

5/1/24 League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission Date: May 1, 2024

Observer Reporting: Shelley Chambers Fox Length of Meeting: 1 hour, 7 minutes

Members Present: This was a hybrid meeting with some participants in the Colfax meeting room: Chad Whetzel, Dave Gibney (on zoom), Brian Davies (on zoom).

Absent: Matt Webb, David Tysz (Tekoa), Mark Tolman (Pullman), Weston Kane (LaCrosse), Russ Jamison (Garfield) There was no quorum tonight.

Others Present (i.e., media, public): Staff: Alan Thomson, Whitman County Planner, Grace DiBiasi (Assistant Planner), Brandon Johnson, Public Works (running Zoom), David Werner (Clerk).

Public: Ken Duft (on Zoom)

Zoom link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87320476769>

Content (What is being discussed):

Public Meetings

1. None.

Reports

1. Planning Commission forthcoming hearings – A zone change hearing from the Agricultural District to Heavy Commercial for Huber Action Freight on May 15, 2024. Alan will be out of office but Grace DiBiasi will be running the meeting. The County will need a quorum of the commissioners, at least 5.

Unfinished business

1. Continue conversation about creating a solar energy ordinance for utility scale solar projects, Chapter 19.65.
2. Day Star Energy is withdrawing from the project that they had proposed. The Commission will go ahead with creating a regulation with a plan of completing it by the end of this year.
3. Alan has made some changes to the proposed regulations since the last meeting. He included definitions, spelled out SEPA in the document.
4. Chad Whetzel is concerned that the only limit on solar farms was the 5000 acres that the county commissioners wanted to specify. He would like to say only allowed on land zoned as non-agricultural in case there are lawsuits that overturn the 5000 acre limit as arbitrary and capricious. Alan thinks that you cannot build with a slope greater than 7% nor do they want to build on the flat because of the shadow. He also does not want the regulation to be too restrictive because the state may step in and dictate what land can or can't be used for solar development. Whitman County uses land descriptions from USDA or FSA and not the label 'land of statewide significance. Alan will ask Jeff Marshall to go over this again with the Commissioners. The County is losing a little bit of agricultural land every year.
5. Chad Whetzel would like to specify decommissioning processes including soil testing and removal of concrete. Dave Gibney would like to know what the standard protocol for decommissioning is that is considered to be a best practice based on the available science. He would also like to have an idea of what size bond companies need to raise in order to pay for decommissioning. The size of the bond would need to be re-evaluated every 3 to 5 years.

6. Chad Whetzel would like to separate the solar panel projects and the utility scale battery storage regulations.
7. There was a listening session last week with the BOCC about whether there should be a moratorium on new wind farms but no decisions have been made about that.

Public Meetings of interest to League

1. See above public meeting scheduled on May 15.

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 May 15, 2024 for the zone change mentioned above. Regular planning commission meeting is June 5, 2024 but the auditorium is not available the first week of June. The commissioners present prefer to meet the third Wednesday of June, the 19th. In July they would prefer to meet July 17th.*