COCHISE COUNTY
Arizona

Development Services
520-432-9300
developmentservices@cochise.az.gov
www.cochise.az.gov
1415 Melody Ln, Bdg F
Bisbee, Arizona 85603

MEMORANDUM

TO: Cochise County Planning and Zoning Commission
FROM: Matthew Taylor, AICP, Planning Manager
FOR: Christine McLachlan, AICP, Director
SUBJECT: SU25-27 (Parker Ranch Road Solar Facility/Data Center)
DATE: October 8, 2025

Docket SU25-27 (Parker Ranch Road Solar Facility/Data Center)
A Special Use Authorization request to allow a small solar facility with grid connectivity and data center.

I. Description of Subject Parcel and Surrounding Uses

Applicant: Louis and Maria Mouza
Location: Parker Ranch Road (Willcox)
APN: 305-43-051F
Property Size: 40 acres
Zoning: RU-4
Plan Designation: Rural
Growth Area: D – Rural Areas
Existing Use: Undeveloped
Proposed Use: Solar Facility/Data Center

Surrounding Zoning and Uses

North	RU-4	Undeveloped
South	RU-4	Undeveloped
East	RU-4	Undeveloped
West	RU-4	Undeveloped

II. Site History

- None

III. Special Use Authorization Request

The applicant requests a special use to allow a solar facility with on-site data center. Six solar panel blocks are proposed along with data center (8,000-15,000 square feet), warehouse/equipment yard (3,000-6,000 square feet), and inverter/switchgear pads on a 40-acres site surrounded by a 7' chain link fence.

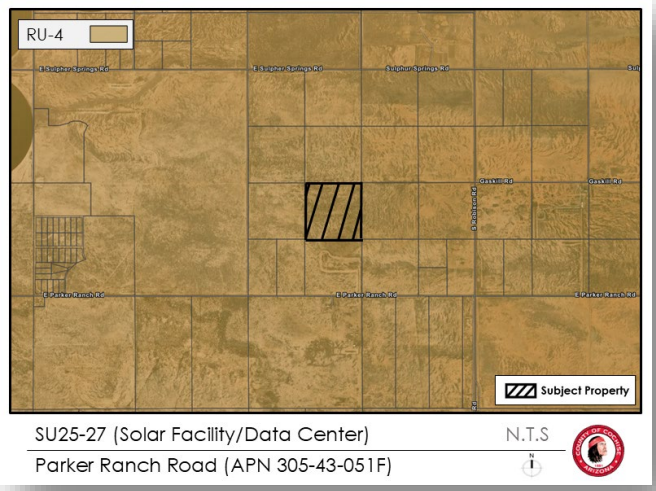
IV. Analysis of Impacts – Compliance with Special Use Factors

Section 2.48.160 of the Zoning Regulations identifies ten (10) factors to evaluate Special Use applications. These factors determine the suitability of a special use request, whether to recommend approval, and to determine if

conditions and/or modifications are needed to mitigate potentially negative impacts on surrounding properties. With the information provided, nine (9) factors apply to this special use request.

1. Compliance with Duly Adopted Plans: Partially Complies
The subject property is designated "Rural" by the Comprehensive Plan and falls within Growth Area D (Rural Areas). The existing RU-4 zoning is consistent with the Plan, and solar energy resources are encouraged by the Plan (Element E, Renewable Energy).

Rural districts are typically used for agriculture and low density residential land uses but allow a wide variety of non-residential uses with special use approval, including airports, animal husbandry, communication towers (exceeding 30' height), contract construction services, convenience stores, feed lots, hospitals, impound yards, manufacturing, marijuana establishments, mini-warehouses, shooting ranges, personal/professional services, retail sales and rentals, veterinary clinics, warehousing/distribution, and wind energy power plants. The most common uses in rural districts are low density residential and agriculture – neither of these uses are proposed in this case, being limited to a solar facility and data center.



2. Compliance with the Zoning District Purpose: Complies
Rural districts, which range in site area from 2 acres to 36 acres, allow residential and non-residential uses compatible with an area's rural character. Section 2.15 (*Rural Zoning Districts*) of the zoning regulations identifies zoning district purpose and permitted use within the rural zoning classification and identifies uses that would otherwise be inappropriate in more populated areas but can be viable in rural areas with enhanced development standards or use restrictions to mitigate potential off-site impacts.

Solar energy power plants are permitted by right in industrial districts and within planned developments but require special use approval in general business and rural districts. Additional standards applicable to solar projects are found in Section 2.51 (*Site Development Standards – Solar Energy Power Plants*) which supplement or supersede base zoning district standards. Section 2.51 standards include design standards, project transfer or sale, use cessation, and decommissioning and site restoration.

3. Development Along Major Streets: Complies
The property takes access from Parker Ranch Road, a County-maintained road with a Rural Local functional classification. The subject property itself does not front on Parker Ranch but has access via a 30' dedicated easement along the property to the south (two 15' easements) and 30' easement along the subject property's south property line (two 15' easements). The County requires a right-of-way permit to establish access to Parker Ranch Road. The intent of this factor is to consider limiting the number of access points on major thoroughfares, arterials, or collectors by using frontage roads, shared access, and no access easements. Incorporating such measures promotes fewer road cuts to avoid potentially unsafe traffic conflicts, hazardous traffic congestion, and roadway obstruction caused by traffic.

4. Traffic Circulation: Complies

This Special Use Authorization factor stipulates:

1. The request is consistent with the preservation of the functions of surrounding streets as defined in the County Comprehensive Plan.
2. The request does not result in the use of any residential street for non-residential traffic.
3. Consideration of future circulation needs in the surrounding area has been considered through right-of-way dedication and off-site improvements if warranted.

The property accesses Parker Ranch Road via dedicated easements shared with properties to the south and southeast. Parker Ranch Road is within County maintenance having a usable width of about 30', and this rural local roadway's functional classification will not be impacted by the proposed use. Traffic impact analysis and off-site impacts are unlikely given the applicant's description of vehicle trips to and from the site but will be evaluated further during commercial permitting.

5. Adequate Services and Infrastructure: Complies

The applicant proposes private well and septic in the future, and the subject property is located within the Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC) service area. The property is located about 5.5 miles northeast from the Sunsites-Pearce Fire District boundary. Development of the site will be phased with perimeter fencing, inverter and transformer pads, data center building, and initial PV panel blocks followed by remaining PV blocks and warehouse/equipment yard with full build-out expected in 18-24 months.

6. Significant Site Development Standards: Complies

Development standards contained in Section 2.15 *(Rural Zoning Districts)* of the zoning regulations applies to RU-4 parcels regardless of use. Additional standards specific to solar projects, some of which are stricter than the zoning district standard, are located in Section 2.51.220 of the zoning regulations:

- 4-acre minimum parcel size (property totals about 40 acres)
- 40' minimum property line setbacks (double the distance required in RU-4)
- 20' maximum panel height (RU-4 allows up to 30' for structures)
- 0' minimum distance between structures (RU-4 requires 15')
- 0% maximum lot coverage (RU-4 allows up to 25%)
- Groundcover shall be planted, established, and maintained for the life of the project with perennial vegetation
- On-site utility lines (utility, transmission, and communication) shall be buried where feasible; interconnectivity with transmission systems may be overhead

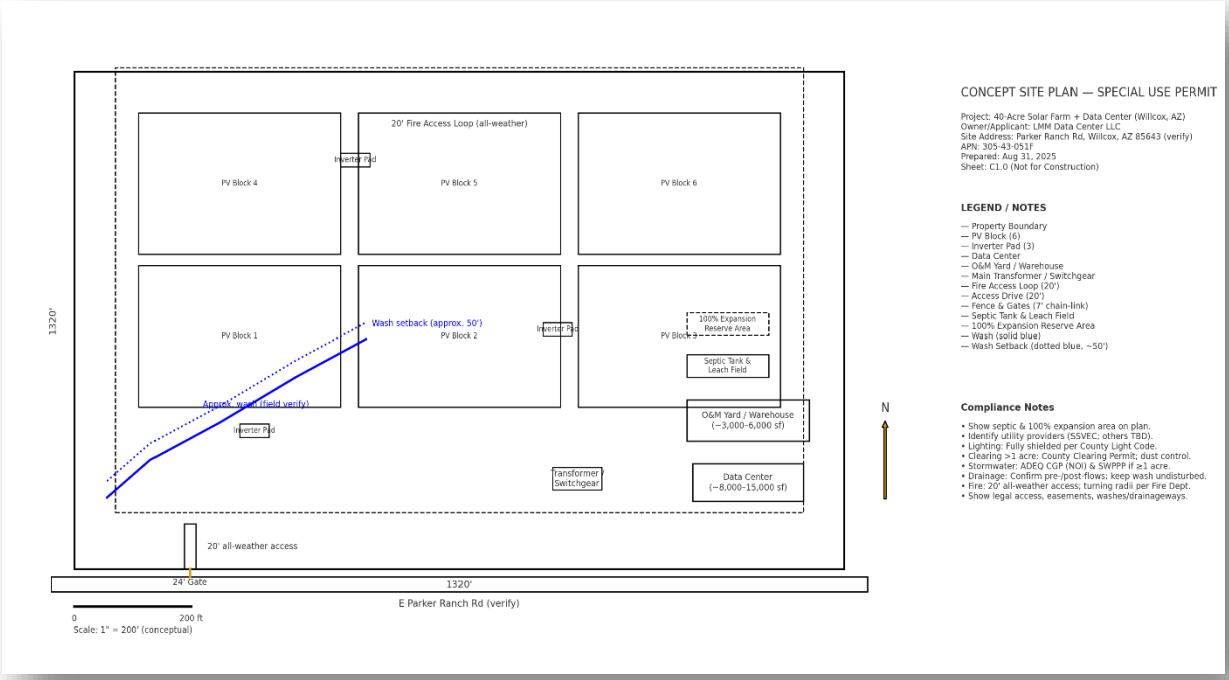
- Wildlife friendly fencing and site design (4”-6” gap between the bottom of fencing and ground surface, maximum 12’1” distance between panel edges)

7. Public Input: Complies

Section 2.48.160 of the Zoning Regulations states, “If public concerns have been raised, it is fair to ask if the applicant has made a reasonable effort to address these concerns through the Citizen Review Process.” The applicant mailed notices to property owners within 1,500’ on August 9, 2025, receiving two responses with one property owner expressing interest in the project.

8. Hazardous Materials: Not Applicable

Hazardous materials are not proposed for this special use. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sets limits for materials in photovoltaic panels, which typically include glass, aluminum, silicone, trace amounts of lead, and other miscellaneous inert materials.



9. Off-Site Impacts: Complies w/ Conditions

This factor is intended to ensure adequate measures have been taken to mitigate off-site impacts such as noise, outdoor lighting, odors, smoke, traffic, and dust:

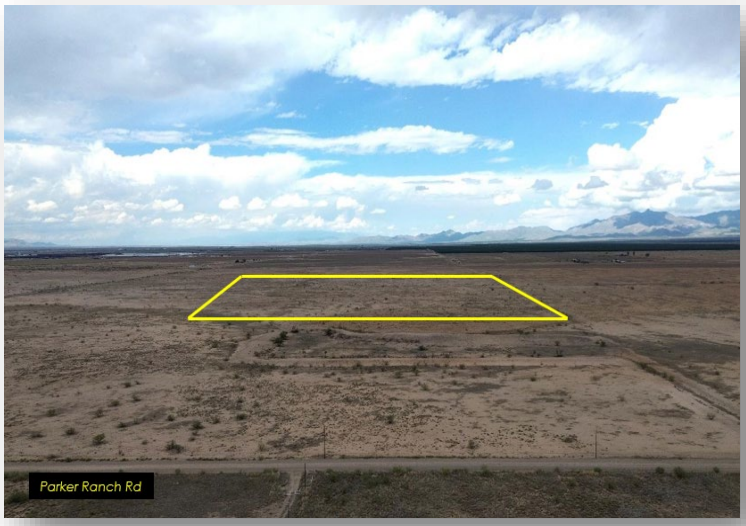
- Noise: Noise mostly during construction as solar facilities generate little operational noise.
- Lighting: Solar facilities are typically not light-intensive uses but outdoor lighting is subject to Section 2.45 *(Outdoor Lighting)* of the zoning regulations.
- Odors and Smoke: The project is unlikely to generate any unusual or offensive odors or smoke during construction or after becoming operational.
- Parking: Parking and driveways areas may remain unimproved in Growth Area D. Two-inch gravel shall be applied to driveways and parking areas as needed in high activity areas to reduce off-site impacts related to dust and erosion.

- Landscaping: The applicant proposes landscaping and Section 2.51.220 requires natural vegetation under solar panels and within buffer areas.
- Traffic: Traffic impacts will be greatest during the planned 18-24-month construction period. After the site becomes operational vehicle trips to and from the site will be minimal.
- Dust: Staff recommends best management practices to reduce fugitive dust and soils erosion during and after development of the site.

10. Water Conservation: Not Applicable

County-wide water conservation requirements identified in Section 2.51.170 *(Water Conservation Measures)* of the zoning regulations apply to non-residential uses and properties. These include drought tolerant vegetation identified on the county's plant list for landscaping; non-erosive, soil stabilizing ground cover materials; misters are prohibited; new water features must utilize harvested rainwater.

Data centers are typically water-reliant; however, solar energy facilities do not require water for normal operation though water for washing PV panels is needed to ensure optimum panel efficiency. The proposed data center will require water. Solar power plants are encouraged for properties location within the Douglas Active Management Area (AMA) and other areas within the county where water resources are limited.



V. Public Comment

Staff mailed notices to property owners within 1,500', published legal notice, and posted the property September 15-19, 2025.

VI. Waivers

None.

VII. Summary and Conclusion

The applicant requests special use approval to develop a small-scale solar energy project with electrical grid connectivity and integrated data center. The project site consists of one parcel totaling about 40 acres and there are no parcels with established residential uses adjacent to the project site.

Factors in Favor of Approval

1. Complies with applicable factors.
2. Non-residential land use with limited impacts on local services and infrastructure
3. Potential benefits to electrical grid resiliency.
4. Low water use within the Douglas Active Management Area (AMA).

5. No opposition from nearby property owners.

Factors Against Approval

1. Fugitive dust during construction.
2. Visual impacts may disrupt natural landscape views for area residents.

VIII. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the factors in favor of approval, staff recommends approval of Docket SU25-27 to develop a small-scale solar energy project with data center subject to the following conditions:

1. County right-of-way and floodplain use permits along with a grading and drainage analysis are required.
2. The project owner shall submit, in advance or concurrent with their first commercial permit, a Traffic Improvement and Maintenance Plan, which successfully mitigates potential project impacts to Parker Ranch Road.
3. The applicant shall submit an Emergency Response Plan in conjunction with building permit submittals for County and fire responder review and approval.
4. The project owner shall include all Best Management Practices (BMP) for dust mitigation and wind erosion with a dust control plan included with Traffic Improvement and Maintenance Plans:
    a. Minimize grading and vegetation removal. Native vegetation helps support wildlife and pollinator species in the area while reducing dust and erosion.
    b. In areas where vegetation removal and/or grading is required, schedule removal to the minimum time required prior to module installation.
    c. Limit vehicle speed on unimproved surface roads to 25 miles per hour during construction.
    d. Apply water to disturbed soil areas using water trucks to control dust and maintain proper moisture levels for soil compaction. Minimize over application of water to prevent runoff and ponding. Utilize two-inch gravel in high activity areas.
    e. Suspend grading during high winds.
    f. Cover trucks hauling soil or other loose material in and out of the project site.
    g. Gravel or aggregate should be used where access roads meet paved roads to limit offsite disturbance and prevent mud and dirt track-out.
5. The project owner shall use PV panels with an anti-reflectivity coating integral to the panel.
6. All solar racks shall be installed to maintain no less than a 12’ minimum clear distance, measured from outer edge of panels, between all tracker rows.
7. A 4”-6” gap between the bottom of project-related perimeter fencing and ground surface shall be reserved for small ground animal permeability.

Standard conditions related to acceptance of conditions, permitting timeframes, and modifications to an approved special use apply to and are not modified by this request.

Sample Motion

I move to approve Docket SU25-27 with conditions recommended by staff, the factors in favor of approval constituting the findings of fact.