

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: 3/18/2026

Observer Reporting: Chambers-Fox Shelley

Length of Meeting: 1 hour 10 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), Julian Matthews Pullman.

Members Absent: Tammy Southern

Others Present (e.g., media, public): County Staff: Alan Thomson (Whitman County Planner), Grace DiBiasi (Assistant Planner-on Zoom), Brandon Johnson (Public Works), Denis Tracy (District Attorney- on Zoom), Clerk. Public: Ken Duft, Tom Thompson, Kevin Atkinson

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.*

Notes taken from the Zoom video posted at the Whitman County Agenda Center.

Consultant Roles and Project Framework

Grace DiBiasi clarified that the consultant's role is to assist in gathering information about the proposed ordinance, rather than determining its content—a task that remains the responsibility of the Commissioners. Rachel Granrath, representing the consulting firm Kimley-Horn, presented the four-stage development process for the Commercial Solar Facility and Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) Ordinances: introducing topics, discussing them, evaluating results, and finally drafting the code. This iterative process builds upon frameworks from other jurisdictions while ensuring specific local needs are met.

Proposed Restrictions and Jurisdiction

The Commissioners emphasized that commercial solar projects should require a conditional use permit to ensure individual consideration. To protect the county's resources, they specifically proposed a 5,000-acre cap on development to mitigate the loss of agricultural land. Regarding jurisdiction, it was confirmed that the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) does have authority over both commercial solar and wind facilities, and applicants may choose to submit projects to them.

Timeline and Schedule of Discussions

The timeline for the ordinance work is structured through the spring and early summer:

- **March 18:** Kickoff

- **April 1:** Draft review and peer jurisdiction comparison
- **April 15:** Focused discussion on setbacks and siting
- **May 6:** Visual impacts and rural character
- **May 20:** Community benefits and economic tools
- **June 3:** Completion of the Draft Ordinance Framework
- **June 17:** Review of revised ordinances and policy decisions guiding public hearings

Zoning and Technical Considerations

The current drafts distinguish between standalone battery facilities and those built alongside solar arrays. While the solar ordinance limits facilities to agricultural districts, the battery ordinance also includes the Pullman-Moscow corridor. For solar, Tier 1 (homeowner-scale) projects are allowed in any district, while Tiers 2 and 3 face stricter zoning limits. Public safety and infrastructure concerns were also raised, including the need for fire prevention measures and the suggestion by Bill Myers to require power lines to be buried.

Visual Impacts and Environmental Safety

Discussion turned to the aesthetic and environmental footprint of these facilities. Dave Gibney noted that battery storage is less visually intrusive than wind turbines, though Denis Tracy requested more visual descriptions of the facilities for the Commissioners. Environmental concerns focused on decommissioning language and the materials used in panels. Specifically, the toxicity of cadmium telluride panels was discussed, prompting a request for the consultant to provide more information on whether the county can regulate specific materials.

Public Comment and Land Use

During the public comment period, community members emphasized the preservation of agricultural land. Tom Thompson urged the Commission to prioritize the county's agricultural potential, suggesting that solar farms be directed toward areas with higher solar gain. Similarly, Kevin Atkinson advocated for restricting solar facilities to industrial zones to prevent the loss of prime agricultural soil.

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?*

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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