

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission Date: May 15, 2024

Observer Reporting: Shelley Chambers Fox Length of Meeting: 1 hour, 40 minutes

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

Absent: Matt Webb, (LaCrosse),

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

Public: David (on Zoom)

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

Content (What is being discussed):

Public Meetings

1. Planning Commission Public meeting to allow comment and approval of a zone change from the Agricultural District to Heavy Commercial for Huber Action Freight. Grace DiBiasi ran the meeting. The request is to expand the size of their property zoned heavy commercial to provide for additional parking space. The zone change was approved.

Unfinished business

1. Continue conversation about creating a solar energy ordinance for utility scale solar projects, Chapter 19.65.
2. Grace asked the commissioners to review the changes to the proposed regulations that were displayed in red.
3. Russ Jamison asked if the County Commissioners have expressed a desire to comply with what the governor wants or if they have other ideas about how the regulations should be written. Chad Whetzel notes that they are interested in having a solar ordinance and they have expressed an interest in specifying a cap on the number acres or in some way limiting the number of acres used for solar farms in the County.
4. The commissioners would like to look at the decommissioning section first. The draft ordinance states that 'The Facility owner shall, at its expense, complete decommissioning of the solar energy facility within 12 months after the end of the useful life of the facility. This includes removal of solar systems, buildings, cabling, electrical components, roads, foundations to a depth of 36 inches.' They discussed whether 36 inches would be sufficient to allow tilling and other farming activities. They would prefer that all the above materials would be removed. The company will purchase a bond to ensure the cost of decommissioning. The ordinance states that the cost of decommissioning equals the estimated cost of decommissioning minus 90% salvage value of the equipment. Costs are re-estimated every 5 years. The commissioners discussed ways to ensure that funds are available to decommission the facility in the event of insolvency of the corporate owner. They would like to use an 125% bond and to use an anticipated value of decommissioning costs 25 years in the future to allow for inflation.

5. Commissioners discussed monitoring soil periodically during the project to ensure that the soil is not left unsuitable for farming.
6. Mark Storey advises that the commissioners craft the ordinance to create a situation that is in the County's best interest permitting some development that is locally controlled.

Public Meetings of interest to League

1. None.

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. 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.