

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: September 15, 2021

Observer Reporting: Shelley Chambers Fox

Length of Meeting: 2 hrs 8 minutes

Members Present: Dave Gibney, Weston Kane, Keith Paulson, Matt Webb, Chad Whetzel, Brian Davies, , Staff: Alan Thomson, Whitman County Planner; Grace Di Biase, Whitman County Assistant Planner; Mark Storey, Whitman County Director/Engineer; Brandon Johnson, Public Works;.

Absent:, Erina Hammer, Russ Jamison, Fred Wexler

Others Present (i.e., media, public): Sheri Farr, Karen Hinnenkemp, Lisa Carloye, Barney Buckley, Samantha Schumacher, Ashley, David

Content (What is being discussed):

Reports:

- a. Forthcoming Administrative Use Permits – Weis Towers new cell tower on Big Alkali Road. Still working on a variance to give them access to the building site.
- b. Administrative use permit issued for the Maders to move dirt from the building site on SR 27 to fill another area on Albion Rd.

Old business: Discuss progress on the **updating of the Whitman County Comprehensive Plan**. The current Whitman County Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1978. The most recent draft is available at <https://whitmancounty.org/DocumentCenter/View/3656/Comprehensive-Plan-Working-Draft-Narrative---September-2nd-2021-PDF> The proposal is to go through the Plan line by line, chapter by chapter. In the next 2 months the Commission will start reviewing, answering questions and discussing the plan at each meeting. This may require meeting the first and third Wednesday of the month.

This month they **continue to discuss Chapter 2**, reviewing the changes that had been agreed to last meeting and discussing new ones. Chapter 1, the introduction, will be reviewed last since they will have a better picture of what the introduction should look like at the end of the process.

1. Land Use, Natural Resources and Agricultural Conservation. **Cluster development** in the county is limited by a tax sharing agreement with the City of Pullman in 2015. Grain elevators are now referred to as Commercial Commodity Warehouses.
2. The **Rail Banking section** has added the language suggested by Art Swannack: ‘Railroad and the associated railbeds are essential transportation corridors for freight and people in Whitman County. The County supports the active use of rail transportation in Whitman County and those measures needed to keep the railroads viable. Should a railroad corridor be determined to no longer be a viable freight and rail transportation route, an objective evaluation must be conducted to consider the merits of abandonment versus preservation. Such evaluation shall protect the rights of private property owners while also considering the public interest in preservation of each individual rail corridor as to future use as a transportation or public infrastructure corridor. The County may employ any legal and ethical method to preserve essential corridors to include methods such as railbanking.’ (page 23) The commissioners discussed whether they wanted to strike their original language which clearly endorsed railbanking. It was decided to strike the original language, however, Lisa Carloye objected to striking the language saying that the county preferred railbanking to abandonment. Chad Whetzel suggested that the title of the section be changed to Railways so as not to imply that railbanking was being endorsed. The original section was restored with clarification about agricultural access being one of the uses. ‘The Whitman County Comprehensive Plan supports the use of rail banking to preserve currently unused rail easements for future use while allowing other uses, including agriculture and recreational trails, for example, to use those spaces on a temporary basis until such time as they are needed again for rail transport. This approach is preferable to permanent abandonment of rail easements.’
3. It was decided to **remove ‘family farms’** from the document this time around since other entities now farm in Whitman County. Commissioners note that Prime Agriculture Land and agricultural land of

statewide importance have specific meaning in terms of the NRCS soil survey and should be inventoried.

4. Commissioners would like to allow a **second residence on a single parcel and the construction of bunkhouses**. There was discussion about whether residential developments are allowed on gravel roads. Chad Whetzel makes the point that the road would have to demonstrate adequate access for emergency services. Thus the county does not allow residential development on roads that are closed during the winter. Gravel roads are considered ‘improved county roads’ and as such would provide access for emergency vehicles. The county does not allow the development of subdivisions or long plats. However, Alan states that there is the need for a mechanism to allow a PRD, Planned Residential Development on parcels with water rights. Chad Whetzel asks whether this would allow the development of mobile home or manufactured home parks. Alan believes that this would not be allowed by the Commissioners. The Commissioners decided to change the word ‘should’ to ‘may’: ‘The County may allow alternative forms of low-density residential development in unincorporated areas through Planned Residential Development in the Agricultural Zone to preserve prime farmland and environmentally sensitive areas.’ (page 25)
5. There was a discussion of how to ensure that **industrial and commercial development** does not exceed the ability of the road to sustain traffic. Lisa Carloye objects to the language of Goal LU7 which specifies that the county wants to promote a variety of industrial and commercial uses within the Pullman Moscow corridor without adding balance that the county would like to maintain the aesthetic quality of the rural space between the 2 towns. Commissioners agree that they will work to wordsmith the section so that it is more balanced in development vs preserving rural character.
6. The **fiber** that has been put in by Port cannot be accessed by individuals. There must be an Internet Service Provider that wants to provide service to individual residences.

Public Meetings of interest to League

1. The Pullman Planning Commission will continue to discuss the draft of its Comprehensive Plan moving to **Chapter 3 during its meeting on October 6**. The draft of the Comprehensive Plan can be found at [Comprehensive Plan | Whitman County, WA](#) The details on remote participation can be found at the Whitman County Planning Commission website.

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 sent via email.

Next meeting: October 6, 2021