

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission Date: Sept 18, 2024

Observer Reporting: Shelley Chambers Fox Length of Meeting: 1 hour, 20 minutes

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

Absent: Matt Webb, Russ Jamison (Garfield).

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

Public: none

Zoom link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84787343315>

Content (What is being discussed):

Public Meetings

1. None.

Reports

- a. Board of Adjustment forthcoming hearing: Blaise and Makalie Schile are requesting a variance to the 1500 view shed rule to construct two new residences on a parcel of land on Brayton Rd within 1500 ft of six other residences. Meeting set for Sept 26, 2024.
- b. Update on previous conditional use permits and variances – Ambrose Property Group applied for a CUP for a distribution Center in the North Pullman-Moscow Corridor District off Airport Road and SR 270. Hearing was held on July 25, 2024, and the permit was granted. Dan and Brandy Brown applied for a conditional use permit to operate an event venue for community festivals and dryland camping off SR 195 just north of Colfax. The hearing was held on September 12, 2024, and the permit was granted. Naomi Allan requested a variance to the 1500 foot viewshed rule to construct a new residence within 1,500 feet of another residence off Old Moscow Road. The hearing was held on August 29, 2024, and the variance was approved.
- c. Update on previous Board of County Commissioners' action – On June 7, 2024, the BOCC approved the zone change for Huber Freight from the Agricultural District to Heavy Commercial District.

Unfinished business

1. Unfinished business: Continue conversation about creating a solar energy ordinance Chapter 19.65. A separate battery storage ordinance will be developed that will apply to wind or solar projects.
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 the changes to the proposed regulations discussed at the meeting on May 15. The plan is to review these changes to see if they read the way the commissioners would like. Many of the regulations are taken from the wind ordinance.
 - a. Projects want to be as close to transmission lines as possible and to build their own substations.

- b. Projects will be allowed in the agricultural district but limited to 5000 acres. Chad would like the district attorney to weigh in on whether putting an acre limit on development is defensible in court.
- c. Not yet determined where in the ag zone to allow and disallow. The locations will be limited by the locations of the transmission lines that they would tie into. The board will look at a map of transmission lines and make sure that there are no unsuitable locations.
- d. Proposed projects must include a decommissioning plan as well as a bond to pay for removal of the project when it is decommissioned. The base for solar panels is not as large as for wind turbines.
- e. Brian asks what are the tax consequences of decommissioning a project. Tax revenue will be lost when projects decommission so a plan to replace that revenue would be desirable.
- f. For public safety a county-approved fire management plan shall be provided by the applicant as part of the SEPA review process.
- g. Alan is working on the battery storage ordinance. It will be stand-alone so that it can be used for wind projects as well.
- h. Tom Handy says he recalls that the 5000 acres is a percent of ag ground that could be lost to agriculture. A discussion followed about the wisdom of using crop ground which is a limited resource for energy projects. The commissioners would like to see a map of the Avista and Inland Power transmission lines to see what amount of land would be considered desirable for projects.

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. The draft regulations were posted on the Zoom screen. Next meeting is October 2, 2024.*