

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: 11/12/2025

Observer Reporting: Chambers-Fox Shelley

Length of Meeting: 2 hrs 23 min

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

Members Absent: Tammy Southern

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), County Commissioners: Tom Handy- on Zoom. Public: Rick McNanny, Jim, Jamie Anderson, Ashley Hartman, Beth St Marie, Jack Lein, Shane Roche and Eric Slusher, Steelhead America, Mike Dymkoski, Carol Black, Roger Caine, Ken Duft, Nicole Frazier, Willard Morgan, Tom Thompson, Kevin Atkinson.

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.*

Davi Gibney made the following motion to be placed after 19.61.050 SEPA and before 19.61.055 Micro-siting Corridors/Areas: a. Wind turbines shall not be permitted within x miles of incorporated communities, b. Wind turbines shall not be permitted within x miles of Rural Community Residential district (RCR), Rural Community Center district 1 (RCC1), Rural Commercial district 2 (RCC2), and the airport commercial district. C. Wind turbines shall not be permitted within x miles of the following areas of county significance (landmarks): Kamiak Butte, Steptoe Butte, and Palouse Falls. The Commissioners discussed what additions might be made to the above exclusion areas (other County parks: Boyer, Wawawai, Klemgard) and what distance should be selected from the exclusion area. Some areas may need to be different from others because of the different shapes of the exclusion areas. They would prefer to measure from the boundaries of the parks rather than the highest point of the park. Chair Gibney suggested using 1 mile from incorporated communities and perhaps 3 miles from landmarks. One commissioner was not pleased with using 3 miles exclusion from landmarks because that takes out considerable private land that the county would be controlling rather than the landowner. They discussed using 6x the height of current wind

turbines. Dean Kinzer moves to use 1 mile from incorporated communities. One commissioner suggests they use nautical miles (1.15 miles) since nautical miles take into account the curvature of the earth. They discuss whether this makes sense in that it can only be measured as the crow flies. The meaning of miles will be defined in the definition section. After discussion it was decided to strike the airport district because the distance from any airport is determined by the FAA.

Bill Myers moved and Dean Kinzer seconded to use a 2 miles distance from the districts in b. They want a greater distance in rural areas because people move outside the cities for a more pastoral life. Alan suggests treating the rural residential and commercial districts the same as incorporated communities because these are places where people live. A commissioner suggests that the distance outside the incorporated communities should be greater than 1 miles so that there is room for growth in these communities. Commissioners amend the motion to include a 2 miles distance for incorporated communities and the rural districts. Motion passed unanimously.

In considering the parks and landmarks, Alan pointed out that Palouse Falls State Park is in Whitman and Franklin counties, and the regulation will only affect the park in Whitman County. Denis Tracy stated that Commissioners can create significant setbacks from natural landmarks such as Kamiak and Steptoe if they are considered important to the public welfare. These areas are rare, important geological landmarks that provide views into adjoining states. Unobstructed views from these landmarks bring considerable tourist dollars into the County. Wind turbines would break the visual landscape in a fashion that would affect the scenic beauty of these views. Bill Myers moves using a setback of 9 miles for Kamiak and Steptoe Buttes and Palouse Falls from the highest point. Seconded. Julian notes that we have cell towers on the Buttes and they are also an eyesore. Other commissioners comment that cell towers are now necessary for public safety. Chair Gibney notes that the present regulations only apply to wind towers. Motion passes 5 to 3. Weston Kane moves, Julian Mathews seconds to add a section D that would prohibit wind turbines within 1 mile of ID and WA state parks, county parks and public access areas operated by the state department of Fish and Wildlife and the Bureau of Land Management. Chair Gibney would like to table the motion until the next meeting when they can consider an accurate list of the properties in this category. Commissioners agree to do that.

Chair Gibney states that the Commission is on track to have the requested work to the County Commissioners before the end of the moratorium. He stated that the meeting on the first Wednesday of December will be devoted to preparing findings of fact to support the changes that are being made to the code. He would like to start that meeting at 6:00. The Public meeting will be December 17. The Commission has received some comments from the legal team that is reviewing their work, mostly about consistency in language. The product of the hearing on December 17 will be a regulation that they can forward to the BOC. The County Commissioners will receive the ordinance as a recommendation. They may adopt it as written, they may make changes in which case they need to hold a public hearing, or they can reject it. He notes that the Commission tabled the solar and battery storage ordinance to work on the wind so WCPC will need to complete those regulations.

Dean Kinzer proposed, seconded by Bill Myers an Amendment to the code to have transmission lines to wind towers underground to and from wind energy facilities. Passed 6 to 3. Bill Myers moved to require a Fire Mitigation system capable of automatic shutdown of the turbine upon alarm. It was decided to defer discussion until the next meeting.

Public Comment: Ken Duft extends a thank you to the Commission for the effort put in to prepare the revised regulation. Carol Black: requests that meetings be given more time and consideration so that decisions are not rushed and meetings do not have to be scheduled weekly as they are in November. Shane Roche Steelhead America stated that the language currently in the code is a de facto ban on wind in Whitman County. Tom Thompson would like the County Commissioners to allow the WCPC to complete the wind ordinance without pressure and haste. Roger Caine objects to using productive agricultural land for wind turbine foundations. Kevin Atkinson would like the Commission to include all the public comments in the finding of fact about why the code is written the way it is. Wind energy is wasteful and harmful. Julie Clarkson Gulick would like the ordinance to be given more time, so it does not require additional revisions.

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?*

WCPC public meeting on wind energy facilities, planned for December 17, 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?*

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.

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