The Yuma County Board of Supervisors met in a special work session with the Cocopah Tribal Council on February 10, 2026. The meeting was held at 197 S. Main Street, Yuma, Arizona.

CALL TO ORDER At 6:01 p.m., Chairman Porchas convened the Board of Supervisors in open session, also sitting as the board of directors of all special taxing districts where noted. Supervisors present were: Martin Porchas, Jonathan W. Lines, Darren Simmons, and Lynne Pancrazi. Marco A. (Tony) Reyes was excused.

Others present were: County Administrator Ian McGaughey; Deputy County Administrator Josh Scott; Chief Civil Deputy County Attorney Bill Kerekes; Planning & Zoning Director Maggie Castro; County Engineer Frank Sanchez; Public Works Director Kelly Fricke and Clerk of the Board Desiree Philipps.

Cocopah Tribal Council: Chairwoman Sherry Cordova; Vice Chairman Neil White; Council Member Florence M. Fitch; Council Member Jennifer Townsend; Tribal Administrator Elizabeth Benitez; and Business Development Manager Gary Magrino.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Cocopah Tribal Chairwoman Sherry Cordova.

DISCUSSION AGENDA: Discussion on the following items.

1. **Introductions & Welcome Comments** – *Chairman Martin Porchas and Chairwoman Sherry Cordova*

Chairman Porchas welcomed all in attendance.

2. **Yuma County Comprehensive Plan** – Yuma *County Planning & Zoning Director, Maggie Castro*

Ms. Maggie Castro presented an overview of the Yuma County 2030 Comprehensive Plan, which was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in March 2023 and is effective for up to ten years. She explained that the plan guides coordinated and harmonious development across approximately 3,159 square miles of the county (excluding YPG and the Barry M. Goldwater Range), with the goals of conserving natural resources, ensuring efficient public expenditures, and promoting public health, safety, convenience, and general welfare.

The comprehensive plan contains 12 elements, including the state-mandated land use, circulation, water resources, and energy elements, as well as optional elements such as open space, growth, environmental planning, and cost of development. Ms. Castro described the nine (9) planning areas and reviewed Tribal Lands & Land Uses maps showing the western portion of Yuma County, including overlays of the City of Yuma, City of Somerton, and City of San Luis general plans and their land use designations, noting their compatibility with the County's comprehensive plan.

She further detailed land use designations around the Cocopah and Fort Yuma Quechan reservation areas, emphasizing that adjacent lands are predominantly designated agricultural, rural preservation, with some rural density residential areas, much of which lies within the 65 decibel noise zone. Additional maps highlighted the North Gila, Martinez Lake, Dome Valley/Wellton, and East County planning areas, again noting that the majority of surrounding lands were designated for agricultural rural preservation, with rural residential uses near the Town of Wellton.

Brief clarification was provided regarding the size, distribution, and primary land uses of the reservation areas, including residential, industrial, commercial, recreational, and government program facilities.

3. Yuma County Major Projects Update – *County Engineer, Frank Sanchez and County Public Works Director, Kelly Fricke*

Mr. Frank Sanchez provided updates on several county building and roadway projects. He reported that the **Yuma County Administration Building** project, designed by BWS Architects and built by Pilkington Construction, was now complete, providing over 100,000 square feet of space for nine (9) departments at a construction cost just over $45 million, with only final punch-list items remaining. He advised that the new **Emergency Management Building**, located adjacent to the Public Works yard, was an 1,800-square-foot facility constructed for approximately $750,000, with its certificate of occupancy issued in December 2025. The **Gadsden Sheriff Substation** renovation, designed by TDA Chris Thompson Architects and built by Yuma Valley Contractors at a cost of $327,000, was substantially complete with a certificate of occupancy expected shortly.

Mr. Sanchez further reported that the **Yuma County Health Department** expansion and renovation, designed by Cunningham and constructed by Mortenson, was approximately 75% complete with a $20.5 million budget and a contract completion date of April 2026, though the contractor was currently about one month behind schedule. He outlined plans to renovate the **Recorder's Office** at 102 Main Street, including full replacement of plumbing, HVAC, electrical, fire, access control, and security systems within a roughly $2.1 million budget, with the office to be temporarily relocated to the former Mexican Consulate building for about one year. He also described the planned **ITS and Facilities Management Building**, currently under design by NEI with a $10.3 million construction budget, to be located near Public Works, with design completion anticipated in August 2026.

Ms. Kelly Fricke outlined a sanitary sewer collection project for the **Orange Grove/Rancho Mesa Verde** community that will transition approximately 332 homes from septic systems to a centralized sewer system conveying wastewater to the City of Somerton's treatment facility, including new service connections, septic abandonment, a new lift station, and a transmission main along Highway 95 and West County 16th Street. She noted potential encroachment on Cocopah tribal lands and, based on

existing right-of-way documentation, does not expect a formal tribal permit to be required, while the design consultant was adjusting the alignment to further reduce potential impacts.

Ms. Fricke then provided an update on the new **South County Solid Waste Transfer Station project** on County 19th Street between Avenues D and E, being constructed on a 10-acre parcel obtained from the Bureau of Reclamation. The station is intended to serve South County residents by providing free, convenient disposal options to reduce illegal dumping. She reported that construction was awarded to DPE Construction, site grading has begun, major equipment such as roll-off containers, collection vehicles and green waste processing equipment has been procured, and the facility is expected to be fully operational by July, initially operating three (3) days per week with possible expansion based on demand. She described the types of materials accepted at the County's transfer stations, including household waste, green waste, appliances ("white goods"), and up to five tires per resident, with metal sent for recycling. Ms. Fricke also detailed a countywide illegal dumping education campaign, "Desert Strong Yuma Clean," funded by a state grant of nearly $80,000, which includes television commercials (airing from February 2 through June), billboards, radio spots, and outreach at community events to encourage proper use of transfer stations and reduce illegal dumping in the desert.

Chairwoman Cordova questioned the site's proximity to the Cocopah reservation, with staff confirming its location on a 10-acre parcel on County 19th Street between Avenues D and E, east of the old landfill.

Mr. Magrino asked whether the County had evaluated contracting with a private waste company versus County operation with staff responding that they were unable to obtain sufficient cost data from private operators and that, given community expectations for free or low-cost dumping to deter illegal dumping, in-house operation currently appears to be the most cost-effective approach.

Finally, she reviewed the renewed **intergovernmental agreement with the Cocopah Indian Tribe**, under which Yuma County provides roadway and traffic signal maintenance within tribal boundaries. Over the past year, this has included patching on multiple roads, a chip seal project, eight (8) traffic signal repairs (including installation of a Miovision video detection system at Highway 95 and Casino Drive), and the installation and repair of more than 60 traffic signs, with emphasis on the value of the ongoing partnership and commitment to continued support and coordination with the tribe.

Next, Mr. Sanchez reviewed multiple roadway and safety projects. He reported that the long-planned **Avenue E/D Corridor** connection between State Route 195 and Highway 95 was nearing 100% design, with Yuma County preparing another federal BUILD/FHWA funding application, due February 24, to cover right-of-way acquisition, utility relocations (primarily irrigation facilities), and construction, estimated at

approximately $6.4 million. He then discussed the **Somerton Avenue and County 10¼ Street Bridge Replacement** over the West Main Canal, noting the bridge would be widened to accommodate future roadway expansion and was currently under design by Core Engineering with a budget of about $1.3 million and anticipated bidding later this year.

Mr. Sanchez summarized the completed first phase of the **Highway 95 Mill & Fill** project from San Luis to Avenue H¼ at a cost of approximately $6.5 million and explained that the county was seeking an additional $12 million in state transportation funding to extend the work through Somerton and up to 32nd Street/County 11th Street. Phase 2 would extend improvements to Avenue D. Phase three would include a future intergovernmental agreement with the Cocopah Tribe for mill & fill work within tribal right-of-way. He also described the reconfigured **Highway 95 at County 16th Street Traffic Signal Project**, which required shifting the intersection approximately 500 feet west to clear airport runway approach and departure paths, with the Board having approved an additional $1.4 million for the realignment.

Supervisor Lines left the meeting at approximately 6:40 p.m. and returned at 6:42 p.m.

Further outlined were several HSIP safety projects, including paving shoulders and adding centerline and edge rumble strips on **Avenue G from Highway 95 to County 11th Street** (construction advertising schedule for July 2026), installing traffic signals and turn lanes at **County 14th Street intersections with Avenues C and G** (bid opening scheduled for February 20), and realigning the **County Limit Street and Avenue G Intersection** with a curve similar to County 8th and Somerton Avenue (with a third bid opening set for February 27 following prior bid submission issues). Mr. Sanchez concluded that, generally, these roadway projects have an approximate two to three year time frame.

4. Discussion of Road Conditions at Avenue G between County 14th & County 15th – *Chairwoman Sherry Cordova*

Chairwoman Sherry Cordova reported serious safety concerns related to road conditions and traffic behavior in the areas surrounding Avenue G, County 14th and 15th, and the intersection of Highway (HWY) 95 and 14th. She described recurring issues with mud and debris left on the roadway by large agricultural machinery, particularly beyond Avenue G toward the reservation, noting that these conditions have damaged vehicles, endangered school buses and emergency vehicles, and created significant nighttime visibility hazards. She emphasized that while she respects the agricultural community and its importance, the lack of roadway clearance has become a critical safety issue and source of frustration, especially when it is difficult to identify responsible parties for cleanup.

She further expressed concern about widespread red light violations at the HWY 95 and County 14th intersection, observing that drivers often continue through the intersection after the signal has turned red, contributing to collisions and near misses despite existing traffic controls. She questioned whether simply adding more signals would be sufficient without stronger enforcement and behavioral change. She also referenced the potential value of paving the remaining unpaved segment between Avenues G and F on County 15th as a future thoroughfare to improve access for school buses and local traffic.

Supervisor Simmons noted that much of the mud problem stems from harvesting companies rather than farmers, and highlighted legal tools and past enforcement actions that could be used to address roadway obstructions.

Chairwoman Cordova concluded by stressing that these issues are fundamentally about public safety and the protection of lives and property, and she expressed hope for greater collaboration with county and law enforcement authorities to develop effective solutions.

Chairman Porchas acknowledged the concerns and noted that it would be looked into.

5. Cocopah Major Projects Update – *Tribal Administrator, Elizabeth Benitez and Business Development Manager, Gary Magrino*

Elizabeth Benetiz reported that construction of the new event center next to the Cocopah Casino was approximately 75% complete, with the 67,983 square foot facility that features an auditorium capacity of about 1,920 seated occupants, was anticipated to be ready by the end of May. She also outlined several tribal environmental initiatives, including restoration of over 430 acres along the Colorado River to enhance wildlife habitat, river access, and traditional plant resources. Ms. Benetiz noted that the North Restoration Project will restore 40 acres using wastewater to create aquatic habitat and ponds, with completion expected in the spring, while the West Restoration Project will restore 390 acres on the west reservation using tribal water rights and a new pipeline from the west main canal, with completion anticipated by December 2027.

Mr. Gary Magrino then provided updates on two major projects. He reported that a 2.47 megawatt solar farm comprising 40,536 tracking solar panels over 15 acres has been constructed, with plans to consolidate eight (8) existing electric meters, including those serving the new event center, casino, and hotel, into a single large meter to reduce electrical costs. The project is expected to be paid off within approximately two and a half years due to grants and other funding. He further announced that a contractor has been secured for the Speedway, with mobilization and site cleanup scheduled to begin in June and racing projected to commence in October, offering new recreational opportunities for the community.

No additional questions were raised.

6. County Regional Transportation Sales Tax Discussion – *Deputy County Administrator, Josh Scott*

Mr. Josh Scott provided a PowerPoint presentation on a proposed countywide transportation sales tax to fund roadway and transportation projects, including all elements within the right of way such as sidewalks, curbs, gutters, and signage. He explained that current road maintenance was funded almost exclusively through the Highway User Revenue Fund (HURF), which is based on a state gas tax set at 18 cents in 1993 and never adjusted for inflation, resulting in an effective buying power of approximately 8 cents today. This has created a widening gap between available revenues and transportation needs for the county, municipalities, and the tribe. Under state statute, the county may seek voter approval for a dedicated road sales tax of up to 1% for a period of 20 years, after which it must be reauthorized or will sunset. Staff analysis since 2019 has focused on a 0.5% (half-cent) rate, projected to generate approximately $21.7 million annually, with revenues proposed to be shared among municipalities based on population, and with a minimum of $400,000 guaranteed to the Town of Wellton. Mr. Scott emphasized that this structure would provide local control over project priorities, protect funds from state “sweeps,” and allow a focus on maintenance projects that can be completed quickly to demonstrate visible results to residents.

He further outlined next steps, including updating and finalizing prioritized project lists, coordinating with Yuma Metropolitan Planning Organization (YMPO) on a regional priorities needs study and supporting analysis, and conducting an educational campaign to clearly explain the tax, its uses, and benefits to voters. Regarding ballot timing, he noted that such a tax can only be presented to voters in an even-numbered year, and that the county was already planning a 2026 initiative related to its state-imposed expenditure limitation, which caps the county’s allowable spending based on a formula established in 1979 that has not kept pace with inflation or modern operational costs (such as computers and software). To avoid voter confusion between the expenditure limitation measure and the proposed road tax, the county is preliminarily targeting a 2028 ballot for the transportation sales tax initiative, separate from the 2026 expenditure limitation measure.

In response to Supervisor Pancrazi regarding an explanation of the expenditure limit, Mr. Scott explained that the State of Arizona set a cap on county spending in 1979, which has not kept pace with inflation or modern costs, and it was clarified that raising this limit would not increase taxes or total revenues collected, but would allow the county to spend funds it already receives and help avoid cuts to essential services. Also noted was that cities face the same constraint, which could lead to reductions in services such as parks and recreation.

7. Closing Remarks - *Chairman Martin Porchas and Chairwoman Sherry Cordova*

Chairwoman Cordova expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet with the County Board of Supervisors, noting this was the first invitation of its kind since she has sat on the council. She emphasized the importance of maintaining strong relationships between the county, city, and surrounding communities, particularly given the jurisdiction's location along the reservation and ongoing annexation and growth in nearby areas. She acknowledged the presence of two new council members and reiterated the value of relationship-building and information sharing.

Chairman Porchas thanked the Council members for their participation and discussion, explaining that the Board had decided in the past year to meet with all entities within the county to better understand local projects and explore opportunities for support. He recognized key staff members for their time and efforts preparing for the meeting and presentations.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the Work Session was adjourned at 7:19 p.m.

Adopted this 2nd day of March, 2026.

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Martin Porchas, Chairman

ATTEST:

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Desiree Philipps, Clerk of the Board