

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: 5/21/2025

Observer Reporting: Chambers-Fox Shelley

Length of Meeting: 1 hour 50 minutes

Members Present: Dave Gibney (Chair Pullman), Tammy Southern (Garfield), Bill Myers (Colfax), David McKeirnan (Pullman), Dean Kinzer (Pullman). Weston Kane (LaCrosse). Julian Mathews (Nez Perce Tribe). On Zoom: Brian Davies (vice chair)

Members Absent:

Others Present (e.g., media, public): Staff: Alan Thomson, Whitman County Planner, Grace DiBiasi (Assistant Planner), Brandon Johnson, Public Works, Denis Tracy (District Attorney) Elinor Huber (Clerk) or David Werner (Clerk). Public: Ken Duft, Eric Slusher, Nicole Frazier, Shane Roche, Steelhead America, Ashley Hartman, Tracy, Luke Sorenson, Jack L, Carol Black, Greg Nolan, Mike Dymkoski, Denise McCardle, Rick McCarty, Rick, Todd Imeson, Kevin Atkinson, Tom Thompson, Adam Simmons.

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.*

Bill Myers would like the WCPC to hear additional presentations for more perspectives from Bob Morris and Rick Dunn. Bob Morris is an engineer who can provide factual information about NW renewable energy and the grid. Chair Gibney has not been in contact with Rick Dunn but his website does not reveal what factual information he might be able to provide. Bob Morris is available on June 4.

Chair Gibney asks if the public would like to make comments before the workshop starts rather than at the end. It is requested that the comment be new rather than one that has been made before.

Mike Dymkoski asks who is in charge of the Planning Commission, is it Dave Gibney or county staff? He thinks that the County Planner should not tell the Commissioners what they should be doing. Dave Gibney in cooperation with the County Planner set the agenda. This arrangement is set out in the code that established the WCPC.

Greg Nolan says that during his recent trip riding 750 miles on his motorcycle, he noted that most of the wind turbines he drove by were very similar to those at Oaksdale. The wind is more constant in Texas and Wyoming. He did see some turbines that were 600 foot tall and blades are 200+ feet; they are much bigger and will be a much different neighbor than the current turbines in the County. Carol Black states that we don't understand how tall the wind turbines are going to be to or how big their blades will be. The specs for providing citizens protection from these larger turbines are not in the guidelines yet.

Denise McCardle is concerned about decommissioning. She does not think that the wind in the Palouse will provide what the facility owners want in terms of energy generation. Dave Gibney states that the purpose of revisiting the wind ordinance is the need to require the facility owners to pay for decommissioning. She is concerned about the vibration causing people to abandon their land nearby. Adam Simmons moved into the

area where they are considering putting the wind farm. He wouldn't have moved there if he knew. He would like the ordinance to make it as hard as possible to build wind farms in the County because they will not bring the benefits that people think.

Next section is 19.61.050 SEPA Requirements for Commercial Wind Energy and will be considered at this meeting. Dave will read the section, Alan will answer questions, Commissioners will comment, then the public may comment. The Commissioners would like to get through the expanded SEPA checklist. This section comes into significance only if there is no need for an EIS (Environmental Impact Statement). The application must include enough information to describe the project and its impact including height, number, structure and road location, expected noise generated, location of power lines, and location of occupied structures near the project. Studies of effects on avian species habitat or other wildlife are required unless the applicant can show why they are not necessary.

Bill Myers asks how they can anticipate the requirements for the larger equipment, in particular noise concerns. There will be a noise study including infrasound and other frequencies, done on each project and at that time a determination will be made the appropriate siting of the project given what the study shows. Carol Black suggests a section in the ordinance that incorporates some of the values addressed in the County Comprehensive Plan. She would like the applicant to address the impact of the project on sweeping views, agricultural character and community values.

Denise McCardle wants to know about setbacks so the impact of real estate can be known. Dave Gibney notes that the Commission is not talking about setbacks until they read that section of the draft regulation. Todd Imeson's concern is who is involved in the decision-making process around where wind farms are located since they might be located on sensitive land. Kevin Atkinson is concerned that the consultant hired by the developer could not be considered independent. What is the procedure for the county to select an expert to review the EIS? This is something that is already established in an ordinance. Dave Gibney notes that the Comprehensive Plan encourages renewable energy in addition to mentioning sweeping views.

19.61.055 Micrositing Corridors/Areas: The County shall review and approve the final location of wind turbines, roads, and all buildings in the facility. They must be sited within the area approved by the County. Final siting considers geotechnical conditions, habitat, cultural resources, and subsurface conditions. Bill Myers suggests that the corridors be rezoned industrial. Alan points out that it is not in the County's interest to rezone 6000 acres of agricultural land as industrial. This would require the farmers who farm on wind farms to apply for a conditional use permit to farm on their own land. Dave Gibney notes that the main use of industrial zones is manufacturing. Mike Dymkoski wants the zoning to be consistent with the use. Kevin Atkinson would also like to see wind farms zoned as industrial. He thinks that the nonconforming use (farming) could be added into the industrial code. Carol Black notes that land used for wind farms includes 1.2 acres for the foundation plus underground cables, and roadways so it is not just a small amount of land.

Adjourned 8:50 pm

Next section to be reviewed will be 19.61.060

Next meeting on the first Wednesday of June.

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?*

Members were courteous to each other and the public. The draft ordinance was shared on the zoom screen.