

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: 3/4/2026

Observer Reporting: Chambers-Fox Shelley

Length of Meeting: 1 hr 18 min

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

Members Absent: Tammy Southern (Garfield), Julian Mathews (Pullman)

Others Present (e.g., media, public): County Staff: Alan Thomson, Grace DiBiasi, Mark Storey, Brandon Johnson. Dan Nickel, Consultant (Facet), presenting on Critical Areas Ordinance update.

Public audience: on zoom: Carol Black, Ken Duft, Rick, Jamie Anderson, Julie, Also 6 people in the auditorium.

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.*

On March 2, 2026 the Whitman County Commissioners **approved the Wind farm ordinance** recommended by the WC Planning Commission (2-1).

New Business: No new updates on solar and battery storage ordinance. The Commission will work on the Critical Areas Ordinance tonight. Alan announced that he anticipates needing to meet twice a month until the CAO is completed. Dave Gibney objects to meeting twice a month if there is no urgency since the state wants the update completed by December 2027. Alan states the urgency is because the funding for the consultant ends June 30 this year.

Dan Nickel from Facet, operating out of Spokane, presented on the **Critical Areas Ordinance Update**. There are new Growth Management Act requirements, and the ordinance must be consistent with the best available science. Facet has completed a Gap analysis to determine where Whitman County's code may need revisions. The Whitman County ordinance is in good shape because the previous update was performed in 2019. Critical areas include wetlands, frequently flooded areas, aquifer recharge areas, geologically hazardous areas, and Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas. The goal is to protect all functions and values of critical areas to ensure there is no net loss. Best available science includes peer reviewed research publications and synthesis publications from state agencies and have been added to a reference list by Facet.

- Wetlands must be identified by a qualified professional, evaluated to determine water quality functions, hydrologic functions and habitat functions.
- Mitigation includes buffers, properly sequenced, and may include compensatory activities to achieve no net loss.
- Fish and wildlife habitat must be identified by a qualified professional, evaluated to determine functions, sensitive species and mitigated. Streams and riparian area ecosystems have been recently reviewed in a 2-volume set.
- Site Potential Tree Height has been mapped throughout the state to determine necessary protection for full riparian functions. The state recommends that counties use a minimum 100-foot-wide buffer riparian zone or the Site Potential Tree Height where available for all streams. In Whitman County the Riparian Management Zone (RMZ) based on the Site Potential Tree Height will range between 106 and 179 ft.
- Geologically hazardous areas are assessed by a qualified professional to determine what are their potential risks to people and property and how to mitigate them.

Key changes: Ensure no net loss statements are included, reasonable use exceptions will be clarified to narrowly apply.

- They suggest reviewing distances for critical areas to use the largest buffer possible and adding no net loss information to the mitigation section.
- Wetlands should address functionally disconnected buffer areas.
- Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas need to be reviewed to determine if the buffers meet or exceed the requirements. In addition, the county will need to update the stream typing system to the currently used nomenclature.
- They suggest addressing functionally disconnected buffer areas and clarify buffer vegetation standards for the fish and wildlife areas as well and to ensure that sewage placement is 100 ft away from streams.
- In the section on Geologically Hazardous Areas, they suggest adding Channel Migration zones.

Timeline: In March prepare Critical Area Ordinance amendments and provide for Planning Commission review in April, April 60 day notice, SEPA, May Public Comment period, Planning Commission hearing, Planning Commission recommendation to BOCC, June BOCC adoption.

Members discussed the need to have 2 meetings a month until the Critical Area Ordinance is completed.

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?*

The Board of Adjustment will have a conditional use hearing for Inland Power and Light for **expansion of the Jerita substation on Hay-LaCrosse Rd** on March 12. A second hearing will be held to consider Two-GM (a Motley-Motley company) placing a building 10 ft from the property line in the North Pullman-Moscow Corridor District.

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?

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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