

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Pullman Planning Commission Meeting

Date: 3/23/22

Observer Reporting: Jessica D. Cassleman

Time: 7:02-8:55 pm

The meeting was held in person at the Council Chambers, Pullman City Hall

Members Present: John Anderson (Vice-chair), Brent Carper, Marcia Gossard, Scott Hodge, Joe O'Callaghan, Bob Olsen.

Others Present: RJ Lott (Pullman Director of Community Development previously called Planning Director); staff member, Valerie; three members of the community including Anita Hornback, Allison Munch-Rotolo, plus one other; and Dave Gibney (no longer member of the Commission); and Jessica Cassleman, LWV Observer.

New business:

1. Amending Section 17.20 of the Pullman Municipal Code as it relates to the Planning Commission. (Legislative matter)

Current Authority on the matter: City Code 17.20 pursuant to RCW 35A.63.020

The planning commission shall consist of nine (9) members, each of whom shall serve terms of six (6) years, subject to resignation or removal. The members shall be appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council. Planning commission members may be appointed to successive terms. No member of the commission may simultaneously be a member of the City Council. (Ord. 22-2 §4, 2022; Ord. 87-9 §1, 1987).

The discussion regarding the Pullman Municipal Code 17.20.020 lasted an hour and a half after **RJ Lott read a memo with recommendations submitted by the Mayor and City Council for the Planning Commission to discuss.** The focus of the memo was the reduction of the number of commissioners from 9 to 7 as “suggested by staff” and the reduction of terms from 6 years to 4 years.

Reduction of the number of commissioners:

Mr. Lott indicated that the City does not see the need to have 9 commissioners, and that other “similar towns” only have 7 members.

When asked why this recommendation came about, **Mr. Lott** indicated that with smaller numbers, there would be a lower chance to not meet quorum.

Many **commissioners objected to this argument**, because late in fall 2021, it was voted that quorum would be lowered to five instead of six; and as only once, in January, there was no quorum, and it was due to several factors including: the commissioners being unaware of Mr. Gibney’s situation of not being renewed in his position, as well as Ms. Stephanie Rink not returning to the Commission. Also, no replacement for Mr. Vik who had resigned earlier in the fall had(s) been appointed.

Marcia Gossard, also in support of keeping the number of commissioners at 9, indicated that having more commissioners would provide an opportunity to have a more diverse group, something the group is missing.

Reduction of term limit:

Mr. O’Callaghan asked about lowering the term limit. The argument against it was that it takes years for new members to learn about the position, responsibilities and to become truly engaged. Several **commissioners** thought 6 years was better than 4.

Mr. Lott suggested that having terms of 4 years would allow more people to participate, and the chance to have “more qualified” members. Mr. Lott also indicated that there is a lack of interest from the community to serve on this commission.

Ms. Gossard again mentioned that there is a need for more diversity, and if there is a lack of interest there should be an effort made to recruit members.

The **commissioners** indicated that nowhere on the website is there a call for volunteers and a stronger effort should be made to attract members to the committee.

Commissioners questioned how would others know of the need for volunteers, since even they did not know they did not have eight members until the Agenda was sent to them without Gibney's or Rink's names. They also shared concern that the appointment to replace Mr. Vik has not happened, with his position being vacant for over six months. Mr. Olsen also indicated that his term is coming to an end soon.

Mr. Lott then indicated that the proposal also included: "time, location of meetings", although this had been discussed, voted and approved by the Commission in 2021. He also indicated that the Commissioners needed to be trained, and educated on procedures, codes, etc. when appointed to serve.

Mr. Carper shared his concerns regarding the statement that the commissioners need more experience; that the changes suggested after only one meeting not having quorum; and asked if other committees and board members have previous experiences in the field they serve.

The **Commission** also asked:

- "Why will the changes make it better"?
- "Why now"?
- To address and ask the City Council to study this proposal further and make the changes later if they are truly needed.

At this point **Mr. Dave Gibney**, who was present during the whole discussion, came to the podium and indicated that when his term ended, he asked in writing if he would be reappointed to continue in the Commission and there were no responses to his inquiry. He indicated that he is very concerned about what's happening, and that nine members allows for more diversity on knowledge, age, experience, culture, etc. It was brought up that people stay on the commission not necessarily based on terms but as long as they can/want to serve. As former chair he believes that there is no need for changes. He also indicated that he wanted to express this not trying to push for him to get back in the Commission, but for further action.

Brent Carper at this point suggested that they should "re-draft the resolution 17.20. That the website needs to be updated indicating that there are three vacancies."

Joe O'Callaghan stated that it was "suspicious" for this proposal to be happening at this point. "Why now?" There were no problems having 9 commissioners, and suddenly changing without any previous consideration or some earlier discussion was disturbing. This was the first time they had heard of this, and with terms expiring. He would have liked to have had more information and more involvement from the commission to determine changes.

Marcia Gossard suggested tabling this for now until more volunteers are identified. She indicated that more effort should be made to attract volunteers through the website, through social media, the City of Pullman website, and word of mouth. She indicated again that more diversity is needed; she challenged the points made regarding not making quorum.

The **Commission** suggested a recommendation to the City Council indicating that the website needs to be updated with names of current members and the vacancies, and to encourage people to apply.

After the indication that this is what the Major and the City Council would like to see, and that it will probably happen, **Mr. Carper proposed for the Commission to adopt the resolution as they did not see major harm; to get the message of vacancies out and try to get the right people to apply.

Called for vote by Mr. Carper to accept the Council's resolution and the changes suggested.

It was approved 4-2, with Brent Carper, Marcia Gossard, Bob Olsen and Joe O'Callaghan voting in favor, and Scott Hodge and John Anderson against it.

2. Elect a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson for the Commission.

John Anderson was elected Chair, and *Brent Carper* Vice-Chair of the Commission.

Old Business:

Continue a public hearing on **municipal code changes regarding the number of unrelated occupants in a housing unit.** (legislative matter)

There were no comments made by the public although 3 members of the community were present.

Discussion followed: There are already items to keep safety provisions in place, with codes and ordinances, as well as minimum square footage per number of occupants in place.

Mr. Carper suggested to accept the resolution as is as there won't be issues regarding parking and further conversation repeated what was discussed in November. Accept as is.

Other Comments/Opinions

- Immediately it became obvious that the Commissioners were quite surprised by this memo. (*New Business 1.*) They first found out about this item a couple days before the meeting, when they were unaware that Mr. Gibney and Ms. Stephanie Rink were no longer part of the Commission. There was also discomfort when addressing Mr. Lott as commissioners did not agree with the reasoning behind this proposal and it seemed that Mr. Lott was fully aware of the recommendations and supported them based on his previous experiences in other locations.

F. UPCOMING MEETINGS 1. April 27, 2022 2. May 25, 2022 3. June 22, 2022

There might be changes on dates due to possible absences.

G. Adjourned: Meeting adjourned at 8:55PM