

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: 4/15/2026

Observer Reporting: Chambers-Fox Shelley

Length of Meeting: 1 hr 50 min

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

Members Absent: Tammy Southern, Julian Matthews has resigned

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

Public: Carol Black

Consultant on Zoom: Douglas Yormick with Facet, presenting on CAO update.

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.*

Grace DiBiasi announced that there will be a Conditional Use Permit Hearing for Pullman-Moscow Airport for an inert landfill just south of the airport set for April 23, 2026.

Douglas Yormick from Facet, operating out of Spokane, presented on the updates to the Critical Areas Ordinance. Commissioners went through the code section by section and discussed items that concern them. The section on Frequently flood areas has the most changes. Dave Gibney asks that they be consistent about referencing the county planner (rather than using planning director interchangeably).

Commissioners start by reviewing section 300, Definitions. Brian Davies asks how 'highest adjacent grade' is defined. It is the highest natural elevation of the ground next to the proposed walls of a structure, recommended for updating the frequently flooded area section. Alkali Wetlands are defined in a new section Special Wetland Characteristics In Eastern Washington. Ecology recommended addition of definitions of Elevation Certificates (for Federal flood insurance purposes) and Critical Area Emergencies (immediate damage to public and private property). Another addition is that the Habitat Management Plan needs to be prepared if there are unavoidable impacts to Fish and Wildlife areas.

Priority habitats defined for Whitman County include Eastern Steppe which includes Palouse Prairie and shrub steppe which is more typical of the western County, as well as the species

found in these habitats. Reasonably Safe from Flooding means that the lowest floor is at least 2 feet above the highest adjacent grade. Riparian Habitat area adjacent to aquatic systems includes functions of the buffer such as shade for temperature control and vegetation for pollution control. Site Potential Tree Height is used to determine what the width of the stream buffer area should be.

Wetlands with Special Characteristics for Eastern Washington: detailed information on Alkali wetlands, bogs, calcareous, forested wetlands, vernal pools and Wetlands of high conservation value can be found in an Ecology Publication so the reader needs to refer to another document to find this information.

The next modified section is section 400. Noxious and Invasive Plant Removal must be conducted in a manner that avoids or minimizes impacts to fish and wildlife habitat and soil disturbance and compaction but is completed without review. Commissioners note that this section requires the use of aquatic herbicides if there is a chance of spray reaching the water.

In section 500 the public and private pedestrian trails section has been expanded to describe their placement.

In section 600 they increased the buffer area between a project and a wetland from 200 to 250 feet.

Section 700 specifies that mitigation sites be located in the critical area tract or a conservation easement.

No changes in section 800.

Section 900 states that mitigations for avoidable impacts shall achieve no net loss of functions of the wetland.

No changes in section 1000.

Section 1100 wetland delineations will be specified on a map with gps coordinates. Regulated activities include those that result in a. a significant change in water temperature, a significant change of physical or chemical characteristics of sources of water to the wetland, c. a significant change in the timing, frequency, depth, or duration of water entering, d. the introduction of pollutants. Category 4 wetlands are less than 4000 sq ft, are not subject to avoidance and minimization and may be filled if the impacts are fully mitigated.

This section contains a table specifying the size of buffers that should be followed and measures that should be used to minimize or mitigate the impact on wetlands. Wetland regulation may exclude areas that are functionally and effectively disconnected from the

wetland by existing public or private roads or railroads. Using these minimization measures will allow landowners to use a smaller buffer size around wetlands. If a wetland contains federally or state listed species the buffer may be increased. The wetland mitigation section is largely unchanged though some text has been reordered. Mitigation can involve replacement or restoration of a wetland in the project area.

The next section, 1200 describes impacts to Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation areas (FWHCA). Most of the changes note that there should be no net loss of the functions of the habitats. The regulation will use the WDFW Priority Habitats as described here <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/at-risk/phs/list>. Recommended buffers for FWHCA have been increased from 200 to 250 ft. Mitigations methods shall include aquatic and terrestrial areas. Wildlife friendly fencing shall be used. No development shall be allowed where there are sensitive species or state priority habitats. Riparian habitats are categorized depending on whether they include fish (Type F) or not. Type N are intermittent streams where buffers may range from 100 to 180 ft. For dry lands or shrub-steppe which includes most of Whitman County buffer widths shall be the greater of 100 ft or the furthest contiguous extent of native riparian vegetation that maintains ecosystem functions, including bank stability, shading, wood recruitment potential from shrub or tree species, nutrient inputs, and pollution removal. If there is forest adjacent to the stream Site Potential Tree Height (SPTH) can be used to determine the width of Riparian Management Zones (RMZs) by setting the buffer width equal to the height a mature tree (approx. 200 years old) can reach on that specific site. This science-based approach ensures buffers are wide enough to provide full ecological functions, such as bank stabilization, shade (stream temperature regulation), and woody debris recruitment. One hundred feet is the minimum buffer width to permit pollutant removal. Riparian habitat areas may exclude areas that are functionally and effectively disconnected from the riparian habitat areas by existing public or private roads or railroads.

Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas, section 1300 had few changes.

Section 1400 Geologically Hazardous Areas contains a few changes. Erosion hazard areas include channel migration zones and the review distance has been increased from 200 to 250 ft.

Section 1500 Frequently Flooded Areas has edits that reflect more modern terminology and notes that the ordinance does not imply that land outside of the areas of special flood hazards will be free from flooding, but includes no substantive change in intent.

Permit applicants who want to build projects in Frequently Flooded areas will need to have the project reviewed by an engineer. Brian Davies suggests that Commissioners review this section in the next few days and forward questions or comments to Alan.

Alan states that the next steps are to complete the SEPA checklist and send the ordinance to

various agencies for a 60 day review and comments. Commissioners discuss whether that could be completed in time for a May 20 public hearing. After the Planning Commission public meeting the ordinance can go forward to the Board of County Commissioners.

The video ends at 8:50 pm before the meeting is officially adjourned. As of April 27, the minutes have not been posted.

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?*

This report is based on the video recording of the meeting on April 15, 2026. The recording ends before the meeting is officially adjourned. As of April 27, 2026 the minutes have not been posted so there may be some information missing from this report.

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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