

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: 3/5/2025

Observer Reporting: Chambers-Fox Shelley

Length of Meeting: 2 hours

Members Present: Chad Whetzel, Brian Davies, Mark Tolman (Pullman), Weston Kane (LaCrosse),

Tammy Southern (Garfield), Dave Gibney

Members Absent: there are 3 commissioner positions open

Others Present (e.g., media, public): Staff: Alan Thomson, Whitman County Planner, Grace DiBiasi

(Assistant Planner), Brandon Johnson, Public Works, David Werner (Clerk), Ken Duft, KHQ Nonstop

Local, Kevin Atkinson, Mike Dymkoski, Beth St Marie, Garrett LaCivita, Tresa Bannister, N Frazier, Nick,

Jamie Anderson, Tom Thompson, Jack Lien, Carol Black, other public audience.

Business pertaining to League Positions or Topics of Interest: *Include in this section 1) issues discussed that relate to League priorities or positions. Do you recommend local league action? If so, please refer to the League position that supports your suggestion. 2) links to further information available on an issue, if available.*

The Commissioners continued their discussion of the solar ordinance with a review of the changes they had made in February. These include that a valid conditional use permit must be approved before construction, and in the decommissioning section that the facility owner shall notify the County of its intent to terminate the project. The facility owner shall submit a detailed site restoration plan within 90 days of declaring its intent to terminate. If owned by an investor-owned electric utility regulated by the Washington Utility and Transportation Commission, such financial assurance is waived and the removal and restoration obligations here shall be a general obligation of the investor-owned utility. The permit holder shall provide a surety bond to provide security for the performance of its site restoration obligations. Mike Dymkoski (audience) asks why the county is involved in the agreement to decommission, why is it not between the company and the private landowner. Garrett LaCivita, land use lead for Washington Fish and Wildlife commented that she hasn't seen language about surety bonds in other ordinances in other counties. She would be willing to share what other counties have shared with her.

At 7:50 PM the Auditorium mike was muted and participants on Zoom could no longer hear the meeting. This was corrected at 8:00. Commissioners were discussing battery storage facilities. Projects will be evaluated based on site specific criteria. Tier II and III battery storage facilities will require a conditional use permit; Tier I battery storage facilities are for residential use and only require a building permit. They discussed summarizing the technical specifications as following the Labor and Industries regulations. They also discussed whether Tier II and Tier III battery storage facilities could be permitted on commercial and industrial zoned land as well as agricultural land. They ultimately agreed that Tier II storage facilities could be small enough to fit on commercial and industrial parcels.

The discussion shifted to the wind ordinance. The concern for Commissioners Swannack and Handy is that the wind ordinance needs to include decommissioning of facilities. Chad Whetzel invited the public to comment on the issue, five minutes each. Tom Thompson passed out a cover letter with revised code of the wind ordinance that had been developed by Save the Palouse including more public meetings for comment, changing the permitting process, meteorological towers, setbacks. Jack Lien had prepared a handout suggesting changes to the wind ordinance focused on the length of the review procedure currently

20 days, include citizens of Whitman County in the review of the application, add a noise standard. Kevin Atkinson would like wind turbines to be on property that is zoned industrial and to require all the concrete used in these facilities be low carbon content, only zero emission equipment be used in construction of projects, construction financial information be posted during the project and that decommissioning be between the landowner and developer, meteorological station at all facilities to monitor benefits of the facility.

Mike Dymkoski would like each wind turbine to be governed by a separate permit. He is also concerned that projects will be started and then abandoned when the opportunity for federal tax credits are eliminated. Decommissioning should be between the landowner and the developer not the county and the developer. Carol Black would like the County to include the aesthetic value of an area in the definition of a critical area.

The Planning Commission is missing 3 members and March is Mark Tolman's last meeting. Chad Whetzel has applied for the open County Commissioner position.

Process & Protocol: (Observations about participants and procedures of the meeting) *e.g., Did the members appear to have done their "homework"? Were members courteous to each other and the public? Was access to materials for certain agenda items available to you?*

Commissioners were courteous to each other and to the members of the public who were commenting.