

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission **Date:** Jan 3, 2024

Observer Reporting: Shelley Chambers Fox **Length of Meeting:** 1 hour 44 minutes

Members Present: This was a hybrid meeting with some participants in the Colfax meeting room and others on Zoom: Dave Gibney, Mark Tolman (Pullman), Weston Kane (LaCrosse), Chad Whetzel, Brian Davies (on zoom), David Tysz (Tekoa).

Absent: Fred Wexler, Russ Jamison (Garfield).

Others Present (i.e., media, public): Staff: Alan Thomson, Whitman County Planner, Grace Di Biasi, Assistant planner, Brandon Johnson, Public Works (running Zoom), Mark Storey (County Engineer), Elinor Huber, Clerk.

Public: Paul Kimmell, Avista presenter; Andrew Davidson, Citizen.

Notes taken from Planning Commission minutes uploaded at

https://whitmancounty.org/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Minutes/_01032024-661

Content (What is being discussed):

Public Meetings (none)

Reports

1. Update on previous conditional use permits and variances – Conditional use permit for Umont LLC, to lease a parcel on the Palouse Producers' Subdivision in the South-Pullman Corridor District to Disaster Response for the storage of emergency response materials and office space was approved on December 14, 2023.
2. Update on previous Board of County Commissioners' action – A zone change for Ridco property off Airport Road was approved on December 4, 2023. Code amendments to Chapters 19.15 and 19.16 were not decided on and moved forward to another public hearing on December 26, 2023. At that hearing on December 26, 2024, the BOCC approved the amendments to Chapters 19.15 and 19.16, North and South Pullman-Moscow Corridor Districts with one change.

Unfinished business

1. Continue conversation about creating a solar energy ordinance. Presentation by Paul Kimmell from Avista on how the Avista grid system works. Mr. Kimmell is the Business & Public Affairs Manager for Avista and lives in Viola. Avista is an industrial utility serving both natural gas and electric customers, operating revenues about \$1.4 billion, Shareholder Equity, at \$2.2 billion with 1,800 employees across their service area. About 60% of their generation portfolio that is renewable. They serve customers in four different states, 30,000 square miles, population within that footprint of about 1,700,000 people. They also own a utility up in Juneau, Alaska, Alaska Electric Light Power. That is all hydro based up in the mountains and then when their hydro doesn't work, they switch over to diesel generators. About half of Avista's portfolio is hydroelectric projects that they own or contract for the generation. About 10% is wind; they buy all of Palouse Wind generation as well as Rattlesnake Flat out in Adams County that is northwest of Washtucna. They also have a woody biomass facility up at Kettle Falls and

about a third of their generation is thermal, natural gas, and about 8% is coal. Avista Rates are among the lowest in the country because of substantial hydroelectric investment.

2. As Avista plans their energy resources, they look through three lenses: affordable, clean, reliable. This means that at the end of the day, they always have to meet the demand for energy at the time that is demanded. Generation must always equal load. The presentation centered on the different resource available and how they contribute to meeting demand. Consider the difference in demand in winter vs summer: in the summer there isn't much load in the mornings, and by lunch it starts ramping up in the afternoon. Then in the wintertime, just a little higher all the way through the day and into the evening. In terms of peak demand, summer has increased such that it almost equals winter demand. Hydroelectric is clean, somewhat variable in that snowpack varies from year to year, flexible in terms of when it can be used. Natural gas generation does produce carbon emissions, varies in price but not in how much is generated; it can be stored to allow use when needed. Coal as an energy source produces carbon and particulate emissions but it is a stable resource and flexible about when it can be generated and used. Biomass (burning of wood waste) is done with the cleanest technology to generate steam. There is some variability in the availability of wood waste but when available can be flexible about when used. Wind generation is sporadic so it has to be used in combination with another source to provide for energy needs when demanded. Here is data on the solar facility in Lind. This is a 24 MW project, just north of the community of Lind. The footprint on this is about 200 acres. There are about 80,000 panels out there. Solar production is very seasonal. In the summertime, when the sun comes up around six, the panels start working. Then they will produce pretty steadily unless some clouds floated by and then as the sun goes down, the generation stops. Then, seasonally, in the wintertime, the lower sun angle, there is less production. Solar generation is about 24% efficient while wind is about 36% efficient, in other words a bit more reliable than solar in terms of meeting demand. They are very interested in battery storage but so far even Tesla does not have utility scale batteries.
3. Avista has worked with the public on a couple of demand studies to see if they can get people to reduce demand in predictable ways. They are often long on energy production from hydroelectric in the winter and short on production compared to demand in the summer. Avista occasionally buys hydroelectric power from the federal system which includes the Snake and Columbia River dam systems. Avista mainly uses their own hydroelectric dams; one of their larger facilities is the Noxon Rapids Facility in Noxon, Montana, roughly 250 MW up on the Clark Fork River.
4. Many of the Avista transmission lines run along the state and interstate highways and need to be modified at the off ramps and substations. The generation facilities direct the power to substations, the transmission lines move it from substations and ultimately it is distributed to the customers. Transmission lines can be a limiting factor in taking on new generators because you can't overload a transmission line. In their planning process, Avista has seen more population growth than they anticipated in the Palouse, 1.5% vs 0.8 % so their next resource plan will consider that. The need to consider renewable energy sources is driven by regulations as well as population growth. In the state of Washington, the electric sector will be carbon neutral by 2027 and carbon free by 2045. Then in our natural gas system, we have aspirational goals to reduce that by 30% by

2030 and carbon neutral by 2045. The regulations that govern coal require that you can't service with coal after 2025 so Avista is in the process of decommissioning the coal plant contributions for Washington. Alan states that the reason hydroelectric power was not looked upon as renewable was because if it were, there would be no reason to have wind and solar or any other renewables, because you couldn't compete with that. Avista is managing through some of these technology, economic forces, to figure out how they need to decarbonize and still keep the reliability affordability on the environment in balance and energy clean. One thing they will do is push to keep their natural gas plant operating. They are working with customers around with demand response and voluntary programs. With electric vehicles they are looking at whether they can use your battery to store generation for a few hours a day. They will pay you to do that.

5. Energy equity: About 35% of Avista's customer base is considered the working poor, that struggles to make monthly payments on energy, transportation, childcare and housing, all of that. So, in the State of Washington, that clean energy implementation we must figure out ways to reduce energy burns especially with our low-income population. That is where this energy equity looks like and those rules are still being written.
6. Mr. Kimmel points out that ideally new projects need to be sited close to existing transmission lines to reduce costs. Not all of the transmission lines in the County belong to Avista; the other power companies include Clearwater and Inland Power. Inland Power buys from the federal dam system.
7. Chad Whetzel points out that they will need to consider animal migration patterns in their placement of facilities because of the need to fence them. There was a discussion about the placement of batteries to reduce the risk of fire.

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. Next meeting is Feb 7, 2024.