

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission Date: Nov 1, 2023

Observer Reporting: Shelley Chambers Fox Length of Meeting: 75 minutes

Members Present: This was a hybrid meeting with most participants in the Colfax meeting room: Dave Gibney, Mark Tolman (Pullman), Weston Kane (LaCrosse), Chad Whetzel, Russ Jamison (Garfield), Brian Davies (on zoom).

Absent: Fred Wexler, David Tysz (Tekoa).

Others Present (i.e., media, public): Staff: Alan Thomson, Whitman County Planner, Director Public Works Engineer, Brandon Johnson, Public Works (running Zoom), Mark Storey (County Engineer).

Public: Ken Duft, Lee Riddle, Alex, community affairs officer with Vesper Energy.

Content (What is being discussed):

Public Meetings

1. Public hearing on the Riddco request to change the zoning in a specified section of Airport Road from heavy industrial to light industrial. No comments were made from the public so the Board adopted the rezone as proposed with the condition that all outdoor light be cut off.
2. Public hearing on code amendments to Chapters 19.15 and 19.16. These were housekeeping changes in the zoning regulations for the north and south sides of the Pullman-Moscow corridor to align them with the new Whitman County Comprehensive plan. There were no public comments about these changes so they were approved by the board.

Reports

1. Board of Adjustment forthcoming hearings – Conditional use permit application for Kyle Ian Pringle who proposes to offer machinist, upholstery, and lapidary services in his future residence, shop, and garage located on Dry Creek Road. Hearing date is November 9, 2023.
2. Update on previous conditional use permits and variances - Conditional use permit for Ferrell Gas in the S-Pullman Moscow Corridor District was approved on October 26, 2023.
3. Update on previous administrative use permits – Motley and Motley new storage building permit was issued on September 27, 2023.
4. Forthcoming Shoreline of the State Substantial Development Permits – Avista replacing a gas pipeline under the South Fork of the Palouse River just south of Albion. Has been approved by the County but now must be approved by the Dept of Ecology.

Unfinished business

1. Continue conversation about creating a solar energy ordinance. Alan sent the commissioner some materials to read about utility scale solar projects. The county will be using the wind ordinance as a framework for crafting the solar ordinance. There aren't many model ordinances in the state of Washington. Chad proposes an initial statement about Whitman County being primarily agricultural land might be useful. WSU has completed a study about solar projects that should be reviewed. Is there any place in Whitman County that we want to take off the table because of the agricultural value of the land. Farmland has been assessed in the county into categories based on soil type so this could be used to make these determinations. Brian Davies voices concerns about

allowing any cultivatable land to be converted into solar farms. Russ Jamison points out that prime farmland may represent a landowner's retirement nest egg and so saying it can't be sold for solar farms is a concern to him. What is the effect of solar farms on return of water to the aquifer? There will have to be storm water runoff plans associated with these projects. We are not sure what the recharge properties of different types of land are. Our Comprehensive plan says we want to protect agricultural land and to encourage renewable energy. Solar farms will require transmission lines, substations and batteries. What are the hazards? Alan notes that some of the resources he provided to commissioners address hazards. Russ notes that there are issues with liability associated with CRP, weed control and fire that would need to be similarly addressed with solar farms. Are there hazards that may develop as the solar farm ages and whose responsibility is decommissioning? Russ points out that to some extent solar farms are eyesores and will spoil the beauty of the rural landscape in order to provide energy for more populated areas. Crafting this ordinance will be the task for the next few months.

Public Meetings of interest to League

1. None this month.

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 agenda and meeting link were sent via email. I did not receive the materials that Alan had shared with the commissioner about utility scale solar farms. Next meeting is December 6, 2023.*