Port can apply for **Publics Work Board Workshop funding** by July 13<sup>th</sup> and the award announcements will be on Sept 9<sup>th</sup>. Whitman County is not considered in distress so would possibly only qualify for loan funding. The Port needs to determine a project that would qualify for this and apply.

Mr. Poire reported John McKern, retired Corps of Engineers Wildlife Biologist, will provide a draft of his findings from review of documents from Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Ecology for **water quality decisions** for Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for Temperature in the Columbia and Snake Rivers. The draft of this report is expected in a couple of weeks.

Commission Kammerzell asked for an **update on Petrichor** and Director Poire said the report is in process.

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

### **York Acquisition Land Sale Update**

Ms. Snell reported the closing of the sale of property at Pullman Industrial Park West, Locust Grove at corner of Palouse Hwy and Albion Rd which was in crop, is scheduled for Tuesday July 7<sup>th</sup>. There is an easement document that allows both a temporary construction easement and permanent emergency access easement through port property.

**Policy Project Update** Resolution 20-12, a **new policy on promotional hosting**, was adopted.

“At the Commission meeting on February 20, the Commission asked that the **policy regarding the Port’s support of recreation and tourism** (Resolution 03-03) be placed on the agenda for the Strategic Planning meeting in the spring for further review. It has been added to the July 8 Strategic Planning Agenda.” (from agenda)

Other policies for review are being delayed so that the new commissioner to replace Commissioner Love can participate in the process. The **following policies will be discussed at the next Commission meeting; Port’s Support of Recreation and Tourism, Commissioner Handbook and Meeting Governance.**

### **CARES Act Funding**

“The Port staff met with Jody Opheim, the Whitman County consultant for Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act to evaluate a potential role for the Port to assist city/town governments within Whitman County.”

Both Ms. Opheim and SEWEDA (Southeast Washington Development Association) Director Dawn Smith are offering their expertise and assistance to local governments in applying for Coronavirus Relief Funds. At this time, it does not appear that additional outreach to these communities is needed.

However, Port staff will keep in contact with Ms. Opheim to identify if the Port may consider taking a role in the following:

- 1) Providing a loan to communities who are unable to fund projects and wait for reimbursement.
- 2) Working with the county and cities in Whitman County to identify broadband infrastructure projects that qualify for CARES Act funding and help manage the project to expedite delivery of services.” (directly from agenda)

### **Commission Comments on Draft Plans**

Ms. Highfield reported on the **draft Strategic Plan and Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvements**. Will wait on incoming commissioners input also. Commissioner Meyer appreciated the work having “more sparkle” and is looking forward to seeing the final work.

### **Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF)**

The Port must complete a non-binding short form by July 15<sup>th</sup> in preparation for a possible bid in Auction 904: RDOF. The Port is working with two companies that were not named at this time, one of which the Port will collaborate/partner with to bring **high speed fixed broadband service** to rural homes and small businesses that lack it. There is no financial obligation at this time and Commissioner Meyer moved that the staff go forward with the application

### **Flightline Drive Realignment & Drainage Project Update**

The commissioners passed a motion to execute contract documents with Motley & Motley for this project which will realign and pave portions of Flightline Drive at the Port of Whitman Business Air Center and improve drainage to the central portion of the airport by adding new piping, drains and dry well

infrastructure. Work is underway on the Motely & Motley final contract documents. Construction will commence in early August and take 60 days to complete.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

### **LaCrosse Rock Houses Project – VERY COOL PROJECT!**

LaCrosse Community Pride members Alex McGregor and Peggy Bryan presented this project which will restore several deteriorating “rock houses” built during the Great Depression. The Washington Trust for Historic Preservation listed the sites as one of the ten “Most Endangered” historic places in the state. LaCrosse Community Pride hopes to convert these homes into a Heritage Museum and Ice Age Floods Center.

*See end of report for Background, Project Scope and Photos.*

### **Central Ferry Rail Project Bid Results**

“In 2019, the Port applied for a \$730,165 grant from the Freight Rail Assistance Program (FRAP) to rehabilitate the spur at the Port of Central Ferry and upgrade the crossings to concrete. These repairs were to be done in conjunction with private partner investments in the sum of \$850,000 to add a new house track off the Port of Central Ferry lead to serve expansion of rail services at the Wilbur Ellis chemical plant. The intended outcome of the project was to rehabilitate the existing lead to a condition where GRNW can safely serve the Port of Central Ferry tenants, maintaining safe track structure and crossing surfaces for all vehicles accessing the site.

The State funding is still in limbo for various reasons and not expected to be awarded or available in the near future, especially as WSDOT might be facing significant budget cuts due to COVID-19. Wilbur-Ellis is moving forward with its construction project, providing the Port with an opportune time to address the port-owned crossing at the same location. The money for this portion of the larger project is in the Port’s capital budget for 2020.” (directly from Port agenda)

The Port received 3 bids to work on this crossing replacement, high bid being \$94,000 to low bid \$53,000. They went with the lowest bidder, Shad Company Railroad Construction out of Oregon. A motion to move ahead with this project was passed by the commissioners. “Go ahead and carry it on.”

## **Upcoming Meetings**

Port Strategic Planning Meeting July 8, Port Administrative Office, Colfax, 10:00 a.m.

WPPA (Washington Public Port Association) Director Seminar, July 9 – Zoom Meeting Format

PNWA (Pacific Northwest Waterways Association) Member/Partner Webinar: Community engagement in a socially distant world – July 9, 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm

WPPA Commissioner Seminar, July 21 - Zoom Meeting Format

## **Process & Protocol:**

The Port staff do a great job with their agenda and supportive meeting materials. It makes it very easy to follow along during the meeting and makes reporting easy as I copy and paste the highlights from their agenda in addition to my notes.

The slide presentation in honor of Commission John Love’s retirement was a great review of all the work done during his service. I was glad to have met him in person for a few meetings before we moved to online meetings.



# Thank you, Commissioner Love.

The Port of Whitman County is honored by your 24 years  
of faithful service to the citizens of Whitman County.

**SUBJECT:** LaCrosse Rock Houses Project

**Background**

The Town of LaCrosse is moving forward with a plan to restore several deteriorating “rock houses” built during the Great Depression. Weather and time nearly destroyed these historic buildings. The Washington Trust for Historic Preservation listed the sites as one of the ten “Most Endangered” historic places in the state. LaCrosse Community Pride hopes to convert these homes into a Heritage Museum and Ice Age Floods Center, which will include overnight accommodations for tourists (two homes and two small bunkhouses). Town and state officials, as well as members of LaCrosse Community Pride, say the project will provide LaCrosse with a much-needed economic boost.

“Saving the ‘rock houses will help save our town,” wrote LaCrosse Mayor Randy Camp in a letter of support. “Main Street will have a renewed look back on our history before time erases it completely.”

For the Washington State Historical Society’s Heritage Capital Grant Program, this project will be separated into two phases:

- **Phase 1:** Includes buildings on the North side of Main Street; currently applying for 2021-2022 biennium funding
  - o **Two bunkhouses** – restore and add an adjoining bathroom between the structures; to be used as overnight accommodations
  - o **Service Station** – restore for use as Museum and Visitor Center
- **Phase 2:** Includes the rock homes on the south side of Main Street
  - o Restore two rock homes to be used as overnight accommodations

Potential Phase 1 funding sources include:

- .09 county funds (Whitman County Library): \$46,500 (decision scheduled for mid-July)
- Heritage Capital Grant (Washington State Historical Society, legislative capital project): \$130,000 (requires 2/1 match)
- Cash match (past donations and grants): \$238,635
- Future in-kind \$75,577 (Includes donated time from LaCrosse Community Pride members and donated supervision and construction management from The McGregor Company).

In addition, more than 35 letters have been personalized and mailed out to local businesses, organizations and individuals requesting their support.

**Next Steps**

Staff will keep up-to-date on this project’s progress.

**Recommendation**

Not applicable. Update on LaCrosse Rock Houses Project for informational purposes.

**Request for Commission Action**

None at this time. Update on LaCrosse Rock Houses Project for informational purposes.



## Rock Houses Project – Project Scope & Photos

We are moving forward on a plan several years in the making—to convert our historic basalt homes built during the Great Depression into productive use as a Heritage Museum and Ice Age Floods Center (the old service station) and places for visitors to stay (two homes and two small bunkhouses). Long seen as part of our rural heritage for our small town (population, 310) the rock houses were listed as one of the ten “Most Endangered” historic places by the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation (WTHP). We are working with two partner organizations that share our enthusiasm about this project—the Whitman County Library and the Ice Age Floods Institute.

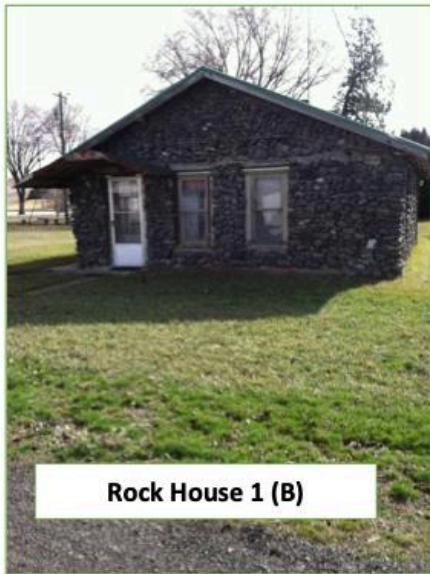
This represents the final chapter in our renovation of a once nearly abandoned Main Street. As WTHP put it, *“with several successful revitalization projects under its belt, LaCrosse Community Pride is now turning their attention to the rock houses and station. They have worked closely with Washington State University’s Rural Community Design Initiative and are involving the community as plans for the buildings develop. One thing is certain: the project will ultimately capture the unique nature of the basalt buildings and highlight why they matter to the people of LaCrosse.”*

As a community along the National Park Service’s Ice Age Floods National Geological Trail, visitors (in the words of Senator Maria Cantwell and former Representative Doc Hastings) *“will not only provide an important economic boost to central and eastern Washington, but they will learn about an amazing, and often overlooked, part of the region’s history.”* As a small town once viewed by reporters as on the verge of “extinction” we’ve come a long way and look forward to welcoming more visitors to a town, as locals say, that thought it could, and did! With your help, this will be a remarkable project and will provide a vibrant future for our town.

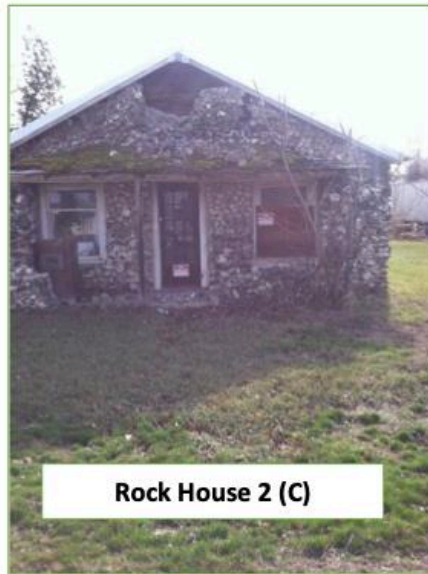
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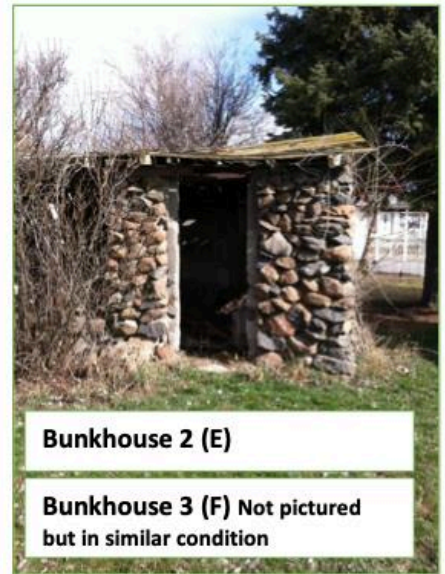




**Rock House 1 (B)**



**Rock House 2 (C)**

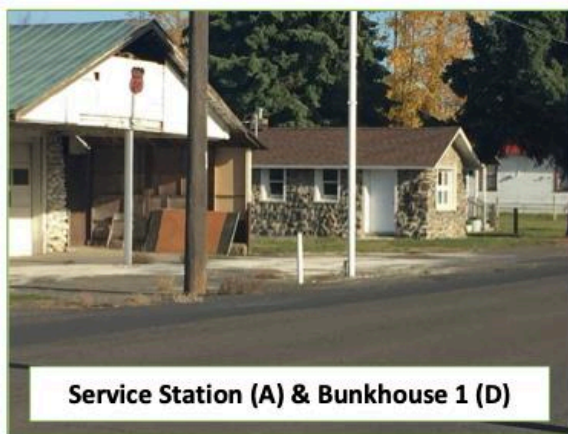


**Bunkhouse 2 (E)**

**Bunkhouse 3 (F) Not pictured  
but in similar condition**



**A = Service Station**



**Service Station (A) & Bunkhouse 1 (D)**



**Bunkhouse 1 - Before**



**Bunkhouse 1 – After Renovation**



N Main Ave, LaCrosse WA 99143 Property marked in yellow



**A = Service Station**

**B = Rock House 1**

**C = Rock House 2**

**D = Rock Bunkhouse 1 – rebuilt in 2016**

**E = Rock Bunkhouse 2**

**F = Rock Bunkhouse 3**

**G = Proposed Bathroom**