

DRAFT

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COCHISE COUNTY PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING HELD ON Wednesday, APRIL 8, 2026

A regular meeting of the Cochise County Planning and Zoning Commission was held on Wednesday, APRIL 8, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. in the Board of Supervisors' Hearing Room, 1415 Melody Lane, Building G, Bisbee, Arizona.

Present: Kim DePew, Chair; Robert Montgomery, Vice Chair; Frank Ambriz, Member; John Benedict, Member; Larry Saunders, Member; Pati Fickett, Member; Neil Tucker, Member

Absent: Gerry Gonzalez, Member

Staff Present: Christine McLachlan, Development Services Director
Matthew Taylor, Planning Division Manager
Sharon Larsala, Planner I
Bert Whitehead, Deputy Civil County Attorney

Attendees: Dave Dodge, Applicant (SU26-03)
Marianne Dodge, Applicant (SU26-03)
Scott Leach, Applicant (SU26-04)
Sara Born, Applicant (SU26-04)
Kara Harris, Speaker (Call to the Public)
Kevin Kitching, Speaker (Call to the Public)
Allison Morse, Speaker (Call to the Public, SU26-04)
Cepand Alizadeh, Speaker (SU26-04)
Christine Atchison, Speaker (SU26-04)
Robert Karren, Speaker (SU26-04)
Nathan Lewis, Speaker (SU26-04)
Dan Baker, Speaker (SU26-04)
Ryan Slawson, Speaker (SU26-04)
Tristin Solorzano, Speaker (SU26-04)
Rachael Stewart, Speaker (SU26-04)
Addie Swallow, Speaker (SU26-04)
Tricia Gerrodette, Speaker (SU26-04)
Lisa Stansbury, Speaker (SU26-04)
Tara Clayton, Speaker (SU26-04)

Chair DePew called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE, ROLL CALL, AND INTRODUCTION

APPROVAL OF THE PREVIOUS MONTH'S MINUTES

Vote: 6 - 0 Approved

CALL TO THE PUBLIC

Kara Harris spoke during call to the public. Allison Morse spoke during call to the public. Kevin Kitching spoke during call to the public.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Docket SU26-03: An applicant-initiated Special Use Authorization request to allow a private airstrip at 5261 E. Dragon Winds Way near Dragoon (APN 208-92-013B). The property totals about 20 acres and is zoned RU-4 (Rural District, one dwelling per 4 acres).

Motion by Member Saunders, Second by Member Ambriz.

Case planner Taylor provided a presentation, which is preserved in the files. Dave and Marianne Dodge, applicants, provided a statement.

Chair DePew opened the public hearing. No one spoke in favor or in opposition. The applicants waived rebuttal. Chair DePew closed the public hearing.

Commission Discussion: Member Saunders asked if the runway was graded and Mr. Dodge responded that the runway is graded. Member Saunders asked where the neighbor's property was in the presentation picture and if the applicant would be taking off near the power lines. Mr. Dodge identified the neighbor's shop building in the picture but said that the house was difficult to see, adding that he will not be taking off near the power lines and that he has spoken with the utilities, which prompted a site plan revision to ensure the airstrip remains on his property. Member Saunders asked the applicant if his aircraft are one-seat and Mr. Dodge confirmed they are. Member Fickett noted she is familiar with this type of aircraft and that the applicant has an appropriate location for flying.

Chair DePew observed that Coronado National Forest is nearby and asked if the applicant is permitted to fly over it and Mr. Dodge said yes provided FAA regulations are followed. Mr. Dodge added that his aircraft holds 10 gallons, so flights would be about one hour and twenty minutes at 50 miles per hour. Mr. Dodge added that he received additional training in Texas and the sport requires significant investment. Chair DePew asked the applicant if he was a hobbyist and Mr. Dodge replied yes. Chair DePew also asked the applicant if he is aware of the modification requirement should the use become a commercial venture and Mr. Dodge stated yes.

Member Benedict asked about the applicant's piloting experience. Mr. Dodge stated that he has owned four such aircraft and hasn't flown in about 15 years but wants to resume flying now that he is retired. Mr. Dodge added that he follows the rules and has about 100 hours of flying experience.

Case planner Taylor stated staff recommends approval with special conditions relative to type of aircraft, flight times, overflights of adjacent properties, compliance with applicable FAA requirements, and coordination with local utilities.

Vote: 6 - 0 Approved

2. Docket SU26-04: An applicant-initiated Special Use Authorization request to allow a Solar Energy Power Plant with Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) at the approximate southwest corner of Airport and Permenter Roads west of Willcox (APNs 209-86-010B, 209-86-016E, 209-86-016F, 209-86-016G, and 209-86-016H). The proposed project site totals about 1,250 acres and is zoned RU-4 (Rural District, one dwelling per 4 acres).

Motion by Member Tucker, Second by Member Ambriz.

Case planner Taylor provided a presentation, which is preserved in the files. Scott Leach and Sara Born, representatives for Winchester Sollar III, LLC (applicant) provided a statement.

Chair DePew opened the public hearing. Cepand Alizadeh spoke in favor. Christine Atchison spoke in opposition. Robert Karren spoke in favor. Nathan Lewis spoke in opposition. Dan Baker spoke in opposition. Allison Morse spoke in opposition. Ryan Slawson spoke in favor. Tristin Solorzano spoke in favor. Rachael Stewart spoke in favor. Addie Swallow spoke in favor. Tricia Gerrodette offered recommendations on road repair, waterless dust control, and larger fence openings for wildlife permeability. Lisa Stansbury spoke in opposition. Tara Clayton spoke in favor. The applicants provided a rebuttal. Chair DePew closed the public hearing.

Commission Discussion: Member Saunders questioned the property tax amount, the battery building and its dual containment, the megawatts per system, whether battery backup covers all three phases, and if solar is limited to local use. The applicants confirmed \$1.4 million in property taxes for year one to double in year two, payable starting next year. They stated the battery cells are in structures similar to shipping containers sitting on cooling plates for temperature control with Winchester I and II systems generating 80MW each and Winchester III generating 200MW. Member Saunders asked who receives the power and the applicants stated AEPCO would distribute the power to its members.

Member Tucker questioned if special equipment is required in the event of a fire and the applicants responded that an event would be monitored by Wilcox Fire Department with the directive to let the BESS burn with structure separation preventing other systems from catching fire. The applicants further stated that the system itself would disconnect if it overheats to prevent a thermal runaway and the emergency management plan will outline steps should a fire occur, with resources being provided to the responding agency. Toxic elements could not be contained as there would be a plume, but full-scale fires are rare and dissipate in 1–2 hours.

Member Fickett stated the property taxes will benefit the County and that the applicant's 96-page submittal addressed all her questions. Member Ambriz asked if there would be employees onsite after construction is complete and the applicants stated there may be personnel on the property after the project completion, similar to the Red Horse project.

Member Ambriz mentioned the Central Highway project where there does not appear to be any local benefit and the applicants stated that, due to regulations, they cannot directly sell electricity to the neighbors. Member Ambriz asked if the Winchester I project is paying taxes and the applicants said the first tax bill will occur in 2027. Director Christine McLachlan confirmed assessments by both the State and County.

Chair DePew asked if APECO is the applicant's sole purchaser and the applicants responded that they have an inter-connection agreement to put power into the system, but the power purchase agreement would come after permitting. Chair DePew stated that Arizona Electric Power is a cooperative that sells to its members and excess power would be put into the grid, which could bring down prices and is very different than the for-profit world and that local benefit is an important factor in these decisions. Chair DePew read a statement about recycling companies extracting valuable materials then burning the remnants in cement ovens, dropping them into landfills, or exporting them to other countries, and specifically asked the applicants about their experience with some solar panel recycling companies. The applicants stated panels are often exported for re-use. Chair DePew asked about recycling for previous projects and the applicants responded that panels occasionally break during the construction process and are picked up by the supplier, but can't speculate on what happens to panels 35 years from now. Chair DePew concluded that the question would have to be answered by panel manufacturers.

Member Benedict expressed appreciation of the applicant's transparency with the process and referenced the previous Friday's site visit to the Winchester I/II project, confirming that lithium iron phosphate would be used for the battery systems and not lithium-ion systems and acknowledging the applicant's willingness to work with local fire districts on training and resources. The applicants confirmed that the systems would comply with 9540a testing standards and that the standards are mandatory. Member Benedict asked about the 20 life span reference in the application versus the 25-year life span stated by the applicant. The applicants said the 20-year reference would apply to the battery systems and panel life could be much longer, but that they too would be recycled as required by environmental laws. Member Benedict asked about site restoration bonds. Director McLachlan responded that the first step is special use approval, then the zoning regulations require a decommissioning plan with a professional engineer's analysis on how much it would cost to decommission the project in 5 year intervals, considering project value and restoration of the site, which zeroes out when factoring the value of remaining equipment. The County requires a bond when the value of the remaining project assets is less than the cost to remove the equipment and restore the site. Member Benedict asked the applicants about the cooling systems for the batteries. The applicants stated that the cooling systems include cold plates and cells stacked on top of each other with glycol as a coolant and that these systems are reportable to the EPA. Member Benedict asked if specific materials to be tested should be added to the conditions. Member Saunders stated that the EPA would control environmental concerns and Member Fickett stated the components are regulated by the federal and state governments. Member Benedict specifically asked about lead, cadmium, and PFAS being mentioned in soils testing requirements, and Director McLachlan said they do not need to be specifically referenced in the conditions to be studied. Member Benedict stated that having a baseline testing could also work in the favor of the applicants if some panel components are already on the ground. Chair DePew asked who would conduct baseline soil testing and Director McLachlan responded someone independent of the project and reviewed by relevant County departments. Vice Chair Montgomery stated that fire districts need more equipment and

are aware of these projects.

Case planner Taylor stated staff recommends approval with special conditions related to emergency and traffic plans, ensuring fire protection and coordination, project setbacks and access, materials and equipment used, soil testing, and best practices recommended by the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

Vote: 7 - 0 Approved

**PLANNING DIRECTOR'S REPORT, INCLUDING PENDING, RECENT AND FUTURE
AGENDA ITEMS AND BOARD OF SUPERVISORS' ACTIONS**

CALL TO COMMISSIONERS ON RECENT MATTERS

REMEMBERING COMMISSIONER RANDALL LIMBACH

ADJOURNMENT

Chair DePew adjourned the meeting at 6:15 p.m.

APPROVED:

Kim DePew, Chair

ATTEST:

Christine McLachlan, Development Services Director