

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE COCHISE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
REGULAR MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2026**

A regular board meeting of the Cochise County Board of Supervisors was held on Tuesday, February 24, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. in the Board of Supervisors' Hearing Room, 1415 Melody Lane, Building G, Bisbee, Arizona.

Present: Frank Antenori, Chairman; Tom Crosby, Vice-Chairman

Absent: Kathleen L. Gomez, Supervisor

Staff Present: Sharon Gilman, County Administrator; Joe Casey, Deputy County Administrator; Dylan Hendel, Deputy Civil County Attorney; Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board

Chairman Antenori called the meeting to order at 10:08 a.m.

SUMMARY OF CURRENT EVENTS

Report by District 1 Supervisor, Tom Crosby

Vice-Chairman Crosby presented a document he said showed an electronic filing removing a case to federal court shortly before a hearing and questioned whether certain records related to voting machine testing under the Help America Vote Act were ever properly filed or verified.

Chairman Antenori stated he could not comment on the matter based on advice from counsel.

Report by District 2 Supervisor, Kathleen L. Gomez

Supervisor Gomez was absent.

Report by District 3 Supervisor, Frank Antenori

Chairman Antenori highlighted a strong turnout at the Aluminum Dynamics job fair as evidence that many residents are seeking employment. He stated that the county must pursue economic development by attracting industry and a growing population rather than raising taxes in order to increase revenue, keep pace with the rest of the state, and protect existing industries such as ranching and agriculture.

CALL TO THE PUBLIC

Allison Morse recognized Black History Month, criticized the U.S. President and recent journalist arrests as threats to free speech, referenced her prior interruption while discussing law enforcement funding, and requested that the county publicly post any rules governing public comment to prevent constituents from being silenced.

PRESENTATION

Presentation by the Cochise County Attorney's Office-Civil Division, regarding 2025 statistics and trends.

Lori Zucco, Cochise County Attorney, presented this item using a PowerPoint presentation. Ms. Zucco stated the County Attorney's Office reported on 32 notices of claim, most handled in-house, with several referred to Arizona Counties Insurance Pool (ACIP), noting that many involve vehicle accidents and require review within 60 days as a precursor to litigation. She stated current civil litigation cases, including new and ongoing matters in Superior Court and U.S. District Court, with some handled internally and others referred out. Ms. Zucco highlighted that the public records requests are a steady volume for the County Attorney's Office and a significant surge in Sheriff's Office requests, along with implementation of a new online system to improve transparency and reduce duplication. She stated there was a 20% increase in planning and zoning violations, detailing active cases, hearings, resolutions, and the handling of enforcement actions.

Catherine Barney, Senior Paralegal, presented the Title 36 Mental Health by PowerPoint presentation. Ms. Barney reported that in 2025 there were 154 Title 36 mental health cases in Cochise County, with 142 petitions for court-ordered evaluation initiated by the County Attorney's Office and 12 cases received from other jurisdictions. She noted of those cases, 28 proceeded to petitions for court-ordered treatment and 23 resulted in treatment orders, while many others were dismissed because individuals agreed to voluntary treatment, did not meet psychiatric criteria, or the evaluation order expired. She also noted an increase in contested hearings, 53 revocations of court-ordered treatment, and that most patients were placed at Canyon Vista Medical Center, with some referred to other facilities, including CBI in Tucson, particularly for inmates.

Ms. Zucco concluded her presentation by introducing the Civil Division team, outlining each attorney's and paralegal's responsibilities, including litigation, contracts, mental health commitments, public records requests, zoning matters, special districts, water law, and representation of various county departments and agencies. She highlighted the experience levels of the attorneys and long tenure of support staff.

In response to the Board, Bert White, Deputy Civil County Attorney, stated Southern Arizona Legal Aid can help assist people with civil matters.

The Board and staff discussed the separation between county and Sheriff's Office public records handling, with staff explaining that the Sheriff manages its own high-volume requests due to system access, workload, and budget constraints, while the County Attorney's Office handles related legal matters. The Board also noted plans to review public records policies, fees, and redaction practices in a future work session,

acknowledged staffing challenges, and expressed appreciation for the department's workload and efforts.

CONSENT

Board of Supervisors

1. Approve the Minutes of the regular meeting of the Board of Supervisors of February 10, 2026.

Elections

2. Appoint Poll Workers/Early Board Members for the May 19, 2026, Election and authorize the Elections Director to make additions or substitutions as necessary prior to the election, to ensure that all Vote Centers are staffed adequately with trained election Poll Workers and Early Board Members.
3. Approve the appointment of one Precinct Committeemen (DEM), by recommendation of their respective Cochise County Party Chairman, to serve through the October 1, 2026, term.

Finance

4. Approve demands and budget amendments for operating transfers.

Vice-Chairman Crosby made a motion to approve Consent items 1 through 4. Chairman Antenori seconded the motion.

Chairman Antenori called for the vote and it was approved 2-0 (Gomez absent).

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Board of Supervisors

5. Adopt Resolution 26-03 granting an Electric Services Franchise to Southline Transmission, LLC.

Vice-Chairman Crosby made a motion to adopt Resolution 26-03 granting an Electric Services Franchise to Southline Transmission, LLC. Chairman Antenori seconded the motion.

Chairman Antenori opened the Public Hearing.

Mr. Hendel presented this item. He stated that under Arizona law, the Board of Supervisors may grant a franchise for use of county rights-of-way, and that staff recommends approval of Southline Transmission LLC's application to construct new power transmission lines across the county as it complies with

state statute.

Christina Tamayo, Development Project Manager at Grid United supporting Southline Transmission LLC, franchise, explained that the multi-state transmission project seeks a franchise agreement to build regional power transmission infrastructure in the county. She clarified that the company develops transmission lines rather than providing retail electric service, and estimated the project could generate approximately \$8 million in pre-operation property tax revenue and about \$37 million over a 40-year lifespan once energized.

Chairman Antenori noted that while the county would receive roughly one-third of the projected property tax revenue from the project, the majority would benefit public schools and other local entities such as the library, flood control, and fire districts. He expressed appreciation for bringing in a new industry and additional funding into the county.

Vice-Chairman Crosby clarified that the proposed transmission franchise does not include a franchise fee and does not involve retail electric service, noting that a retail franchise could involve a pass-through fee to customers, which would raise concerns without customer approval.

Mr. Hendel assured no such fee applied.

Tricia Gerrodette stated that while reviewing the franchise agreement she noticed the name "GU Southline LLC," which she recalled being associated with a prior state trust land auction proposal and requested confirmation.

Ms. Tamayo clarified that GU Southline LLC refers to Grid United, a co-developer of the project, and explained that she is employed by Grid United, with the project developed in partnership with Black Forest Partners. She stated that she was not aware of the specific state trust land auction referenced but confirmed that Southline Transmission is not currently involved in any auction in Arizona.

Chairman Antenori closed the Public Hearing.

Chairman Antenori called for the vote and it was approved 2-0 (Gomez absent).

ACTION

Board of Supervisors

6. Approve the sale of two parcels sold during the November 3, 2025, through November 14, 2025, Tax Deed Land Auction held online through Public Surplus of parcels listed on Exhibit A.

Vice-Chairman Crosby made a motion to approve the sale of two parcels sold during the November 3, 2025, through November 14, 2025, Tax Deed Land Auction held online through Public Surplus of parcels listed on Exhibit A. Chairman Antenori seconded the motion.

Ms. Loewenheim clarified that two parcels in Douglas were sold together as one lot, but after the highest bidder defaulted, the sale transferred to the next highest bidder rather than restarting the process.

Chairman Antenori called for the vote and it was approved 2-0 (Gomez absent).

7. Approve and authorize the Chairman to sign the attached letter dated February 24, 2026, to the Honorable Tulsi Gabbard, Director of National Intelligence, requesting information concerning Voting System Test Laboratory (VSTL) accreditation, ES&S voting system certification, and related federal statutory interpretation.

Vice-Chairman Crosby made a motion to approve and authorize the Chairman to sign the attached letter dated February 24, 2026, to the Honorable Tulsi Gabbard, Director of National Intelligence, requesting information concerning Voting System Test Laboratory (VSTL) accreditation, ES&S voting system certification, and related federal statutory interpretation. Chairman Antenori seconded the motion.

Allison Morse spoke in opposition to the proposed letter to the Director of National Intelligence, arguing that it relates to unfounded claims of voter fraud connected to a recent ballot seizure and asserting that prior investigations have found no significant fraud. She criticized federal officials and previous related actions by the Board, contended that the effort is politically motivated and unlikely to produce evidence of wrongdoing with voting machines, and urged the Board not to proceed.

The Board clarified that the proposed letter is not an attempt to allege fraud or pursue criminal action, but rather an inquiry about the accreditation process for Voting System Test Laboratories (VSTLs) and how that accreditation applies to the county's voting machines. The Board described the letter as a limited step toward verifying federal guidance and restoring public confidence in the election system.

Chairman Antenori called for the vote and it was approved 2-0 (Gomez absent).

County Sheriff

8. Approve Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) 2023-090-R3, between the State of Arizona Department of Public Safety (AZDPS), and Cochise County Sheriff's Office (CCSO), to utilize funding for strict enforcement of immigration, human smuggling, drug smuggling, gangs and employer sanction laws, as well as County Jail reimbursement costs relating to illegal immigration. REMOVED

Development Services

9. Adopt Resolution 26-04 authorizing the abandonment of Buena Vista Ranchettes subdivision pursuant to the application of Kevin Colwell, Brandi Comeau, John Comeau, Spencer Grijalva, Mahlon MacKenzie, Margene MacKenzie, Shelly Owens, Kati Robinson, Rylee Robinson, Eric Spencer, and Janitzy Spencer (Supervisor District 3).

REMOVED

Elections

10. Adopt Resolution 26-05 to approve Vote Center Locations for the 2026 Primary and General Elections as listed on the attached Exhibit; and authorize the Elections Director to make substitutions as necessary prior to each election, in the event that a Vote Center replacement needs to be made in accordance with A.R.S. 16-411.

Vice-Chairman Crosby made a motion to adopt Resolution 26-05 to approve Vote Center Locations for the 2026 Primary and General Elections as listed on the attached Exhibit; and authorize the Elections Director to make substitutions as necessary prior to each election, in the event that a Vote Center replacement needs to be made in accordance with A.R.S. 16-411. Chairman Antenori seconded the motion.

Chairman Antenori stated on behalf of Supervisor Gomez that although she initially requested tabling the item for research, adding a voting center in Portal, staff determined it was unnecessary to delay approval of the existing voting centers. He explained that the current resolution would move forward, while staff will evaluate staffing, location, and funding feasibility for a Portal site and return with a recommendation. He noted if viable, the Board will consider adding the Portal voting center as a separate future agenda item.

Mr. Casey stated that Supervisor Gomez wants her constituents to know she will be reaching out to the residents of Portal who raised the concern and plans to speak with them over the next couple of weeks.

Allison Morse urged the Board to reconsider restoring the Portal vote center, noting that many residents across party lines support its return due to population growth, a large senior community, and the long drive to Douglas or San Simon.

William Scott Huber spoke in support of adding a future agenda item to consider restoring a voting center in Portal. He noted that Portal had its own voting center prior to 2020, but residents must now travel about an hour to Douglas or San Simon, creating hardships for seniors, ranchers, and those in remote areas.

The Board acknowledged long lines at existing voting centers, including Shiloh Church and Benson High School, and expressed understanding of concerns about voter access and easing pressure on other locations. The Board agreed to evaluate restoring the Portal voting center, noting appreciation for community help in identifying a facility and volunteers. The Board stated that staff will review machine availability, legal backup requirements, and resources, with the goal of potentially placing the item on the next meeting agenda if feasible.

Chairman Antenori called for the vote and it was approved 2-0 (Gomez

absent).

Human Resources

11. Approve the Cochise Combined Trust premium rate structure for medical, dental and vision benefits for fiscal year 2026 - 2027.

Vice-Chairman Crosby made a motion to approve the Cochise Combined Trust premium rate structure for medical, dental and vision benefits for fiscal year 2026 - 2027. Chairman Antenori seconded the motion.

Jennifer Graeme, Human Resources Director, presented this item using a PowerPoint presentation. Ms. Graeme explained that the Cochise Combined Trust, which covers Cochise County, Cochise College, and Central Arizona College, approved premium rates and benefit changes for the July 1 plan year, serving 725 active employees with projected enrollment primarily in the EPO (45%) and high-deductible health plan (43%). She stated medical updates include joining Blue Cross Blue Shield's national BlueCard network, transitioning telehealth services, and adjusting deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums, including IRS-required increases to the high deductible plan. She explained the Trust also changed vendors, moving dental coverage to Humana for cost savings and broader access, and shifting short-term disability administration to Guardian. She stated there are new wellness programs, including Fedlogic and Digbi, that were added to provide benefits advocacy and personalized health management resources aimed at supporting employees and controlling long-term costs.

The Board and staff discussed the IRS-required increases to the high deductible health plan, clarifying that the IRS oversees Health Savings Account (HSA) limits and contribution rules, which is why deductible adjustments were necessary. The Board also discussed employer-related expenses (ERE), explaining that benefit costs are taxpayer-funded whether paid through county general funds or grants, with the source differing but the obligation remaining the same.

Ms. Gilman reported that an overall employer cost increase of about \$462,931, approximately 8%, due to high claims and rising healthcare costs.

Ms. Graeme stated that dental rates will remain the same under the new Humana plan, with only a slight increase in vision premiums, and noted that the county provides a small contribution toward dental coverage due to its connection to overall health. She concluded by recommending approval of the Cochise Combined Trust premium rate structure for medical, dental, and vision benefits for FY 2026–2027.

Chairman Antenori called for the vote and it was approved 2-0 (Gomez absent).

Housing Authority

12. Approve the renewal of the Family Self-Sufficiency Grant Agreement, FSS26AZ7186-01-00, awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to the Housing Authority of Cochise County, for the amount of \$85,000, effective January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2026.

Vice-Chairman Crosby made a motion to approve the renewal of the Family Self-Sufficiency Grant Agreement, FSS26AZ7186-01-00, awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to the Housing Authority of Cochise County, for the amount of \$85,000, effective January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2026. Chairman Antenori seconded the motion.

Anita Baca, Housing Director, presented this item. Ms. Baca explained that the Family Self-Sufficiency grant, which the county has received for over 20 years, funds the salary of the program coordinator and a small portion of supervisory time, and that this year's award reflects a \$5,000 increase from last year. She stated the grant supports participants receiving housing subsidies by helping them increase household income and move toward independence. She stated participants earn more, their rent contribution rises while the housing subsidy portion is placed into an interest-bearing escrow account, which they receive upon successful program completion. She stated graduates have used these funds for tuition, computers, and home down payments, with the coordinator providing individualized case management and connecting families to local resources to achieve their goals.

Chairman Antenori called for the vote and it was approved 2-0 (Gomez absent).

STATE & FEDERAL LEGISLATION

13. Discussion and possible action regarding state and federal legislative matters listed or described in the attached County Supervisors Association Legislative Policy Committee Agenda, the Arizona Association of Counties (AACo) Legislative Policy Committee Agenda, and the proposed State budget, and other matters related thereto.

Chairman Antenori discussed a newly signed Arizona bill sponsored by State Rep. Michael Carbone and State Sen. David Gowan that eliminates property taxes for disabled veterans, noting it will likely reduce property tax revenue in Cochise County if eligible veterans apply. He also warned of pending legislation related to the Public Safety Personnel Retirement System (PSPRS) that could further increase county liabilities if enacted.

Mr. Casey stated that SB 1504 was rejected, noting he had just received an email confirmation from the County Supervisors Association.

Chairman Antenori stated the Governor is still negotiating with the legislature on the conformity bill for income taxes. Chairman Antenori stated that a review is underway to possibly designate the San Pedro River basin as an Active Management Area and indicated the county may consider legal action if similar state action affects the basin.

REPORT BY SHARON GILMAN, COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR -- RECENT AND PENDING COUNTY MATTERS

Ms. Gilman announced that a press release has been issued with an updated primary election timeline, noting the primary will be held on July 21 and encouraging residents to review deadlines on the county website. She also shared that a community meeting would take place on March 4 at 5:30 p.m. at Schieffelin Hall in Tombstone to discuss future road closures for El Tour de Zona. She stated Supervisor Gomez is leading the effort to inform residents that Charleston Road will be closed for the bike ride on April 12.

Chairman Antenori adjourned the meeting at 12:08 p.m.

APPROVED:

Frank Antenori, Chairman

ATTEST:

Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board