

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: June 2, 2021

Observer Reporting: Shelley Chambers Fox

Length of Meeting: 2 hours

Members Present: Chad Whetzel, Dave Gibney, Keith Paulson, Brian Davies, Russ Jamison, Matt Webb, Alan Thomson (county planner), Grace DiBiasi (assistant county planner), Mark Storey (Whitman County Public Works)

Absent: Hailey Wexler, Erina Hammer, Weston Kane

Others Present (i.e., media, public): Tom Handy (WC Commissioner), David Hall (Palouse Prairie Foundation), Alexandria Osborne, Anthony, Kuipers (Daily News), Richard Wesson, Richard Alldredge, Lisa Carloye, Jeff Guyett (Community Action Center), Kathy Prout, Bobbie Ryder.
Consultant: Todd Hall.

Reports:

1. Forthcoming Administrative Use Permits – Weis Towers **new cell tower** on Big Alkali Road and Racom new cell tower on Tekoa Mountain.
2. Update on previous conditional use permits and variances – A conditional use permit was approved on May 13, 2021, for NW Grain Growers for a **commercial agricultural commodity warehouse** just west of Endicott.

Old business: Continue with update to the **Whitman County Comprehensive Plan**. 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>

After finishing regular business the Planning Commission adjourned and a **virtual open house** was held on the **Comprehensive Plan update** conducted by Todd Hall, Consultant and Planning Staff. **Future virtual open houses** are scheduled for June 16 and June 30, 2021 which Planning Commission members can attend if they wish. Those open houses are not official Planning Commission meetings but if a quorum is present then the Chair will open them as a public meeting. The links to those meetings will be posted on the Planning Departments' webpage.

1. **Why does Whitman County need a Comprehensive Plan?** There was a discussion about what the goal of the Comprehensive Plan was. Russ Jamison pointed out that many goals state that the Comprehensive Plan supports this or that, for example, multimodal transportation businesses within the county and would like to know if this means that the county would be investing taxpayer monies in all the supported goals. He is concerned about being a good steward of taxpayer funds. Alan clarifies that the Board of County Commissioners have the authority to spend county tax dollars but the Planning Commission does not. Mark Storey notes that the purpose of the Comprehensive plan is to make a statement about what the county wants to support with Land Use planning. Or another way to state this is we do not want to develop land use regulations that will make it hard to do business in Whitman County. Whitman County, though not required has chosen to consider all the following elements in their land use planning:
 - 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. *will be discussed tonight

2. Introductory information

- a. 2020 county population was 50,480, 13% increase from 2010, 89% in Pullman
- b. Majority of residents are 20-24 years of age
- c. 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.

3. Economic Development

- a. Identify opportunities for the diversification of the area's economic base and enhancement of the long-term economic stability for cities, towns and the county.
- b. Retain Whitman County's existing businesses and industries.
- c. Support business sectors that create a healthy and sustainable economy in Whitman County. Includes Agriculture, Education, Healthcare, Natural resources, Tourism
- d. Promote the number and diversity of businesses along the Pullman Moscow corridor.
- e. Develop Renewable Energy Facilities to contribute to the economic health of the county.
- f. Allow and encourage development of compatible businesses in agricultural areas to serve farmers as well as to diversify employment opportunities in the county.
- g. There was a discussion about Schweitzer expanding to Moscow. Brian Davies clarified that Schweitzer is expanding outside of the Port of Whitman location because they have run out of room.
- h. Chad Whetzel notes that some of these goals conflict with one another. For example, people often come to the Palouse to take pictures, but they don't come to take pictures of wind farms. Another example is protecting the climate and supporting agriculture.

4. Transportation

- a. Provide a safe and reliable multimodal highway and county road network that includes options for bicycles, heavy freight, pedestrian and public transport.
- b. Maintain county road facilities to ensure function and mobility of goods and services.
- c. Provide safe and accessible non-motorized routes such as bike paths and trails.
- d. Develop and maintain multimodal regional freight transportation system to serve agriculture and industry.
- e. Maintain a safe Pullman Moscow (SR 270) corridor.
- f. Encourage land use types, mixes and densities that promote efficient multimodal transportation systems.
- g. Protect and support existing air transportation facilities in Whitman County.
- h. Support public transportation options that are available to populations in need.
- i. Participate in state and regional planning for transportation facility needs and funding within Whitman County.
- j. The consultant points out that the chapters of the Comprehensive plan document will contain more detail. Mark Storey has authority over county transportation issues. Dave Gibney notes that the plan should mention that railbanking should be used to preserve the right of way for rails. The purpose, he notes, is to preserve the right of way, NOT to develop trails. Diagonal parking in Pullman will have to wait until heavy traffic is moved off of Main Street.

Public Meetings of interest to League

1. The Pullman Planning Commission continues to discuss its Comprehensive Plan during its meetings on June 16 and June 30. The details on remote participation can be found at [Comprehensive-Plan---Virtual-Public-Open-Houses-June-2-16--30-2021-Remote-Participation-Details-PDF \(whitmancounty.org\)](#)

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>