

SU 23-11 (Winchester Solar)

**Special Use Authorization to construct, operate,
and maintain a proposed Solar Energy Power Plant
and Battery Energy Storage System in a Rural
Zoning District**

**Planning & Zoning Commission
May 10, 2023**



DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

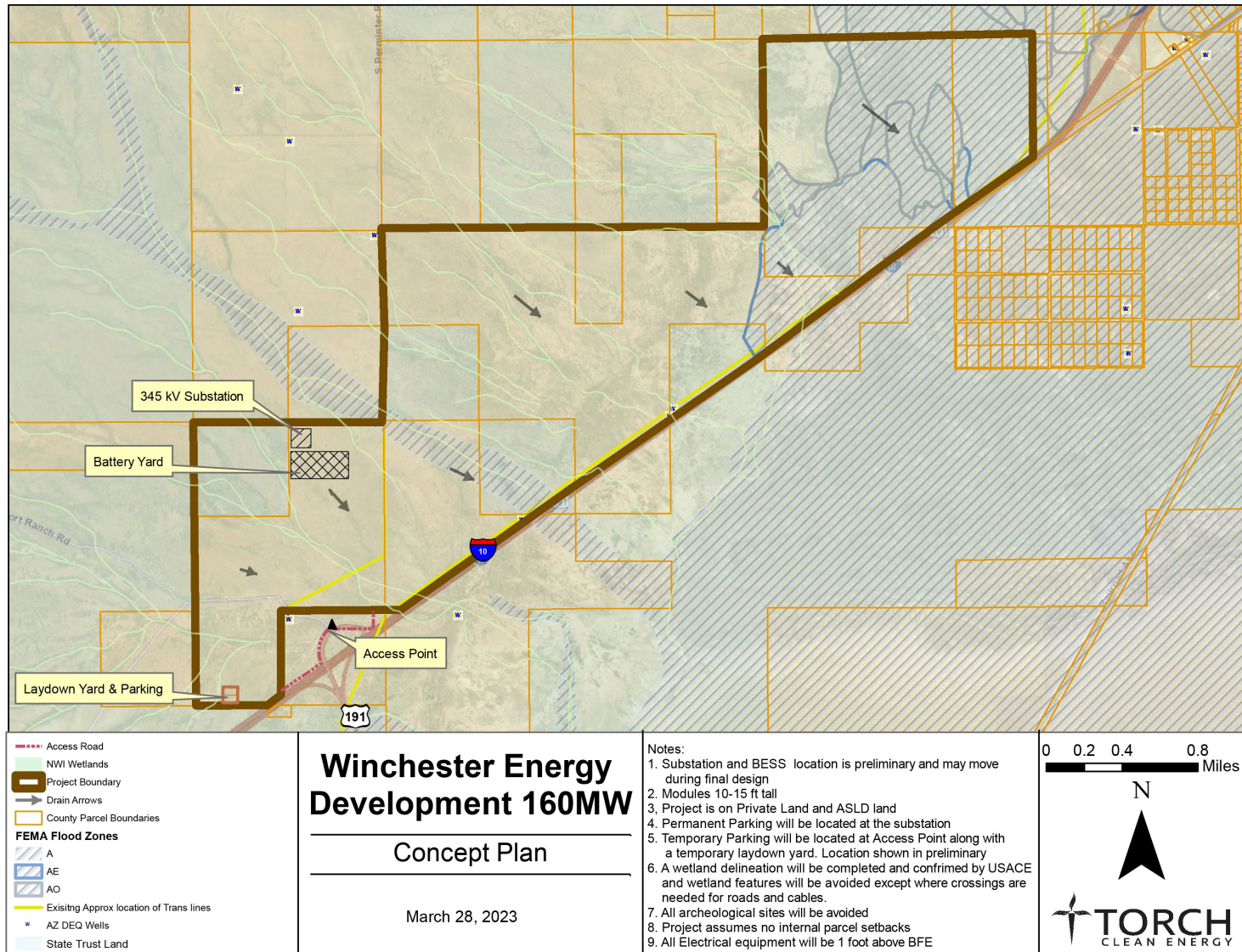
- This is a request to allow a 160 MW PV solar facility with 160 MW battery storage, with the option to expand up to 500 MW
- Multiple parcels (see report/application), 3,584 acres
- Winchester Solar I and II, LLC, rep. by Sara Born (applicant)
- Mostly Undeveloped land in Willcox



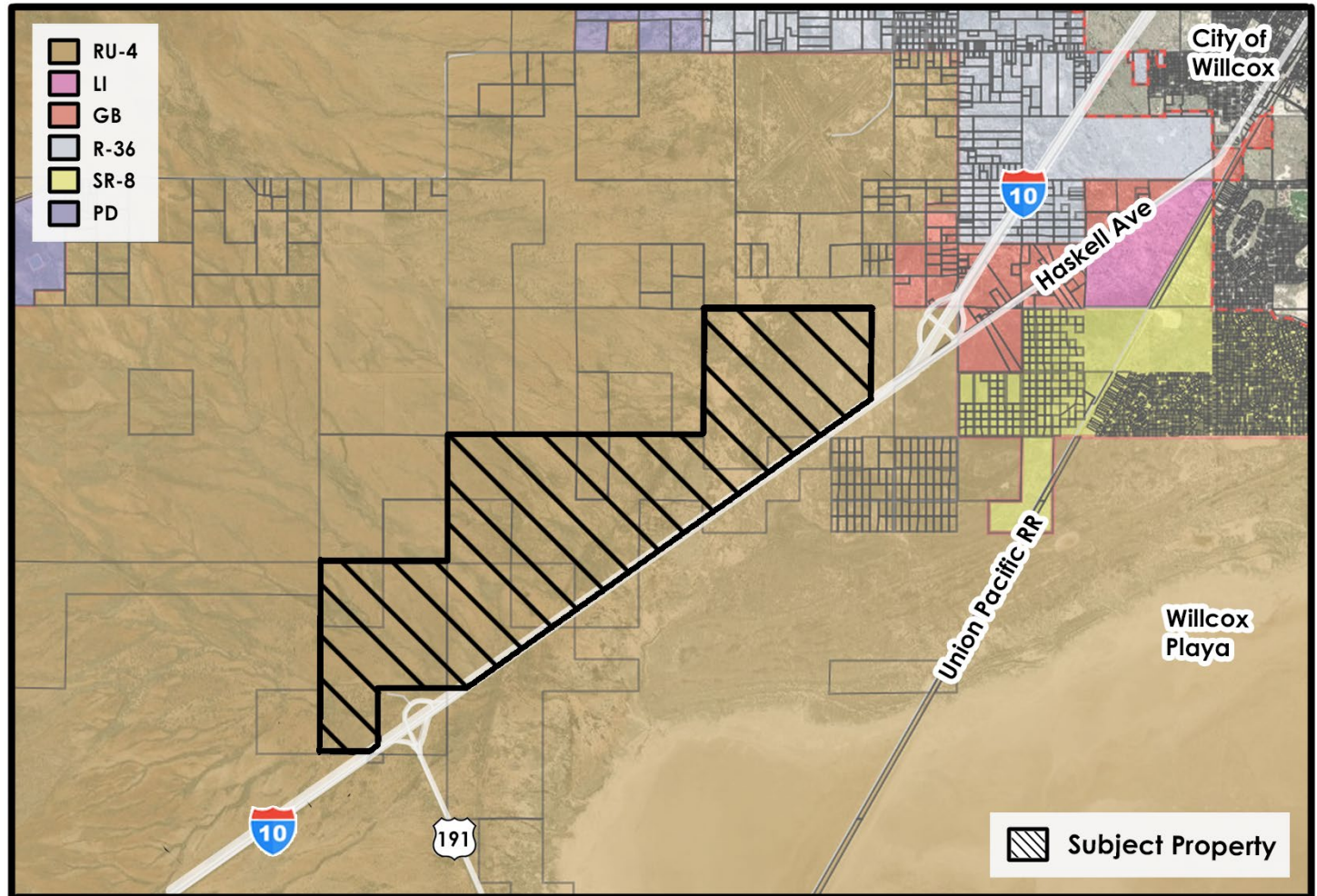
Site Photos



Concept Plan



Zoning



Location
SU 23-11 Winchester Solar

N.T.S



DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

There are 10 factors used to evaluate all special use proposals. As submitted, the application:

Complies: 7 factors

- Compliance with duly Adopted Plans
- Compliance with the Zoning District Purpose
- Development along Major Streets
- Traffic Circulation
- Adequate Services and Infrastructure
- Significant Site Development Standards
- Public Input
- Water Conservation

Complies with Conditions: 3 factors

- Significant Site Development Standards
- Off site impacts
- Hazardous Materials

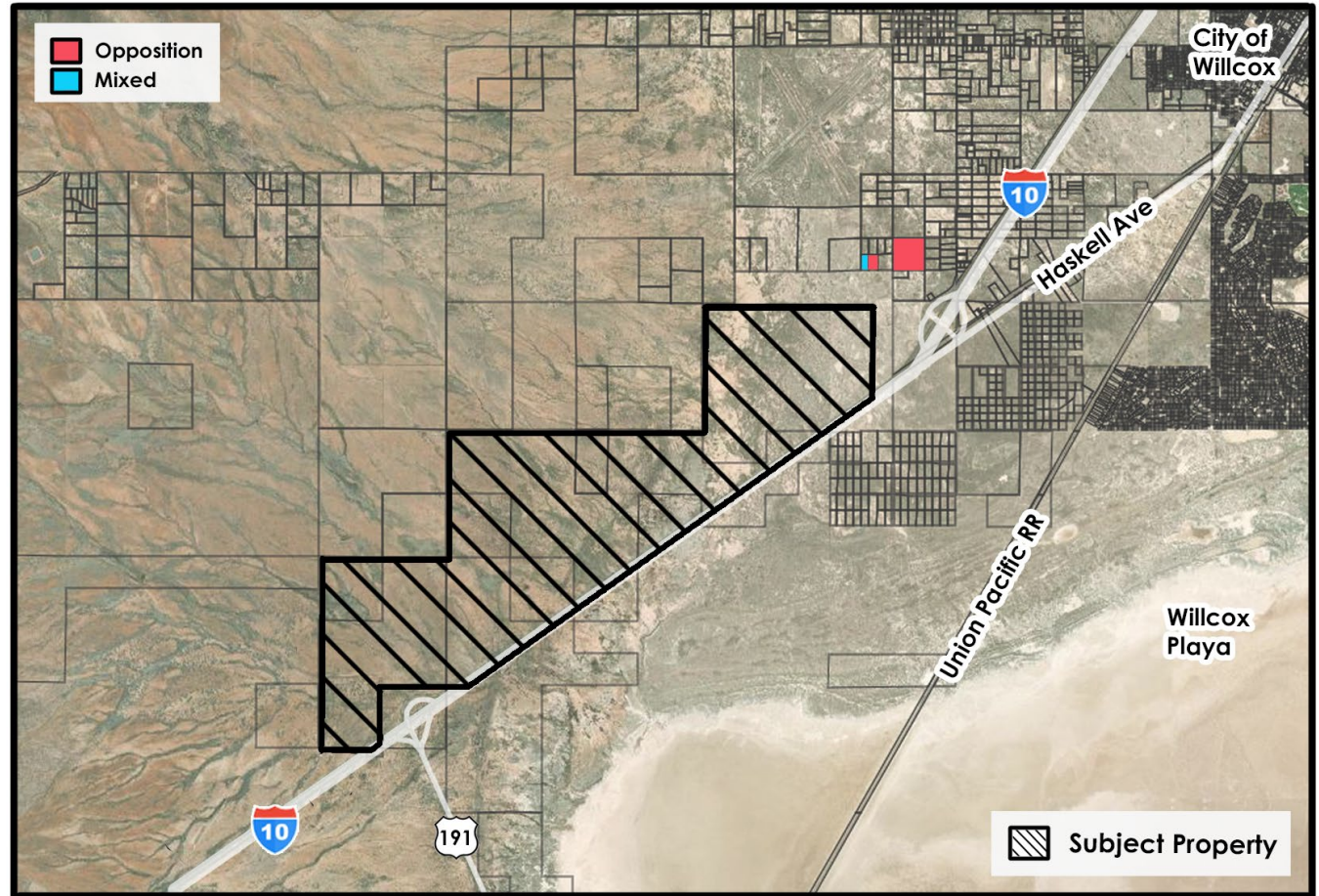


Other studies submitted (attached to application):

- **Biological Evaluation:** no effect on any species listed under ESA
- **Potential Avian Impacts Summary:** minor potential impacts to birds, primarily passerines, doves, waterbirds and pigeons near the facility, but would not result in any species-specific population-level effects
- **Hydrology and Hydraulic Study** (for planning purposes): evaluates the approximate 100-year and 500-year ponding depths within the subject tracts.
- **Visual Study from Key Observation Points:** the visual impact of the project, in certain locations, may not register as perceivably altered “due to the presence of existing dense vegetation and the prominence of the Winchester Mountains in the background
- **Real Estate Value Impact:** cites a number of studies that indicate utility-scale solar facilities do not have a measurable impact on the value of adjacent properties.

Public Input

- Letters sent to all property within ¼ mile
- 4 responses/ 3 land owners
- Concerns: water, flora/fauna, health, property value, intrusion of privacy, jobs



Public Input
SU 23-11 Winchester Solar

N.T.S.



Factors in Favor of Request

1. The project is consistent with the applicable Policies of the Comprehensive Plan and the Purpose of the Rural Zoning Districts;
2. The project complies with most of the criteria used to evaluate special use requests;
3. The site plan submitted complies with most applicable site development standards and conditions;
4. Once completed the project would generate negligible levels of traffic and would use minimal water, services and infrastructure; The project would serve as a source of clean energy, offsetting greenhouse gas emissions and reducing the need to generate electricity from fossil fuels; and
5. More specifically, this project replaces energy produced from the retired San Juan and the Four Corners Power Plants – both were coal powered



Factors Against Approving the Request

1. Project construction will likely generate fugitive dust.
2. General compatibility and aesthetics concerns – the surrounding terrain is flat, and the area is undeveloped. The scale, visibility, and massing of the project is of concern.
3. Avian concerns – there is potential for bird fatalities or injuries to occur if avian species mistake the solar panels for open water.
4. Wildlife and biological concerns – The AZGFD stated in their review of the proposal that “the landscape in which this project is proposed provides important movement pathways for wildlife.” The project risks reducing habitat connectivity and wildlife movement/migration unless specific design features are incorporated to provide a pathway for the wildlife.
5. Letters of opposition were received from two property owners.



Applicant Presentation/Discussion



Staff Recommendation

Docket SU 23-11, Recommend Conditional Approval

If the Commission wishes to grant approval, staff recommends the following conditions:



Recommended Conditions*

1. The project owner shall maintain the project site with perennial vegetated groundcover and noncompacted soil. Where grading is not required during project construction, any existing vegetation will be mowed rather than removed completely.
2. The project owner shall exclusively use PV panels with an anti-reflectivity coating that is integral to the panel.
3. All panels shall be regularly inspected and continuously maintained by the project owner. Any broken or damaged panels shall be properly and safely removed in a timely manner from the site.
4. To reduce the optical illusion of water that closely spaced panels can create, the project shall be designed with no less a twelve-foot distance between all tracker rows.
5. The applicant shall submit a completed wetland delineation, confirmed by USACE prior to commercial permit issuance. Wetland features shall be avoided except where crossings are needed for roads and cables.



Recommended Conditions* (continued)

6. To the extent feasible, non-fenced, wildlife corridors within project boundaries shall be reserved near washes or in areas determined by the AZGFD to be appropriate for a wildlife highway crossing.
7. The final locations of the proposed substation and battery energy storage system may deviate from what is indicated on the concept plan, provided each are located within project boundaries a minimum of 0.5 miles from I-10.
8. Pursuant to 1824.03 of the Zoning Regulations, which mandates wildlife-friendly fencing, the applicant shall reserve a 6–8-inch gap between the ground surface and the bottom of the perimeter fencing.
9. The commission grants a waiver from setback required to internal parcel boundaries. Instead, minimum setbacks of 40' shall only be applied to the exterior boundaries of the Project indicated by the concept plan.

* Standard conditions related to acceptance of conditions, permitting timeframes, and modifications apply, and have not been modified by this request

Sample Motion

Mr. Chairman, I move to approve Docket SU 23-11 (Winchester Solar), with the Conditions of Approval and waiver requests recommended by staff; the Factors of Approval constituting Findings of Fact.

