

# League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Pullman Planning Commission Date: 3/27/2019  
Observer Reporting: Helen Catanese Length of Meeting: Adjourned 10:17 pm  
Members Present/Absent: Brent Carper, Joe O'Callaghan, Bob Olsen, Stephanie Rink, Dave Gibney, John Anderson, Marcia Gossard, Scott Vik; Scott Hodge is absent as planned Others Present (i.e., media, public): Approx 35 members of the public, at least one reporter, one office staff, and Pete Dickinson

## **Meeting Content:**

*Note: TLDR means a summarization*

Topics Discussed

### **1. Animal/ Fowl Regulations**

**TLDR: The commission resolved to form a subcommittee of Stephanie and Brent to draft revised zoning to allow chickens under the same rules as dogs, cats and rabbits.**

Discussion is motivated by an earlier case. Brent asked about the process for revising regulation. They consider whether this is worth an individual zoning code revision or should be considered as part of the comprehensive plan. The process of redoing zoning for the full city would take 1-2 years. Bob asks if the comprehensive plan has any conflicts with this rezoning. It doesn't directly. John Anderson wants to expand the definition of pets to include chickens, but not necessarily roosters. Currently 10,000 sq ft are required to raise a chicken. In the current codes a caged bird is permitted with no space requirement, but only within the home.

Public comments in favor of keeping chickens (these are the main points made by the commenters and are not endorsed or fact checked by the observer):

Two teenage brothers: The boys and their family wrote a letter and brought in their hen. They would like to bring chickens to the park. They claim space requirements for chickens are overly restrictive as compared to other pets like dogs. Claim: Seattle will allow hens with no space requirements.

Public: Spokane allows one hen per 1000 sqft, one goat or pig per 2000 sq ft. Hens are quieter than dogs and cats at night.

Public: She says it's better to handle this quickly, rather than wait for the comprehensive plan. This is a west coast trend. Moscow is chicken friendly; they allow 3 chickens per lot. Setbacks and clipping or cooping are options to prevent disruptions.

Public: She agrees we shouldn't wait for the comprehensive plan. She mentions there are no tests or limits on other pets (parakeets, snakes, dogs etc.) Allowing kids to raise animals in cities is important.

Another woman with a parakeet: She thinks chickens are fine but we need to do something about dog poop. She has no worries about a single chicken, but worries about diseases with multiple.

College hill resident: He worries about chickens being loose on Friday night.

The consensus seems to be that we want to make it easier to own a chicken now, with more potential changes in the comprehensive plan. Proposal to add a number of hens as small household pets. Pete makes a statement about workload. Dave offers to have a subcommittee draft legislation. Pete agrees. Stephanie and Brent offer to serve on a subcommittee to draft the code revision. The motion is passed unanimously.

### **2. Short Term Rentals**

**TLDR Initial information was collected, there is general agreement that more information is needed, but nothing binding was decided.**

Short term rentals (STRs) are currently allowed in R2 (conditionally) and in commercial zones. There are concerns about some evasion of the city lodging tax. Bob wants to know if AirBNB collects lodging taxes for cities. Scott Vik wants to know if it's a common complaint. Pete says only the one complaint.

Public comments regarding STRs:

Public: Air BnB collects sales tax for sure, possibly lodging tax. She rents out her rooms during overflow weekends in an R1 zone. They have off street parking for guests and have never gotten complaints from neighbors. Vacation home rules don't require you to claim rentals under 14 days a year. Property taxes are too high, and str's offset that.

Public: thinks owner occupied str's are unlikely to be substantial problems, as compared to unoccupied homes. He likes to stay in airBNBs on his trips.

Public: She has neighbors who do STRs on weekends. She is indifferent. She has problems with unoccupied homes in her neighborhood. She feels there is a dearth of affordable housing in Pullman. She wants a sidewalk at the end of her block. The lot there was never required to build one.

Public: She mentions the way Walla Walla handled the divide between owner occupied and non-owner occupied rentals. She requests this not be limited by zone. They limit the length of rental to 90-days per year. Inspections requirements. Dave claims his R1 neighborhood is more than half student.

Public: Operates an Airbnb. Suggests offering amnesty to renters to help collect information.

Members seem generally willing to allow STRs, but Brent is worried about proposing revisions hastily. Most seem in favor of more research. Consideration of allowances below a certain level as a non-business. No binding decisions were made.

### **3. Revisions to Critical Areas Ordinance**

**TLDR: This is passed down largely from the state level, and there is only so much room to change it. There will be a Q/A in the next meeting.**

Washington state requires critical areas ordinances. These need to be updated by June 30<sup>th</sup>. We are required by the state to follow the "best available science." Bob wants to know about impacts of the changes. If development is proposed next to a wetland, the developer is required to avoid impacts to the wetland and a buffer. If unavoidable, compensations must be made. Exceptions exist if there is a road between the critical area. Much of the language is passed down from the Washington State Department of Ecology.

John has some comments about small linguistic changes. Nothing overly impactful. Dave notes that the Whitman county ordinance states there are no aquifer recharge areas in the county (including Pullman).

Some threatened plants and bird habitats are in Pullman.

### **4. Misc**

**Discussion of the zoning of the old city hall.** John considers a new zone for government buildings.

### **Public Meetings of interest to League:**

The next meeting is April 24<sup>th</sup>. Possible meetings in May or June. Several members have conflicts in June.

### **Process & Protocol: (Observations about participants and procedures of the meeting)**

Dave asks that individual comments be kept around 3-5 minutes.

After the chicken discussion is ended, about a third of the public leaves.

A Recess is called from 9:25-9:35, after which the entire public and press left.

One commissioner admitted to not reading the critical area ordinance.