

# League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: 12/17/2025

Observer Reporting: Chambers-Fox Shelley

Length of Meeting: 3 hours

Members Present: Dave Gibney (Chair Pullman), Bill Myers (Colfax), David McKeirnan (Pullman), Dean Kinzer (Pullman), Weston Kane (LaCrosse), Julian Mathews (Pullman), Chris Melhus (Malden). Brian Davies (vice chair), Tammy Southern (Garfield)

Members Absent: none

Others Present (e.g., media, public): Staff: Alan Thomson (Whitman County Planner), Grace DiBiasi (Assistant Planner), Brandon Johnson (Public Works), Mark Storey, Denis Tracy (District Attorney- on Zoom).

Public: Jess Smith, Tom Lamar, Chantel Macguire, Shane Roche, Holly Greystone, Linda Barber, Bill Owens, Greg Jones, Annie Messer, Roger, Collin Bannister, Seth Penton, Julie Clarkson, Simon Smith, Cory, Kevin Owens, Charlotte Omoto, Dan Lensen, Bob Johnson, Tom Himison, Carol Black, Jean Kinzer, Adam Capaage, Jamie Anderson, Paul Kimmell (Avista), Bill Clark, Art Steger, Ken Duft, Rick McNanny, Mary Jean Emtman, others.

**Business pertaining to League Positions or Topics of Interest:** *Include in this section 1) issues discussed that relate to League priorities or positions. Do you recommend local league action? If so, please refer to the League position that supports your suggestion. 2) links to further information available on an issue, if available.*

Chair Gibney summarized the start of work, dates of moratorium, and notices relating to the Commission's work on the wind ordinance. He stated that the Commission had received and reviewed all comments from the SEPA (State Environmental Protection Act) review and those submitted during the comment period, minutes from the relevant meetings in which discussions of the ordinance had been held, and Denis Tracy's materials listing all the findings of fact supporting the decisions reflected in the proposed ordinance.

Commissioners then publicly reviewed the procedural findings of fact and the list of documents to be used as findings of fact provided by Denis Tracy. Brian Davies moved, and another commissioner seconded, to enter these into the record. They were to vote on the motion after the public comments.

The latest version of Chapter 19.61 proposed changes of the commercial wind energy

facilities ordinance was projected on the screen so the audience could see the changes. Commissioners were asked if they had any opening remarks or changes they wanted to make to the proposed draft. Weston Kane proposed to change the setback for the list of county and public park locations (Cascade to Palouse Trail, Escure Ranch, etc.) from 1 mile to 6x the height of the turbine. After discussion, Commissioners agreed on this change.

Chair Gibney then opened the floor for public comments with a limit of three minutes and a request that people confine their comments to the amendments proposed.

#### Public Comment

- Jess Smith said that she supported the exclusions and proposed setbacks. She mentioned several other counties and states that had similar or greater setbacks for wind farms.
- Tom Lamar (Palouse Clearwater Environmental Institute, owner of Rose Creek) commented that the ordinance had been written as an effective ban on wind energy projects in Whitman County and that this would push developers to the state of Washington EFSEC (Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council) for consideration of projects. He cited the high setbacks and exclusion areas as examples of regulation that would take the siting out of the hands of Whitman County.
- Chantel Macguire, who owned an aerial application company, felt that the setbacks were adequate for aerial application around the turbines and was glad they would bury the transmission lines. She was concerned about the setbacks for Rock Lake that might have made it difficult to pick up water for firefighting.
- Holly Greystone supported the proposed setbacks. Shane Roche (developer of Harvest Hills) thought that if the proposed changes were passed, developers would go straight to the state. Linda Barber thought wind energy projects were something that the county wanted because they needed electricity. Another person objected to landowners being told what they could do with their land. Bill Owens and his wife were part of the original petitioners against wind farms.
- Greg Jones was in favor of windmills and wanted to continue to have the right to have energy facilities on his land. He thought the regulations were, in effect, a ban of wind power in the county. Annie Messer was against the new regulations because they were too restrictive and abdicated the County's ability to have wind power and economic benefits. Roger read comments from a friend who was against windmills on farmland because of the effect on soil erosion; she thought that terracing might mitigate this problem.
- Collin Bannister said that the input on this project had been primarily opposed to wind turbines with very little input supporting them. He argued that the provision of

information should have been more independent and not provided by the company that wanted to build towers. Seth Penton, an ag pilot from Oakesdale, lived very close to the current wind farm; he noted there were noises on calm days, but on windy days the turbines sounded like a rushing river. He had sprayed around wind turbines for 14 years and had safety concerns about working around them. He supported putting the transmission lines underground.

- Julie Clarkson encouraged the Commission to change the setbacks for nonparticipating landowners to 1 mile due to infrasound. Simon Smith favored wind energy production and felt that the proposed changes were unnecessarily restrictive and without a sound basis. Cory was in full support of the amendments, noting wind turbines were noisy and more noticeable because of the elevation changes.
- Kevin Owens requested that aerial application protections be strengthened, soil and road construction standards be added to prevent erosion, emergency helicopter access be assured, and firefighting water access be maintained. Charlotte Omoto believed that the regulation might prevent farmers from allowing wind farms on their properties, which was an economic opportunity for them and the County.
- Dan Lensen approved of the changes that had been made but encouraged Commissioners to continue their work. Bob Johnson supported the revised wind farm code as essential. Tom Himison believed that the setbacks might interfere with private property rights. Roger was concerned that too many farm areas were being taken out of production and did not like the idea of planting concrete foundations on productive farmland.
- Carol Black thought that 700 ft turbines would become the dominant feature of the landscape. She proposed changes in the property line setback to 10x or 2 miles, whichever was greater. Jean Kinzer wanted the Commissioners to increase the setbacks so that nonparticipating property owners did not have to see the turbines.
- Adam Cappage advocated for clean, reliable energy but did not think the excessive setbacks were necessary. Jamie Anderson strongly supported the proposed revisions and wanted to see the fire control section strengthened. Paul Kimmel with Avista Utilities said there were over 70,000 customers out of power that day and noted they were looking for new resources to provide renewable energy.
- Bill Clark supported the revised wind code as a 5th generation farmer who had not signed a lease to avoid adversely affecting his neighbors. Ken Duft wanted the commissioners to increase the protected area around the three protected parks to 9 miles. Other speakers were concerned the regulation would prevent development needed to prevent climate change, while another stated wind energy was expensive and unreliable. Rick McNanny was opposed to the location chosen by the developer

and supported the regulation to prevent a wind farm near Kamiak Butte. Art Steger did not want a wind farm built on some of the best farmland in the County. Mary Jean Emtman was in support of the proposed amendments.

At 8:23, everyone who wanted to comment had commented. After a break, Chair Gibney asked the Commissioners if they had any additional comments and findings of fact that should be noted in the record. Brian Davies stated that they had something they could put forward, and if it became apparent that the regulation was not working, they could revise it. He was ready to move the ordinance to the BOCC. Weston was ready to move the ordinance forward, calling it a good compromise. David McKiernan was not 100% happy but felt that major improvements had been made. Tammy Southern wanted to move the ordinance forward. Dean Kinzer stated that the ordinance would protect the health, welfare, and safety of the County. Chris Melhus believed it was a living document. Chair Gibney believed the document was a compromise but perhaps overstepped private property rights more than he had hoped.

Brian Davies asked whether an advisory vote could be taken. Denis Tracy stated that the BOCC could get an advisory vote. The BOCC had set a public hearing on the extension of the moratorium for December 29. The regulation needed to be sent to the BOCC on Friday, December 19. Chair Gibney moved that a finding of fact be added noting that the majority of citizens at the December 17 meeting had agreed with the proposed regulation. Commissioners supported this finding.

Denis Tracy suggested two additional findings: that incorporated communities needed a 2-mile setback to permit growth and rural residential districts needed the same. The WCPC moved and seconded to forward their proposed regulation to the BOCC. The motion passed 8 to 1.

**Public Meetings of Interest to League:** *Were there any public meetings announced that you think League members may be interested in attending and/or becoming involved with that relate to League positions?*

BOCC meeting on December 29, 2025 to extend the moratorium on windfarm permits,

**Process & Protocol:** (Observations about participants and procedures of the meeting) *e.g., Did the members appear to have done their "homework"? Were members courteous to each other and the public? Was access to materials for certain agenda items available to you?*

Members are courteous to each other and the public. The draft ordinance materials were displayed on Zoom while being discussed.

**Your additional comments/opinions:**

## **Reminders** 😊

*A LWV Observer is impartial, silent, and respectful. It is, however, acceptable to ask questions for clarification following the meeting.*

*Remember to wear your awesome ID Badge!*

*Please attach any materials, or links to such, received at the meeting that you feel are important to your report. Please submit your report to the LWV Observer Chair within one week of the meeting.*

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