

League of Women Voters of Pullman Observer Report

Name of Agency: Whitman County Planning Commission

Date: 10/29/2025

Observer Reporting: Chambers-Fox Shelley

Length of Meeting: 2 hrs 34 minutes

Members Present: Dave Gibney (Chair Pullman), Bill Myers (Colfax), David McKeirnan (Pullman), Dean Kinzer (Pullman), Weston Kane (LaCrosse), Tammy Southern (Garfield), Julian Mathews (Pullman), Chris Melhus (Malden)

Members Absent: Brian Davies

Others Present (e.g., media, public): Staff: Alan Thomson, Whitman County Planner, Grace DiBiasi (Assistant Planner-on Zoom), Brandon Johnson, Public Works, Mark Storey, Denis Tracy (District Attorney- on Zoom), David Werner (Clerk). Public: on Zoom: Rick McNanny, Tony S, Jamie Anderson, Ashley Hartman, Beth St Marie, Jack Lein, Shane Roche, Steelhead America, others in auditorium.

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.*

David Gibney spoke with the County Commissioners about the January 6 deadline. The Commissioners replied that they would like the wind farm regulation submitted by January 6, 2026 prioritizing the revisions to include the consensus on decommissioning including removal of foundations first and the consensus on setbacks second.

Denis Tracy stated that the Commissioners should develop the language they judge necessary for decommissioning as it relates to requiring bonds and financial guarantees. Mr. Tracy will then take it to his experts on this subject for their review. He also reminds the Commission that they are trying to craft the regulations that are reasonably needed to protect the health, safety and welfare of the people of Whitman County. He recommends that they make use of the studies that the Commissioners have been briefed on during the workshop process. If a developer goes to EFSEC (Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council) for site approval, that group is required to look at the local code and to have a member from Whitman County on their council. In determining setbacks ask what is reasonably needed to protect health and safety, and what are the facts that back this up.

Commissioners discussed the effect of wind turbines on the ability of neighboring farms to apply herbicide aerially. It may be reasonable to put into the code that the developer will reimburse neighboring landowners for the increased cost of farming around the wind turbines.

Chair Gibney entertained a motion that would switch the first discussion tonight to decommissioning from the earlier plan to discuss setbacks first. Dean Kinzer made a motion to address setbacks first. The setback is intended to protect the safety, health and the integrity of people and property in Whitman County.

1. Physical safety and damage: a. the setback minimum, non-waivable occupied building setback shall be 1.5x the height of the wind turbine away from any existing occupied buildings, regardless of whether the occupied building owner consents to the location. b. The setback shall be 4x the height of the wind turbine away from any non-consenting, non-participating adjacent parcels, including state and improved county rights of way. Commissioners also discussed the reasonableness of the same setbacks for owner occupied buildings and non-participating buildings. Chair Gibney asked the Commissioners who would like to make changes in the setbacks to return to the Commission with the studies that support the setback specified.

2. Health: including but not only sound, vibration and shadow flicker turbines shall be a minimum distance of 6x the height of the wind turbine generator (originally 4x the height) away from any non-consenting, non-participating landowner's occupied buildings. Commissioners discussed using 8x the turbine height as the setback in this category. Dean Kinzer read a statement from the National Institutes of Health regarding the potential damage of infrasound. There are no specifics in the document that states what distance is safe. Alan Thomson notes that if 8x the height of the tower is used as the setback, there will be no places in the County where wind turbines can be built. Dean Kinzer replies that Canada and counties in California use 2-mile setbacks. The motion to use 8x the height failed. The Commissioners then discussed using 6x the height of the wind turbine because a neighboring county is using that standard. The motion passed.

3. Welfare, aesthetics and quiet enjoyment: turbines shall be a minimum distance of 6x the height of the wind turbine generator with a minimum of 1 mile away from the property line of any non-consenting, non-participating adjacent parcels, including state and improved county rights-of-way.

4. Waivers: any allowable consents to setback distances less than stated in this section except for the non-waivable setback in 1a shall be documented by a fully executed, notarized agreement by the fee title owner in a format that can be recorded on the affected real property title.

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?*

none

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 draft ordinance 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