

# League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: 7/16/2025

Observer Reporting: Chambers-Fox Shelley

Length of Meeting: 2 hours 3 minutes

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

Members Absent: Tammy Southern (Garfield)

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, David Werner (Clerk)

Public: Ken Duft, Rick McNanny, Nicole Frazier, Shane Roche, Steelhead America, Ashley Hartman, Theresa Bannister, Tom Thompson, Doug Robinson, Mike Dymkoski, Todd Imeson, Carolyn Imeson

**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 plan is to continue discussion of the wind ordinance from where we left off last time. That is, 19.61.060(N) Decommissioning and try to finish to the end of the ordinance. Denis Tracy reports that he has asked the law firm which has expertise in land use zoning for advice about setbacks, and giving special protection to particular landmarks in the County such as Kamiak Butte, Steptoe Butte, Palouse Falls. He also asked about limiting noise and impacts on housing prices near the turbine. He received a general memo on July 16 but has not had time to review it. He hopes to have a summary of the memo for the Commissioners by the end of July.

Dave Gibney sent the other Commissioners the old wind ordinance which was developed in 2009 and the findings of Fact which are a required part of the zoning process. He wants Commissioners to be thinking about what Findings of Fact they will have that support the changes that they wish to make. The BOCC will need an ordinance that is legal and defensible. Dean Kinzer is concerned that infrasound can induce vibroacoustic disease although the research discussed in a recent email indicated there is no evidence tying it to wind turbines.

Tom Thompson commented that an employee of Steelhead America told him they wanted to build in Whitman County because of the substation close to the farm they were going to use and because the ordinance was favorable to them. He would like the revised ordinance to be favorable to the residents of Whitman County. Doug Robinson comments that the wind farm that is proposed wants to locate in the least appropriate location. He suggests locating the farms down near the Snake River and away from where people are. Todd Imeson does not want the Commission to talk about decommissioning of turbines. He wants them to tie the turbines to the land so that whoever buys the land buys the wind turbines on it. Dave Gibney moves the discussion to decommissioning which is intended to ensure that when wind facility is no longer producing energy, the company can't just walk away and leave it. They must put the land back to the same state it was in before the facility was built. Dean Kinzer would like the landowner to set up an

escrow account to fully fund the decommissioning. Chair Gibney notes that the proposed language states that the company building the project is the party that sets up and uses the escrow account to remove the turbines, then if that doesn't happen the funds are available to the landowner to do that. If that doesn't happen, the funds are available to the County. Commissioner Kinzer states that oversight would be fairly simple for the County, administratively and legally, if that landowner was made responsible for it. Weston Kane and Chris Melhus agree with Dean Kinzer. Julian Matthews asked how often this is a problem, have any of the turbines on the Columbia stopped working and needed to be removed. Alan Thomson is not aware of any turbines that have required decommissioning but this standard language is in all the ordinances. Mike Dymkoski notes that typically a performance bond or a surety bond would be between the developer and the person with the ultimate responsibility, and that is the landowner whose land is at risk for nuisance abatement activities that the County might pursue. He is not necessarily against having a bond in place between the developers and the permitting authority, but it would be unusual and must be thought through for potential pitfalls.

Chair Gibney reads the eight pages that describe the proposed decommissioning process. The applicant must prepare a decommissioning plan that describes how they will remove and dispose of all materials, structures and roads used in the project. The decommissioning work must commence within 60 days of terminating the project. The plan must include a detailed engineering estimate, prepared by a licensed professional engineer, of the costs to fully implement the Decommissioning and Site Restoration Plan. Weston Kane would like the ordinance to specify that the entire foundation must be removed. A soil scientist is consulted to ensure that any contamination is ameliorated and a biologist to ensure that vegetation is restored. The cost to complete the decommissioning is re-evaluated on a periodic basis and the operator must increase the amount of funding available as needed. The Commissioners discussed how the County can be aware of what is happening at a wind farm so that they know when the project is no longer producing energy and decommissioning needs to start. Monitoring the facility would be an administrative expense for the County. Mike Dymkoski would like the Commission to carefully consider the different kinds of financial instruments that can be used to provide decommissioning funds. He thinks that surety bonds are not a particularly secure way to enforce payment. Chair Gibney would like to have a long discussion about financial instruments but two commissioners have moved and seconded that the meeting be adjourned.

This report was taken from the transcribed minutes of the Zoom recording of the meeting on July 16, 2025.

**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 and is available on the County website.