



NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING

GILA BEND TOWN COUNCIL
Tuesday January 13, 2026; 6:00pm
Gila Bend Unified School District Media Center
308 North Martin Avenue

MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER

Call to Order **meeting called to order at 6:00p.m. by Mayor Tommy Sikes**
Pledge of Allegiance **led by Mayor Tommy Sikes**
Invocation **given by Councilmember Mary Vinzant**

II. ROLL CALL

Mayor Tommy Sikes **Present**
Vice-Mayor Chris Riggs **Present**
Councilmember Fernando Fernandez **Present**
Councilmember Will Sipes **Present**

Councilmember Scott Swanson **Present**
Councilmember Mary Vinzant **Present**
Councilmember Donny Young **Absent**

III. Appointment of Interim Town Clerk

The Mayor and Town Council may discuss and possibly take action to appoint Pat Riggs as Interim Town Clerk.

Discussion and possible action.

Councilmember Scott Swanson moved to approve Pat Riggs as Interim Town Clerk
Second by Councilmember Fernando Fernandez

Motion approve passed (Ayes (4) Mayor Tommy Sikes, Councilmembers Fernando Fernandez, Scott Swanson, Will Sipes, Abstain (1) Vice-Mayor Chris Riggs, No (1) Mary Vinzant, absent (1) Donny Young

IV. Call to the Public

(Council requests that you express your ideas in three minutes or less and refrain from any personal attacks or derogatory statements about any individual. The Mayor will limit discussion whenever he deems such an action appropriate to the proper conduct of the meeting. At the conclusion of an open call to the public, individual members of the Council may respond to criticism, may ask staff to review a matter, or may ask that a matter be put on a future agenda. Members of the Council shall not discuss or take legal action on any matters during an open call to the public unless the matters are properly noticed for discussion and legal action.)

Andrew Yancey with the solar project advised Council he was there if questions arise on item VI (B).

Fae Sowders with solar project advised Council she was there if questions arise on item VI (B).

V. CONSENT AGENDA

(All items subject to approval by a single motion; any Councilmember may require any of these items to be voted on separately).

A. **Approval of Council Meeting Minutes:** The Mayor and Town Council may discuss and possibly take action to approve December 9, 2025, regular meeting. **Discussion and possible action**

B. **Payment of Claims:** The Mayor and Town Council may discuss and possibly take action to ratify claims in the amount of \$720,359.91 and approve claims in the amount of \$63,263.57 for the period of December

1, 2025, through December 30, 2025. **Discussion and possible action**

Vice Mayor Chris Riggs moved to approve the Consent Agenda
Second by Councilmember Fernando Fernandez

Motion to approve passed unanimously (Ayes (6) Mayor Tommy Sikes, Vice-Mayor Chris Riggs, Councilmembers Fernando Fernandez, Will Sipes, Scott Swanson and Mary Vinzant; Absent (1): Donny Young

VI. **BUSINESS-**

- A. **Legal Overview of Development Exactions and Related Land Use Tools:** The Town Attorney will provide an overview of legal considerations related to development exactions, including what the Town may and may not require as part of the development approval process, and a discussion of common tools used to address infrastructure and public facility needs, such as development agreements, stipulations, impact fees, and related mechanisms. **Discussion only.**

Town Attorney Allen Quist gave a brief presentation on exactions. Specifically, what are exactions and what are the legal limits on what the town can and cannot ask for in regard to zoning cases and other entitlement cases.

- B. **Southwest Bend (Longroad Energy) SFOZ Rezoning Case # ZON-25-001:** The Mayor and Town Council may discuss and possibly take action to approve rezoning case ZON-25-001 to adopt the Solar Field Overlay Zone on t approximately 1,380 acres generally located west of SR-85, along both side of Old U.S. Highway 80 and the Gila Bend Canal, and north and south of W. Fornes Road alignment. **Discussion and possible action**

- Staff Presentation by Sandra Hoffman, Community Planner
- Applicant Presentation by Fae Sowders
- Public Hearing
- Council Discussion and Possible Action

Community Planner Sandra Hoffman spoke to and had a PowerPoint to show the Council about Southwest Bend (Longroad Energy) SFOZ Rezoning case # ZON-25-001. It is zoning case, CON 25001, and the overall project site is 1,721 acres, but only 1,381 acres are within the town limits. The 340 acres are in unincorporated Maricopa County. It's located west of State Route 85 on both sides of the canal and north and south of West Fornes Road alignment. There's a part of the property to the north that is already solar field overlay zone approved. The surrounding zoning around that would be ag and planned community. The unincorporated Maricopa County is rural residential. There's an authority here for this project to move forward with their application to apply for a solar field overlay zone. They had two citizen review meetings because they initially filed for part of their 1,381 acres that had never gotten solar field overlay. They decided that they wanted to add back in the part that already has it because there's some language in the zoning for solar field overlays that requires construction to start with a certain time frame so this would make it abundantly clear that all of that 1,381 acres has been approved by the town council and that it will all work together and not have any questions in the future. Both citizen review meetings were published for those to come; nobody came besides the applicant and staff. We have no comments provided. Sandra mentioned they did have a couple of e-mails that were resolved by the applicant or by staff. When staff reviewed it, comparing it to the general plan, it does meet the land use policy related to supporting land uses.

Stipulations:

- 1) Access to Old Us Highway 80 and SR-85 must be reviewed and approved by ADOT and/or the regulatory agency (Maricopa County or Town of Gila Bend).

- 2) The Applicant must coordinate with ADOT to address any requirements and impacts to SR-85 right-of-way prior to site plan approval. The Applicant will also provide a before -and-after pavement assessment for Old US Highway 80 at construction access points and restore any pavement damage to its pre-construction condition to the satisfaction of the Town.
- 3) The Applicant must follow the recommendations of the Arizona Game and Fish Department.
 - a. If special status wildlife species are encountered during project activities, they will be moved out of harm's way, no more than 0.25 miles outside the project boundary within similar habitat.
 - b. The power line design and substations to be bird safe shall follow the standards established by the Avian Power Line Interaction Committee (APLIC) for new powerlines which is found here: <https://www.aplic.org/documents>.
 - c. Ensure the project complies with Arizona Native Plant Law regulations.
 - d. To minimize the potential introduction or spread of exotic invasive species, including aquatic and terrestrial plants, animals, insects, and pathogens, the Department encourages the Applicant to take precautions to wash and/or decontaminate equipment before entering and leaving the site.
 - e. Areas that are disturbed in proximity to existing washes and wildlife corridors be revegetated with native drought tolerant species that represent the natural surrounding landscape.
 - f. Public access roads currently open to the public within the project site that allow passage into adjacent public lands must remain open or be rerouted in order to maintain access to adjacent areas if feasible.
- 4) Fencing should minimize impacts to wildlife corridors currently located on the property.
- 5) The Applicant must complete a submission to the Department of Defense Siting Clearinghouse where several agencies will review the application. It must be filed through OE/AAA due to multiple military installations are users of VR242 among other civilian airspace users. If the FAA identifies a recommended lighting requirement, the Applicant must meet it if feasible.
- 6) Lighting must be designed to minimize impacts on military operations and wildlife.
- 7) Applicant will dedicate right-of-way as necessary to complete the required 55-ft. half width right-of-way adjacent to South Old US Highway 80.
- 8) Applicant will preserve existing utility and access easements on the site, or as appropriate, abandon and relocate them in coordination with the respective grantees or grantors. Easements identified for relocation or formal extinguishment will be addressed through the applicable and recording processes required by the governing authorities.
- 9) A monument commemorating the Historic Butterfield Trail will be placed in a prominent location in proximity to the location of the mapped trail that is similar in style to the signage at the Historic Gatlin Site prior to final building inspection for the project.
- 10) The Project will achieve Commencement of Development within one-year of Town Council approval of this SFOZ. An estimated Project Schedule of Construction and Commencement Milestones is included in the Southwest Bend narrative. For the purposes of the Southwest Bend SFOZ, Commencement of Development shall be defined by the development milestones identified in Table Project Schedule of Construction with Commencement Milestones of the Project Narrative dated October 2025.
- 11) In the event archaeological materials are encountered during construction, the Applicant shall immediately cease all ground-disturbing activities within a 33-foot radius of the discovery and notify the Town Planner and the Tohono O'odam Nation San Lucy Village leadership.
- 12) Building Plans must follow and meet the 2018 International Code Council (ICC) codes and the 2017 National Electric Building Codes. The Fire Code (IFC) is part of the 'I-Codes'. The project must meet State Fire Marshal as a minimum Code which is the 2018 IFC. The I-Codes encompass the IBC, IMC, IPC, IECC and IFC.

Attorney Al'en Quist addressed the Council explaining the difference between stipulations and considerations.

Councilmember Scott Swanson asked about the zoning number. As the number was 2501, did that indicate the Town only having one zoning application?

Sandra Hoffman replied that yes, the 25 represents the year and the numbers to follow represents the number of the zonings filed.

Applicant Presentation by Fae Sowders with Bergen Freaks Folly, and Oberholtzer at 4343 East Camelback Road in Phoenix, Arizona. She represents the applicant, Longroad Energy. Representatives for the rezone request also include Andrew Yancey, who is with their firm, and Steve Morgan with Longroad Development team. *Presentation of PowerPoint.* We are requesting a solar field overlay zone to cover the entire proposed area of the 1381 acres that are currently zoned to AG and PC. Almost half of that project has the underlying zoning of PC with the solar field overlay zone. This is being included just to ensure that the entire project area is under one consistent zoning framework, and it also is subject to those 12 stipulations. The requested overlay will allow the applicant to develop a solar energy facility with battery energy storage as an interim use while maintaining the underlying zoning, ensuring long-term flexibility for Gila Bend for future development. Their business model, which she expressed is important to distinguish or to note, is they own and operate their projects long term. They don't flip after construction so they will be involved long term, and they will have commitment to the current project. As Longroad does have a proven track record, their operational projects in the state produce enough electricity to power approximately half a million homes, as they have three more large-scale projects under construction at this time. The proposed site with its relation to Gila Bend's town center is located on private land in the northeastern part of Gila Bend on flat terrain near similar uses. It is remote, being over 3.75 miles approximately from the town center. It is important to note that it's surrounded by similar uses, reinforcing this area's suitability for utility-scale solar development. The center of the project and where you will find the BESS, the battery energy storage, a one-story operation and maintenance building, and the substation. Solar panels will be obviously located across the entire site. These panels are low profile, photovoltaic, and on a single axis tracking system that allows them to track the center of the day to maximize efficiency. The movement is slow and inaudible, and they're about 8 to 12 feet high at full rotation. There's also the battery energy storage component. Longroad is looking to build up to 350-megawatt solar generation capacity. The project will not add strain on water, wastewater resources, or other public facilities. We're hoping to get on the grid 2028 or later.

Vice-Mayor Chris Riggs asked Fae, is this going to be a 24 hour a day, seven day a week?

Fae Sowders replied that the operator won't be there 24 hours, but it will be remotely monitored 24 hours.

Councilmember Scott Swanson asked, when was the previous overlay done?

Fae Sowders, 2011 is when it was approved. We found that on this site, we're proposing to do this project on, 40% of it already has the SFOZ, and that's why we did the two citizen review hearings, because we said, okay, wait, we're only doing the remainder. However, we're going to have stipulations, and we're not going to use the old stipulations on the old case.

Councilmember Scott Swanson, do you already have a buyer for it?

Andrew Yancey, that is not the way the industry works, and this has kind of changed a little bit recently. The utilities make competitive requests for proposals. They send out once or twice a year RFPs where different generators of different kinds of power, gas, solar, whatever it is, they make their proposal and the utility goes through and decides whether or not to pick them.

Public Hearing: No comments

Vice Mayor Chris Riggs moved to approve the Southwest Bend rezoning case ZON-25-001 to adopt the Solar Field Overlay Zone on approximately 1,380 acres generally located west of SR-85, along both side of Old U.S. Highway 80 and the Gila Bend Canal, and north and south of W. Fornes Road alignment with the twelve (12) stipulations.

Second by Councilmember Fernando Fernandez

With no further discussion Mayor Tommy Sikes called for the vote

Motion to approve passed unanimously (Ayes (6) Mayor Tommy Sikes, Vice-Mayor Chris Riggs,

Councilmembers Fernando Fernandez, Will Sipes, Scott Scanson and Mary Vinzant; Absent (1): Donny Young

C. **Amendment No. 1 to the Intergovernmental Agreement for Library Facility Improvements:**
The Mayor and Town Council may discuss and possibly take action to approve Amendment No. 1 to the Intergovernmental Agreement between the Town of Gila Bend and the Maricopa County Library District. This amendment authorizes the Library District to reimburse the Town, up to \$200,000, for specified one-time improvements to the Gila Bend Branch Library. Discussion and possible action.

Council member Will Sipes moved to table item C.

Second by Councilmember Fernando Fernandez

Motion to table item C passed unanimously (Ayes (6) Mayor Tommy Sikes, Vice-Mayor Chris Riggs, Councilmembers Fernando Fernandez, Will Sipes, Scott Swanson and Mary Vinzant; Absent (1): Donny

Young

VII. **MCSO REPORT**

(This is the time MCSO may present a brief summary on MCSO crime statistics, data, and cases. The Council may not propose, discuss, deliberate, or take any legal action on the information presented.)

Lieutenant Miranda, Maricopa County Sheriff's Office assigned to District 2 as Watch Commander. MCSO has seen a decrease in calls since 2022. Those would include calls for service as well as calls that were called in by citizens. It was close to 4300 calls down to just below 2600 this past year. It's about 40% reduction. And a lot of that had to do with proactiveness and the deputies have taken initiative on that. The calls for service have decreased from the citizens. Assaults have decreased by more than 57% since 2022 and have remained low since then. The burglaries have nearly dropped by 50%. Crime is a lot lower than it was four years ago.

VIII. **DEPARTMENT UPDATES**

(This is the time the Town Manager and/or department heads may provide departmental updates based on written reports submitted in advance. Any such reports are included with the agenda packet and are available to the public prior to the meeting upon request. Council may ask clarifying questions limited to the content of these reports.)

Councilmember Will Sipes asked for an update on the Fire District. Town Manager Valenzuela said Mary Dalton (consultant) is moving forward.

IX. **MAYOR AND COUNCILMEMBER'S REPORT ON CURRENT EVENTS**

(This is the time Councilmember's may present a brief summary on current events. The Council may not propose, discuss, deliberate or take any legal action on the information presented.)

Councilmember Mary Vinzant attended the Santa in the Park. Saying it was wonderful, kids all seemed to be having a great time.

Vice-Mayor Chris Riggs said he saw a lot more kids this year at Santa in the Park.

Councilmember Scott Swanson asked if the event had surrounding communities attend.

Town Manager Valenzuela replied, that there were families and individuals from other communities who attended.

X. **TOWN MANAGER REPORT**

(This is the time the Town Manager may present a brief summary on current events. The Council may not propose, discuss, deliberate, or take any legal action on the information presented.)

Town Manager Katherine Valenzuela: Said to add to the comments about Santa in the Park. Town Manager Valenzuela thanked town staff for spending their holidays, (public works, parks, social services, and the recreation team) on all of the holiday events. Mayor Sikes and Town Manager Valenzuela are meeting with Ruben Reyes. He's the senior advisor to Representative Adelita Grijalva this Thursday. Adelita Grijalva is newly elected, and she wants to hear about the needs of Gila Bend. Town manager Valenzuela was contacted on Friday, 1/9/26 by Maricopa County Library District requesting this change to the IGA, which is why we moved so quickly on it in an effort to be sure we move forward and finalize the IGA and get that current so we can get the library moved into the community center. Town Manager Valenzuela mentioned the Town will resume the zoning code work sessions on 1-27-26.

XI. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

(This is the time Councilmembers may request items be placed on future agendas. Requests for future agenda items that are supported by at least 3 Councilmembers shall be added to future agendas. No discussion or voting shall occur on future agenda items.)

Councilmember Fernando Fernandez asked the Town to look into streamlining the permitting. Town Manager Valenzuela replied she will ask Willdan to give a presentation.

XII. **EXECUTIVE SESSIONS:**

(This is the time Council may hold an executive session pursuant to A.R.S. § . No action shall be taken in executive session. Executive sessions are confidential and closed to the public.)

Vice- Mayor Chris Riggs moved to approve to go into executive session 7:13p.m.

Second by Councilmember Fernando Fernandez

Motion to approve passed unanimously (Ayes (6) Mayor Tommy Sikes, Vice-Mayor Chris Riggs, Councilmembers Fernando Fernandez, Will Sipes, Scott Swanson and Mary Vinzant; Absent (1): Donny Young

- A. **Real Estate Transaction:** The Mayor and Town Council may convene into executive session pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(3) and (7) for discussion and/or consultation for legal advice concerning potential real property transaction. **Discussion only**
- B. **Donation of Land:** The Mayor and Town Council may convene into executive session pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(3) and (7) for discussion and/or consultation for legal advice concerning potential donation of land. **Discussion only**
- C. **Aluminum Dynamics Lawsuit:** The Mayor and Town Council may convene into executive session pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(3) and (4) for discussion and/or consultation for legal advice concerning the Aluminum Dynamics, Inc lawsuits. **Discussion only**

Vice Mayor Chris Riggs moved to reconvene the meeting at 7:53p.m.

Second by Councilmember Fernando Fernandez

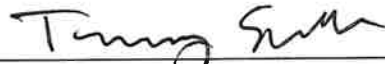
Motion to approve passed unanimously (Ayes (6) Mayor Tommy Sikes, Vice-Mayor Chris Riggs, Councilmembers Fernando Fernandez, Will Sipes, Scott Swanson and Mary Vinzant; Absent (1): Donny Young

ADJOURNMENT

Vice Mayor Chris Riggs moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:54p.m.


Second by Councilmember Fernando Fernandez

Motion to approve passed unanimously (Ayes (6) Mayor Tommy Sikes, Vice-Mayor Chris Riggs, Councilmembers Fernando Fernandez, Will Sipes, Scott Swanson and Mary Vinzant; Absent (1): Donny Young




Tommy Sikes, Mayor

ATTEST:



Patricia Riggs, Interim Town Clerk**CERTIFICATION:**

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the Council meeting held on January 13, 2026, and that the meeting was duly called and posted and that a quorum was present.



Patricia Riggs, Interim Town Clerk