

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: 6/18/2025

Observer Reporting: Chambers-Fox Shelley

Length of Meeting: 2 hours 10 minutes

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

Members Absent: Chris Melhus (Rosalia)

Others Present (e.g., media, public): Staff: Alan Thomson, Whitman County Planner, Grace DiBiasi (Assistant Planner), Brandon Johnson, Public Works, Mark Storey, Denis Tracy (District Attorney) on Zoom, Elinor Huber (Clerk). Public: Ken Duft, Eric Slusher, Nicole Frazier, Shane Roche, Steelhead America, Ashley Hartman, Luke Sorenson, Mark Weseman, Collin Bannister, Michael Echanove, Kevin Atkinson, Mark Myers, Theresa Bannister, Emily Pearce, Denise McCardle, Carol Black, Mike Dymkoski, Tom Thompson, others

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.*

There will be a short course on Local Planning sponsored by Department of Commerce of the State of Washington. Commissioners and members of the public are encouraged to enroll at the Dept of Commerce website.

The discussion on the wind ordinance continued. There will likely be revisions in the setback section but the changes need to be carefully considered and defensible. Questions have been submitted to the District Attorney and his experts to clarify what is possible. The Commissioners would like to know the best science and legal advice on setback issues. The Commission will move to later sections until the setback questions have been answered.

Tom Thompson asks about how long the moratorium on wind projects will be extended; it expires on July 7. Dave Gibney states the process will not be completed by July 7 and will require an extension of the moratorium. The County Commissioners are taking steps to extend the moratorium.

Site Access and Traffic Management: Applicant must put forward a traffic management plan for the roads that will be used in the project. It will be reviewed by the county engineer. Applicant will need permits to use roads for oversized loads. A franchise agreement will govern the long-term use of public rights-of-way for underground utilities, above ground utility and private infrastructure. Roads suitable for emergency vehicles shall be provided within 150 ft of the project. Bill Myers would like to know if applicants must submit a bond to pay for damage to roads. There is no provision for this in the present ordinance. Carol

Black suggests they add waterways and transmission lines to the elements that projects should address in their plan. Alan suggests that the waterways and transmission lines can be addressed during the SEPA (State Environmental Policy Act) or conditional use permit process rather than adding more detail in the ordinance.

Noise: Projects should comply with applicable state noise standards. A member of the audience is concerned about infrasound which is not addressed by the state regulations. He would like to see a large setback to prevent issues with infrasound. Dean Kinzer states that there is science on infrasound. It can be measured in decibels though we cannot hear it. Infrasound refers to sound waves with frequencies below the threshold of human hearing, typically below 20 Hz. While humans cannot consciously hear these low frequencies, they can sometimes be felt as vibrations. Tom Thompson would like to see this handled through setbacks. Kevin Atkinson states that the telecommunications industry set standards for siting cell towers that may be helpful in framing the sound standards. Another audience member would like to ensure whatever standards are set are enforced. Julie Clarkson provided the WCPC with links on setbacks and sound standards in a document emailed earlier today. An audience member would like the turbines to turn off at 10 pm if adequate setbacks cannot be added to the ordinance. Brian Davies asks if there have been noise complaints from Palouse Hills project. Alan Thomson states that there have been none. Dave Gibney will explore with the legal experts what standards can be set regarding sound. Theresa Bannister states that the Palouse Hills towers at Oakesdale project can't be compared with what is happening now. They were built 17 years ago, are smaller.

Air Quality: Emission permits shall be obtained. Areas should be revegetated and dust control applied to roads. An audience member objects to the use of water for dust control. David Gibney takes note of this. Vegetation and wildlife construction limitations: The applicant shall flag sensitive areas and limit the construction disturbance of these areas including weed management. Alan notes that projects will not be allowed to impact Palouse Prairie which is regulated as a Critical Area in Whitman County. Theresa Bannister is concerned that TetraTech did an inadequate environmental review of a project in Wenatchee such that the project has been stalled. Dave Gibney states that the County will be cautious about who is hired to do the SEPA review.

Overhead electrical transmission and collector lines: Overhead electrical lines should be constructed in accordance with the Avian Power Line interaction Committee for raptor protection. A Commissioner asks if the company could be required to put the transmission lines underground. Alan does not know. Other commissioners like this idea.

Avian and bat studies and requirements: In evaluating a project the County will apply the State Department of Fish and Wildlife Wind Power guidelines that protect birds and bats. The applicant is required to do pre-assessment studies, assess and monitor raptor nests within a 1 to 2 mile radius of the project site and use bird flight deflectors on guy supported towers or use un-guyed towers. Livestock carcasses should be removed so they do not attract raptors. Birds and bats should be monitored for at least one year and the applicant shall report bird fatalities for the life of the project. Dave Gibney proposes that the WCPC table this section until they can look at some of the recent recommendations made by F&W for Turnbull Wildlife Refuge.

Stormwater: Stormwater drainage system shall be designed to ensure that minimal erosion will occur. After construction the site will be monitored for erosion on a regular schedule and take corrective action as necessary. Is EFSEC involved in this? (Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council) Once the permit is issued, the County makes these determinations. A suggestion was to specifically note the use of the Eastern Washington Stormwater Manual.

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 are courteous to each other and the public. The ordinance is displayed on Zoom while it is being discussed.