

SU 23-26

(Cochise Stronghold 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

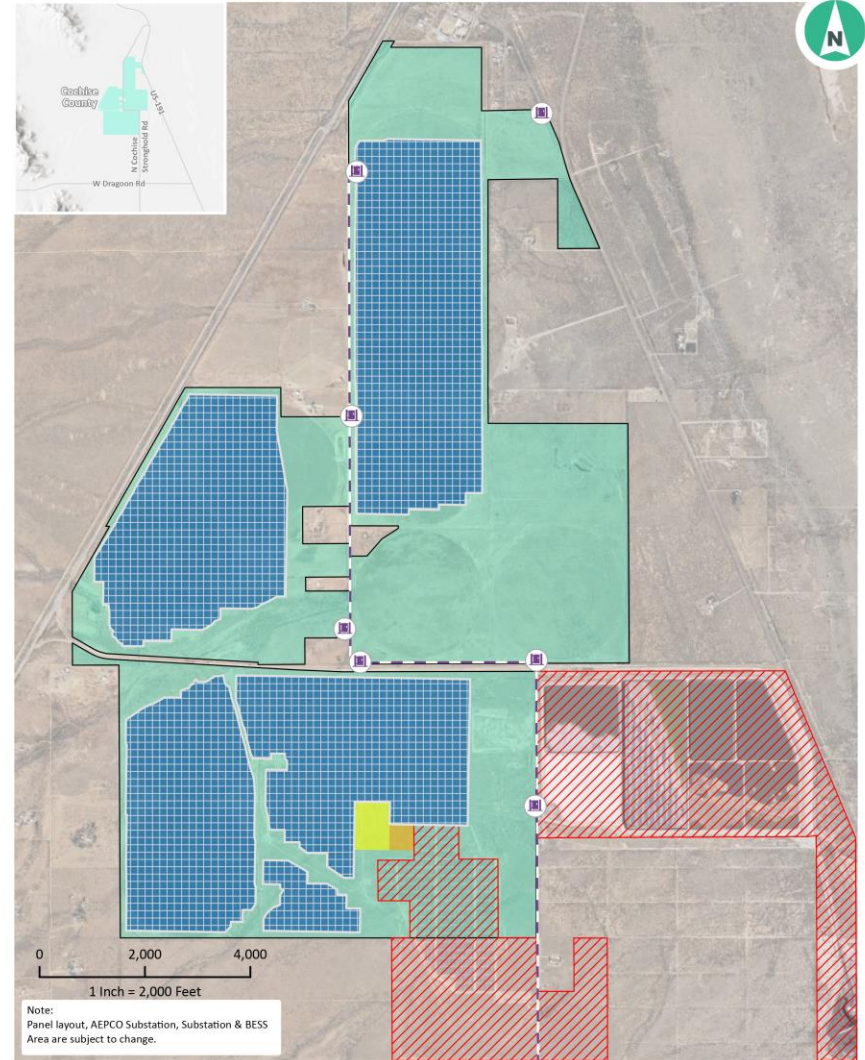
Planning & Zoning Commission

November 8, 2023



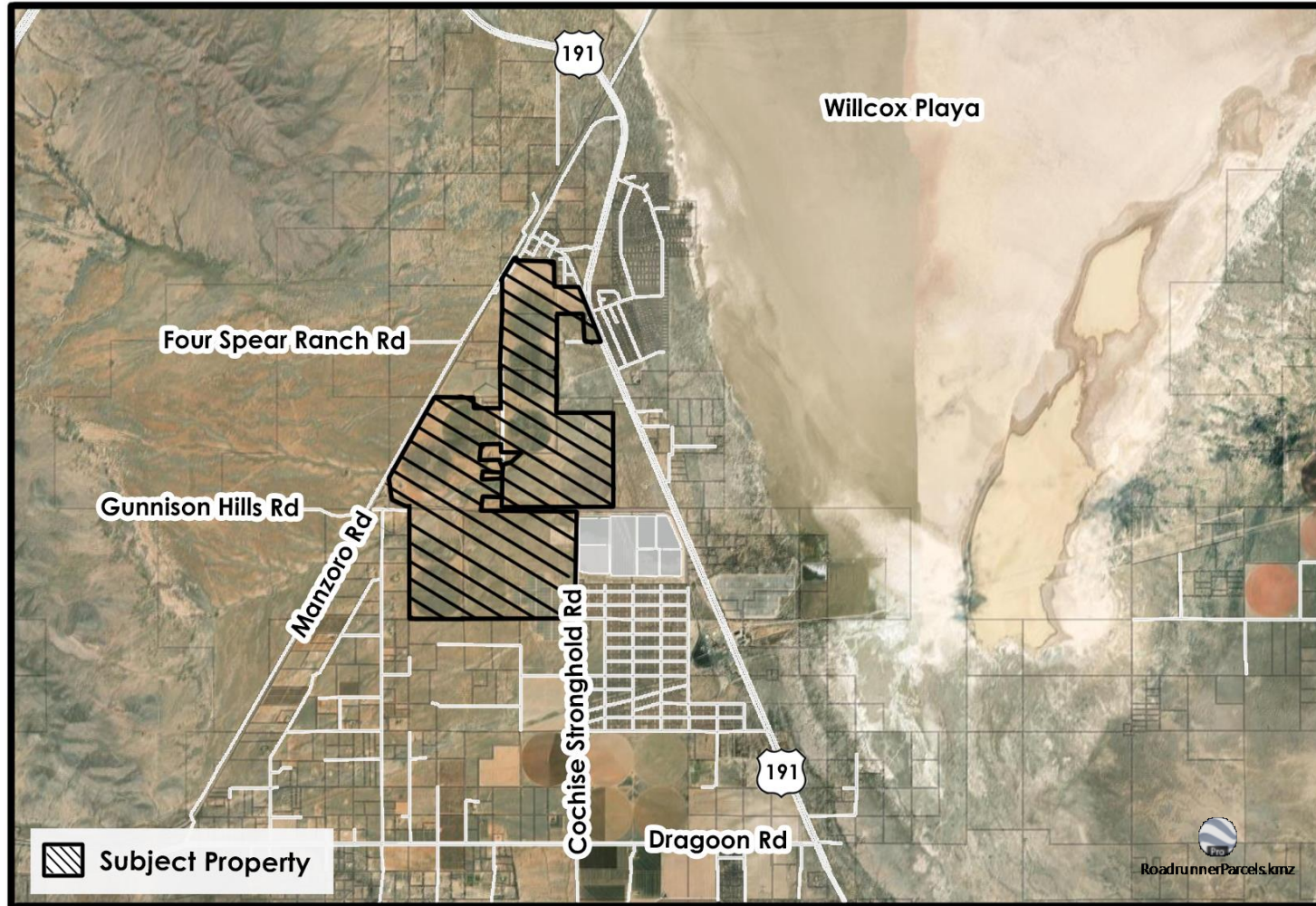
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

- This is a request to allow a 235-MW solar energy power plant with 235-MW battery storage
- Multiple parcels (see report/application), 2,437 acres (approx.)
- Arizona Electric Power Cooperative/Roadrunner LLC rep. by Teresa Murphy (applicant)
- Undeveloped land, retired farmland in Cochise, southwest of the playa



Roadrunner
Conceptual Site Plan

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

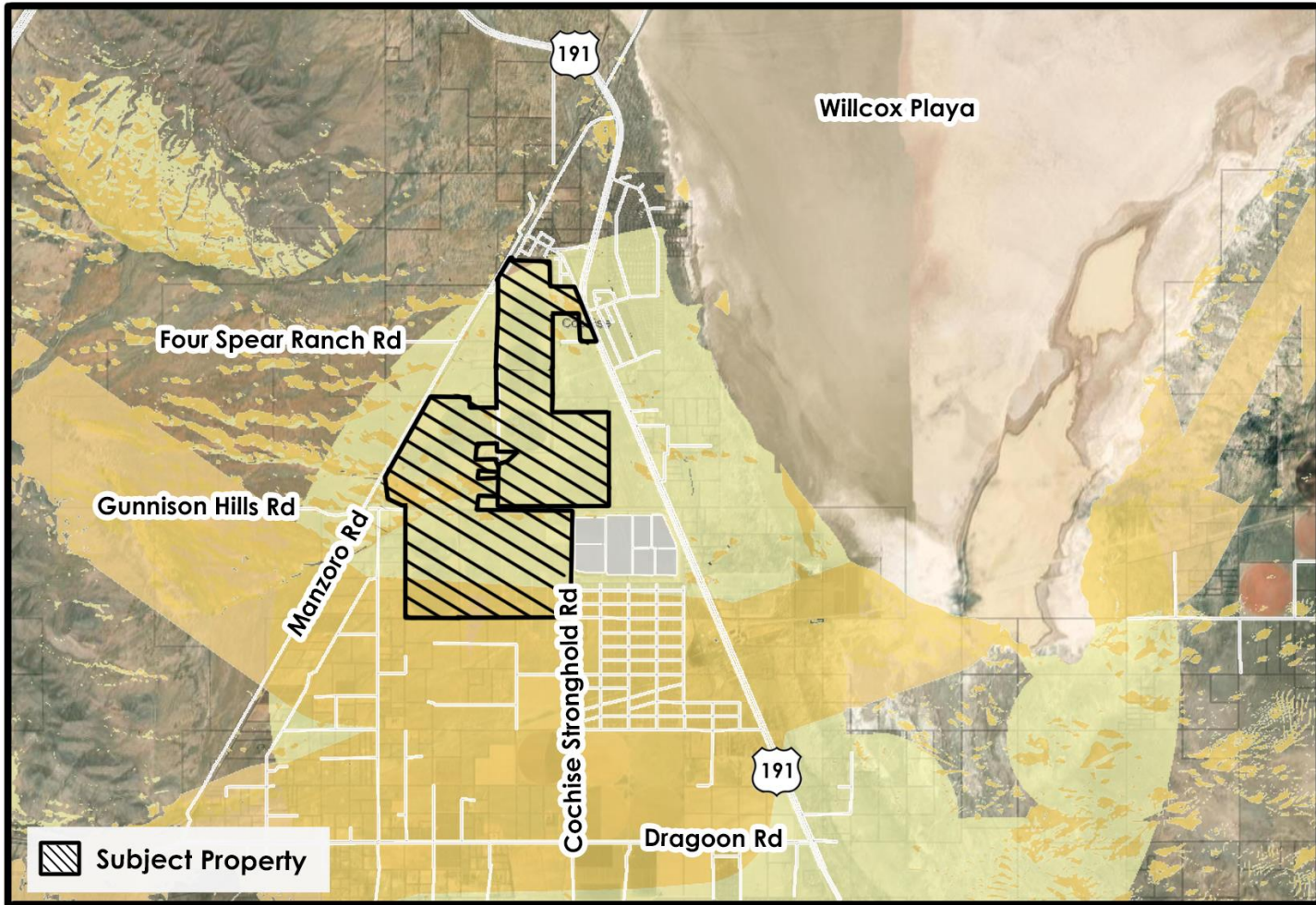


Location
SU 23-26 (Cochise Stronghold Solar)

N.T.S



COCHISE COUNTY
Arizona

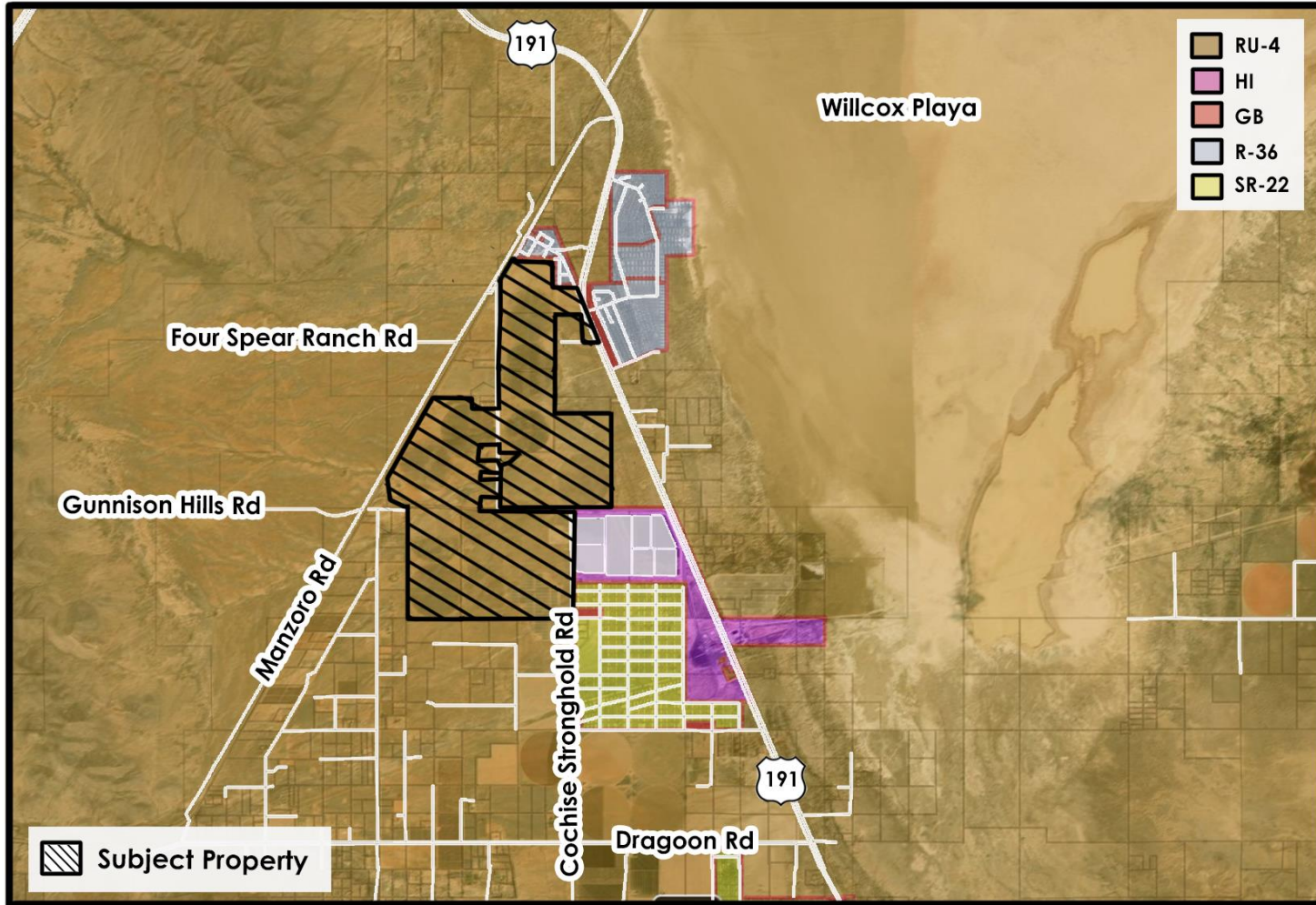


Renewable Energy Opportunity Analysis Map
SU 23-26 (Cochise Stronghold Solar)

N.T.S.



DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

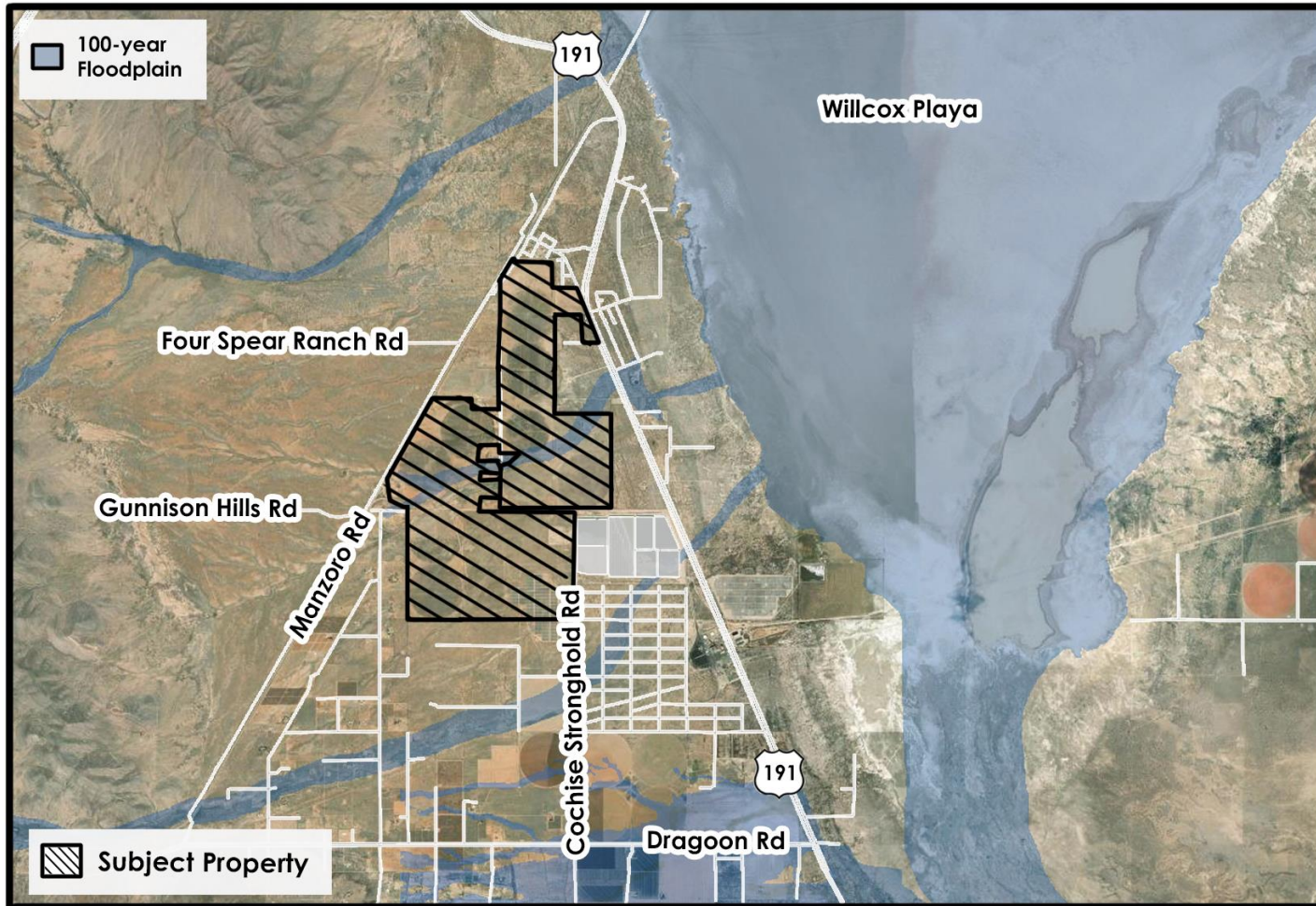


Zoning
SU 23-26 (Cochise Stronghold Solar)

N.T.S



DEVELOPMENT SERVICES



Floodplain
SU 23-26 (Cochise Stronghold Solar)

N.T.S



COCHISE COUNTY
Arizona

Photo Simulations



Existing Condition



Existing Condition



Simulated Condition

pg 4



Simulated Condition

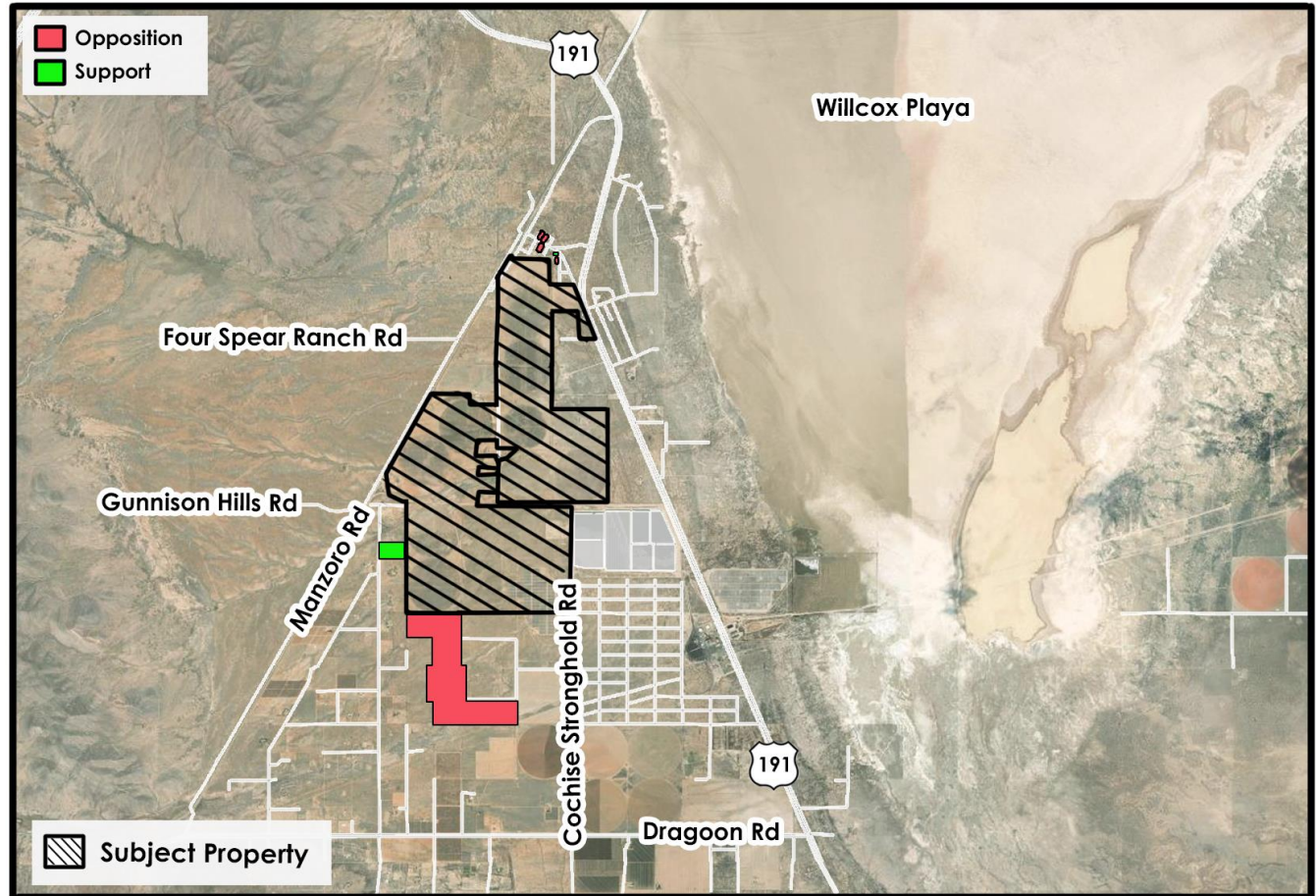
pg 6

The Site



Public Input

- 8 neighbors in opposition
- 4 neighbors in support



Public Input
SU 23-26 (Cochise Stronghold Solar)

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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

Complies: 6 factors

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

Complies with Conditions: 4 factors

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



Site Development Standards, Recommended Conditions

- Setbacks/Public Input COA: The project owner shall preserve no less than a 100-foot buffer from the edge of all developed residential lots to the edge of a solar-panel array. No less than a 1,320-foot buffer shall be provided from Cochise Elementary School to the edge of any solar panel array.
- Wildlife Impact COA: The project owner shall reserve a 6–8-inch gap between the ground surface and the bottom of all new project-related perimeter fencing.
- Lot Coverage COA: 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.
- Glare/Wildlife Impact COA: The project owner shall exclusively use PV panels with an anti-reflectivity coating that is integral to the panel.
- Wildlife Impact COA: All solar racks shall be installed to maintain no less than a twelve (12) foot minimum clear distance, measured from outer edge of panels, between all tracker rows (north-south). The applicant shall not exceed a 35% ground cover ratio, defined as panel area to total project area, for the project site.

Traffic Circulation, Recommended Conditions

- Traffic COA/Dust Mitigation COA: The project owner shall submit, in advance or concurrent with their first Commercial Permit, a Traffic Improvement and Maintenance Plan, which successfully mitigates project impacts to Cochise Stronghold Road, to the satisfaction of the county. The plan shall include, but not be limited to, a traffic control plan, a dust control plan, a road stabilization plan, and a road maintenance plan.
- Traffic COA/Dust Mitigation COA: The project owner shall apply a chemical stabilizer, such as Magnesium Chloride, to Cochise Stronghold Road, where it is indicated as an access road on the concept plan, no fewer than four times, as further specified in the Traffic Improvement and Maintenance Plan during the project construction phase. Road preparation and application shall follow best practices to improve product performance and shall be in accordance with manufacturer's specifications.



Off Site Impacts, Recommended Conditions

- Glare/Wildlife Impact COA: The project owner shall exclusively use PV panels with an anti-reflectivity coating that is integral to the panel.
- Glare/Wildlife Impact COA: All solar racks shall be installed to maintain no less than a twelve (12) foot minimum clear distance, measured from outer edge of panels, between all tracker rows (north-south). The applicant shall not exceed a 35% ground cover ratio, defined as panel area to total project area, for the project site.
- Dust Mitigation COA: The project owner shall include all BMPs listed under factor 9 of the staff memo for dust mitigation on their Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan.
- Wildlife Impact COA: The project owner shall conduct preconstruction surveys per the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) prior to vegetation removal or ground disturbance associated with project construction.



Hazardous Materials, Recommended Conditions

- Hazardous Material COA: The project owner shall submit an Emergency Response Plan in conjunction with building permit submittals for County and fire responder review and approval.



Factors in Favor of Request

1. The Project is being developed for the benefit of rural electric distribution cooperatives and public power members served by AEPCO;
2. The project would serve as a source of clean energy, offsetting greenhouse gas emissions and reducing the need to generate electricity from fossil fuels;
3. The electricity generated by this project offers enhanced grid resiliency and support for future load growth needs;
4. The project is consistent with the applicable Policies of the Comprehensive Plan and the Purpose of the Rural Zoning Districts;
5. The project complies with most of the criteria used to evaluate special use requests;
6. The site plan submitted complies with most applicable site development standards and conditions; and
7. Once completed the project would generate negligible levels of traffic and would require minimal water, services and infrastructure.



Factors Against Approving the Request

1. Cumulative area impacts in project vicinity;
2. Fugitive dust associated with construction;
3. General compatibility and aesthetics concerns – the surrounding terrain is flat, and the project has a large footprint;
4. Neighbor concerns (8 letters of opposition)
5. Avian and wildlife concerns – the project is adjacent to the Willcox Playa/Cochise Lakes Important Bird Area. Also, AZGF considers this general area to be an important wildlife connectivity zone. The project risks reducing habitat connectivity and wildlife movement/migration unless specific design features are incorporated to mitigate project impacts.



Applicant Presentation/Discussion



Staff Recommendation

Docket SU 23-26, Recommend Conditional Approval

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



Recommended Conditions*

1. The project owner shall submit, in advance or concurrent with their first Commercial Permit, a Traffic Improvement and Maintenance Plan, which successfully mitigates project impacts to Cochise Stronghold Road, to the satisfaction of the county. The plan shall include, but not be limited to, a traffic control plan, a dust control plan, a road stabilization plan, and a road maintenance plan.
2. The project owner shall apply a chemical stabilizer, such as Magnesium Chloride, to Cochise Stronghold Road, where it is indicated as an access road on the concept plan, no fewer than four times, as further specified in the Traffic Improvement and Maintenance Plan during the project construction phase. Road preparation and application shall follow best practices to improve product performance and shall be in accordance with manufacturer's specifications.

Recommended Conditions* (continued)

3. The project owner shall reserve a 6–8-inch gap between the ground surface and the bottom of all new project-related perimeter fencing.
4. 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.
5. The applicant shall submit an Emergency Response Plan in conjunction with building permit submittals for County and fire responder review and approval.
6. The project owner shall exclusively use PV panels with an anti-reflectivity coating that is integral to the panel.

Recommended Conditions* (continued)

7. All solar racks shall be installed to maintain no less than a twelve (12) foot minimum clear distance, measured from outer edge of panels, between all tracker rows (north-south). The applicant shall not exceed a 35% ground cover ratio, defined as panel area to total project area, for the project site.
8. The project owner shall include all BMPs listed under factor 9 of the staff memo for dust mitigation on their Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan.
9. The project owner shall conduct preconstruction surveys per the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) prior to vegetation removal or ground disturbance associated with project construction.

Recommended Conditions* (continued)

10. Area within the 100-year floodplain shall remain free of any solar modules, batteries, inverters, transformers, and internal security fencing.
11. The project owner shall preserve no less than a 100-foot buffer from the edge of all developed residential lots to the edge of a solar-panel array. No less than a 1,320-foot buffer shall be provided from Cochise Elementary school to the edge of any solar panel array.
12. 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

Madam Chair, I move to approve Docket SU-23-26 (Cochise Stronghold Solar), with the Conditions of Approval recommended by staff and waiver requests requested by applicant; the Factors of Approval constituting Findings of Fact.

