

## League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: April 21, 2021

Observer Reporting: Shelley Chambers Fox

Length of Meeting: 2 hours

Members Present: Chad Whetzel, Dave Gibney, Keith Paulson, Erina Hammer, Brian Davies, Hailey Wexler (new member, PHS 2010), Weston Kane (new member), Matt Webb (new member), Alan Thomson (county planner), Grace DiBiasi (new assistant county planner), Mark Storey (Whitman County Public Works)

Absent: Russ Jamison

Others Present (i.e., media, public): Tom Handy, Art Swannack, Michael Largent, Ken Duft, Bob Westby (DOT), Tom Kammerzel, Sherri and Larry Farr, Shaun Darveshi ( Palouse 2040), Paul Spencer, Lawrence Fox, Richard Old, Tom Keogh, Asa Clark, David Hall (Palouse Prairie Foundation), Richard Wesson, Richard Huggins, Karen Hinnenkamp, Ron Miller, Michelle Mousel, Kathleen Lloyd, Molly, Lee Family, Lisa Carloye, Nancy Mack, Bobbie Ryder (Pullman Civic Trust), Lovina Englund (Palouse Land Trust), Scott Cornelius, Consultants: Todd Hall, Matt Covert.

### Reports:

- a. **Board of Adjustment forthcoming hearings** – NW Grain Growers commercial agricultural commodity warehouse outside Endicott will be held on May 13, 2021.
- b. **Forthcoming Administrative Use Permits** – Weis Towers proposes a new cell tower on Big Alkali Road and Raycon proposes a cell tower on Tekoa Mountain.
- c. **Update on previous conditional use permits and variances** – Kyle Schultheis variance setback for grain bins. Hearing held on April 8, 2021 and variance was granted. David Hopkins variance setback to a garage. Hearing held on April 8, 2021 and variance was granted. Whelan Grange RV park Conditional Use Permit granted on April 8, 2021.
- d. **Update on previous administrative use permits** – Whitman County Emergency Management proposal for a new cell tower on Bald Butte was granted on March 8, 2021. The county and the Phoenix Conservancy will be going to the site later this month to remove Palouse Prairie plants before construction starts.
- e. Brian Davies was **elected vice chair** of the Planning Commission. Chad Whetzel will remain as chair.

**Old business:** The current **Whitman County Comprehensive Plan** was adopted in 1978. It is available at <https://whitmancounty.org/DocumentCenter/View/1033/Whitman-County-Comprehensive-Plan-PDF>

The April 9 draft of the new plan is available at

<https://whitmancounty.org/DocumentCenter/View/3148/Comprehensive-Plan-Working-Draft-Narrative---April-9th-2021-PDF> A **Comprehensive Plan update workshop was conducted** by the Planning Commission and the consultant group, LDC via Zoom.

1. The County's consultant LDC, presented an update on survey results and what elements of the plan have been drafted so far. The **elements to be considered in the plan** include:
  - a. Land Use\*
  - b. Transportation\*
  - c. Parks, Recreation and Trails
  - d. Economic Development\*
  - e. Natural Resources and Agricultural Conservation
  - f. Environmental Protection and Climate change
  - g. Public Services, Facilities and Utilities\*
  - h. \*elements that have drafts in the new plan so far. Each element will have a chapter in the plan which will address the purpose and current state of the element and then goals, policies to assist in achieving goals and maps.
  - i. **Framework goals include**

- i. Preserve rural character,
- ii. Preserve and protect existing natural resources,
- iii. Enhance countywide services,
- iv. Support local businesses and countywide economic growth,
- v. Protect environmental quality and respond to climate change,
- vi. Promote and improve mobility options,
- vii. Effective land use planning,
- viii. Ongoing public involvement,
- ix. Support recreation and access to natural areas
- x. Preserve cultural heritage of Whitman County.
- xi. For example, ways that county policies can support the first goal of preserving rural character include strict rural housing codes such as no building on hilltops and all houses must be 1500 ft apart.

**j. Consultants and county staff are in the process of developing the plan draft narratives. They hope to have a final draft ready to discuss at public meetings in October and November with final adoption in December 2021.**

2. There have been **380 responses to the survey** which the consultant considered fantastic. It is still open at <https://s.surveypal.com/TRI-bh-He> . The 3 top priorities cited by participants in the survey are diversification of business, preservation of agricultural land and protection of natural resources.
3. There was some comment from the Board of County Commissioners and the County's Planning Commission, however most of the comments were from the public
4. **Transportation issues** such as bypasses for Pullman and Colfax were discussed. A proposal to provide a bypass for traffic coming from Moscow to Highway 195 has been submitted for consideration that will use Kirkendahl and Sand roads. Currently Pullman's policy is that roads are built by development but this does not facilitate projects that accommodate high speed or heavy vehicular traffic. Shaun Darveshi offered to participate in the development of the transportation element in the plan.
5. Larry Fox notes that many of the public had come to the workshop to discuss **parks and trails**. Alan Thomson points out that the county has a **separate document** for parks that was developed about 10 years ago. While he agrees that trails should be part of the Comprehensive plan, the references will only be general in nature and will not propose specific projects. The drafters have not addressed this element yet. Chad Whetzel notes that the survey asks about the CAP (Colfax Albion Pullman) trail and led the public to think that specific projects would be addressed. He would like the public comment on this topic to be presented to the Commission so they understand the complexity of it.
6. Bobbie Ryder and Lisa Carloye note that **rail banking and the proposed Colfax, Albion Pullman trail** are consistent with several framework goals including promoting and improving mobility, effective land use, supporting recreation and access to natural areas and preserving the cultural heritage of Whitman County.
7. Bob Westby notes that the Washington State Dept of Transportation acquired the **Palouse Corridor** through a quit claim deed in 2004. Officially it is still an active rail line but due to damage to trestles, it has not been trafficked for 10+ years. The legislature has the authority to tell the DOT to abandon or rail bank the line. **If abandoned** the property would go back to the original owners; **if rail banked** it could be made into a recreational trail with the understanding if the rail line was needed, it would convert to a railroad.
8. Larry Farr, a property owner in the Palouse Corridor, notes that his deed states that the railroad has a right of way as long as it operates a railroad. If not, the land reverts to the original landowner.
9. Richard Old presented photos of deer hunters trespassing on his property along the south fork of the Palouse this fall, having arrived on a speeder car that runs along the rails. He also had a photo of them transporting the deer carcass out on the speeder car. He notes that the rail line emboldens people to think that they can use the surrounding land however they want and this poses a threat to framework goals such as preserving and protecting existing natural resources and preserving the cultural heritage of Whitman County.

10. Michelle Mousel notes that the **No Trespassing signs** that the DOT put up at various access points along the rail are not effective. She also would like to see any trail that is built allow horseback riding.
11. The public is encouraged to continue to participate in the discussion of these issues.

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

1. The Pullman Planning Commission is discussing its planning document. The public is invited to participate the second Wednesday of each month through the month of August.
2. The Whitman County Planning Commission may skip the May meeting since the present meeting is so close to the regular meeting date (May). The next meeting will likely be in June, hopefully June 2 in person. Stay tuned.

**Process & Protocol:** (Observations about participants and procedures of the meeting) *e.g., Did the members appear to have done their "homework"?* **Yes** *Were members courteous to each other and the public?* **Yes.** *Was access to materials for certain agenda items available to you?* **Yes, the most recent copy of the Comprehensive Plan, agenda and supporting materials were available on the website at <https://whitmancounty.org/272/Planning-Division>**

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