

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: 9/24/2025

Observer Reporting: Chambers-Fox Shelley

Length of Meeting: 1 hour 39 minutes

Members Present: Dave Gibney (Chair Pullman), Bill Myers (Colfax), David McKeirnan (Pullman-on Zoom), Dean Kinzer (Pullman), Weston Kane (LaCrosse), Julian Mathews (Pullman), Chris Melhus (Rosalia).

Members Absent: Tammy Southern (Garfield), Brian Davies (vice chair)

Others Present (e.g., media, public): Staff: Mark Storey (County engineer), Brandon Johnson, Public Works, David Werner (Clerk),

Public audience: Tom Thompson, Carol Black

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.*

Mark Storey announced that the County experienced a server failure last week and has made it difficult to prepare materials and post for this meeting. Reconstruction of the resources held on the server is ongoing. The first part of the meeting will include a presentation that was proposed by Tom Thompson, a member of the public.

The presentation was made by Paul Krupin, an attorney and retired environmental protection specialist working for Tri-Cities CARE, a nonprofit organization in Benton County. He told the story of the Horse Heaven Hills Wind & Solar Project that was proposed 4+ years ago and is still pending approval through EFSEC (Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council).

Mr. Krupin worked for Dept of Energy at Hanford, BLM, US Forest Service and USGS before his retirement. Horse Heaven Hills Wind and Solar projects would be the largest in Washington State. The wind energy company, Scout proposes to build 222 499 ft high turbines, on 72,000 acres, with 18 acres of lithium storage batteries, and 20 miles of new transmission lines. The company estimates that in the first 3 years they would employ 450+ workers but once completed, the number of employees would drop to 26 FTE. The project would provide an estimated \$5.2 million in income to Benton County. Experts noted that the Tri-Cities is not the best location for generating wind energy because the wind only blows about 8~10% of the time, unlike Wyoming and Montana where the wind blows about 30% of the time. The project will be built in proximity to the major population centers of Benton County. So...there was opposition in Benton County, and the County did not have an ordinance and so Scout went to the state level EFSEC permitting office to request its permission to build in Feb, 2021. There were many issues that the project encountered requiring mitigation: no confirmed water source for the 265,000 gallons/day required during construction, raptor nests in the area proposed to build turbines, concern about the ability to bring in very large airplanes to fight forest fires in the area of the turbines, turbines visible to 86% of the County population. As a result of the Environmental Impact Statement some of the turbines were removed from the project to mitigate the impacts on wildlife, culture and visual landscape. The Governor's office sent a directive to

EFSEC to add the removed turbines back to the project. Suits were filed at the end of 2024 to prevent the increase in turbines, and there have been hearings and meetings among the parties to resolve this. Final decision will be on October 15, 2025. A recent decision called Policy 16-01 that gives EFSEC extra discretion to grant permits has generated new litigation. Per President Trump's recent executive order all projects need to begin construction by July 4, 2026 and be placed in service by December 31, 2027 to qualify for the tax credits/subsidies which make them economically viable.

Chair Gibney comments that the Commission was expecting a presentation on health effects. Tom Thompson states that he asked the speaker to come to inform members about the issues that occur when the State EFSEC does the permitting. Carol Black notes that the description of visual impacts of the project was helpful. She has given the Commissioners proposed language on visual impacts for the code. Chair Gibney proposed to place the existing code on the table for the purpose of making specific changes in the code. The public cannot make motions but they can talk with the members of the Commission to request changes. There was some discussion among the board members about why the BOC is concerned about completing the ordinance revisions within the timeline of the moratorium. Chair Gibney talked about the process that will be followed to amend the wind ordinance, Chapter 19.61 Commercial Wind Energy Facilities. Weston Kane and Julian Mathews moved that the Commission begin work discussing and amending the wind ordinance. This moves the board from the workshop format that involved information gathering. Public input will be allowed either at the beginning or the end of each session.

This report was taken from the Zoom recording of the meeting on September 24, 2025.

Public Meetings of Interest to League: *Were there any public meetings announced that you think League members may be interested in attending and/or becoming involved with that relate to League positions?*

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 presentation materials were displayed on Zoom while being discussed.

Your additional comments/opinions:

Reminders 😊

A LWV Observer is impartial, silent, and respectful. It is, however, acceptable to ask questions for clarification following the meeting.

Remember to wear your awesome ID Badge!

Please attach any materials, or links to such, received at the meeting that you feel are important to your report.

Please submit your report to the LWV Observer Chair within one week of the meeting. rogerc63@outlook.com