

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: 7/2/2025

Observer Reporting: Chambers-Fox Shelley

Length of Meeting: 2 hours and 42 minutes

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

Members Absent: Chris Melhus (Rosalia), Julian Mathews (Pullman), Brian Davies (vice chair).

Others Present (e.g., media, public): Staff: Alan Thomson, WC Planner; Grace Di Biase, WC Assistant Planner; Mark Storey, WC Public Works Director; Brandon Johnson, Public Works; David Werner, Clerk.

Public: (on Zoom) Eric Slusher, Ken Duft, Emily Pearce, Allie James, N. Frazier, Tammy Storey, Zayne

Hunter, Jamie Anderson, Rick. Audience: Jack Lien, Todd Imeson, Tom Thompson, Carolyn Imeson, Rob

Hubner, Kevin Akesson, Boyd Jeffries, Tresa Bannister, Mike Dymkoski, remaining audience list is available in the Planning Office.

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.*

Alan Thomson announced that the County Commissioners extended the moratorium on windfarm sitings in the County on Monday until January 7, 2026. Dave Gibney asked the Commissioners for their remarks about the short course on local planning that was held for new commissioners. Some had not attended but it was recorded so they can pull it off the County website. Dave Gibney pointed out that one of the more important aspects to take note of is that the open meeting requirements in the State mean that regulations are developed using an open and above-board process that includes the public if they choose to participate. Those who did attend appreciated some topics but not others. Chair Gibney also noted that traditionally, the Commission does not meet in August, but given the expiration date of the new moratorium, they need to make progress such that the County would have an ordinance at the time of that expiration or shortly thereafter. This would mean the Planning Commission would need to be pretty much done revising the ordinance in November. The Commissioners noted that they would appreciate taking August off but if they are unable to make enough progress, they could make an August meeting work. Chair Gibney also noted that he was given documents by members of the audience that because they were given to him tonight (July 2), the Commission will be unable to discuss them. Please plan ahead if you want your documents to be considered at the meeting. Jack Lien notes that the document he provided he did not expect to be reviewed tonight but would like Commissioners to read his comments for discussion at a later date. There were specific public comments about how setbacks should be determined based on impacted views and flicker. Chair Gibney reminds the public that it is important to get the Whitman County wind ordinance back in place because the alternative that is available to any energy siting project in the State of Washington is the EFSEC whose rules are quite likely to be significantly more lenient than what Whitman County will have will have in the final ordinance.

The discussion of the wind ordinance continued on the subject of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife suggestions and on the remaining subsections of 19.61.060-Development Standards and Criteria. The setback questions that were submitted to the law firm that is advising Denis Tracy on wind farm development regulation have not yet been answered so those will be tabled until a response is received. The comments sent to the County from the Department of Fish and Wildlife advised they establish appropriate vegetation mitigation for projects specific impacts. Alan states that this is already covered in the County's Critical Areas ordinance. During the SEPA process, the plan is sent to the WDFW for review. The Commissioners discussed whether it should be in the wind ordinance as well so the company preparing to submit a project can find all of the applicable requirements in one place. Alan notes that the planning department staff will let applicants know that they have to follow the Critical Areas ordinance as well. Back to the review of 19.61.061 Development Standards and Criteria, which is part of the requirements that the Hearing Examiner uses to develop and analyze and approve or disapprove the conditional use permit for the applicant. Applicants must prepare a stormwater runoff plan which is going to be developed for them by a professional engineer and checked by County engineers. Mark Storey clarifies that the plans are designed for a 25-year run-off event so if we have a storm that exceeds that, there may be erosion from a project.

Geologic and Flood Hazards: The applicant shall design structural foundations and buildings in accordance with applicable International Building Code requirements for the relevant seismic zone. Mark Storey clarifies that the tower industry has its own standards through the Structural Engineering Association. Chair Gibney suggests it might be reasonable to reference those standards.

Water Resources: Water required for onsite use (construction phase work, restroom facilities and general maintenance) shall be obtained in accordance with state and local requirements. Most of the water used in these projects is used to mix the concrete. Tom Thompson suggested that applicants be asked to estimate how much water they will use and what source will be used. Chair Gibney points out that the concrete will likely come from a commercial concrete facility rather than mixed on site, and that will be the source of the water.

Cultural Resources: The applicant shall complete a cultural resource survey of areas of the project site that will be disturbed temporarily or permanently. Tom Thompson objects to the fact that the applicant is allowed to pick consultants for all of these areas that must be addressed in the project application. Alan Thomson responds that the County's staff and occasionally independent consultants check the project consultants' work. This is done at the applicant's expense. Grace DiBiasi notes that the Palouse Wind SEPA, the entire CUP and the checklist are posted on the County's website so people can see an example of how this is done. Alan Thomson adds that the Tribes are notified right away when an application comes in.

Visual Resources: a. The applicant shall prepare visual simulations of wind turbines from key viewpoints, chosen in consultation with the Planning Office. b. Lighting for security shall be minimized. Lighting fixtures, except those required by the FAA for safety purposes, must be shielded, hooded, and oriented towards the ground so that direct rays of light don't shine onto neighboring properties or serve as a source of light pollution. FAA lights shall be minimized to the extent practicable in consultation with the FAA. In addition the facility will be clean, painted unobtrusively and bear no signs other than identification and warning

signs. Alan Thomson suggests that they may want to require projects to use a new technology that allows lights on the turbines to come off at night, unless the system's radar detects that there is an aircraft flying close by. Tom Thompson states that he would like the ordinance to state that there can be no towers built on ridgelines or tops of hills such as required for residences. Alan Thompson points out that there are many apparently contradicting requirements in county and state law because some structures will need to be on ridgelines to function as intended such as transmission towers. Tresa Bannister states that Benton County has prohibited wind turbines on hilltops and ridgelines because they don't need to be there and they don't want to see them. Dave Gibney asks if the County could exclude wind turbines from the County's better view sites, specifically Kamiak and Steptoe or Palouse Falls. Commissioners discussed with members of the public whether this would be feasible in Whitman County given the BOCC has asked the Planning Commission not to make windfarms impossible in Whitman County.

The next section to be reviewed is the decommissioning rules which need strengthening. The intent is that there be enough money set aside at the time the project begins, such that at the time it is over, it can be restored to as close as to the existing conditions as possible. Commissioners hope that they can use some of the same language that is in the solar ordinance to specify how this will be done.

This report was taken from the transcribed minutes created from the Zoom recording of the meeting.