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## Housing development will have ground-mounted solar system

Phoenix Business Journal - by [Patrick O'Grady](#)

Two Valley firms are planning what may be the first Arizona residential development to feature a ground-mounted solar system feeding power to all of the homes.

Scottsdale engineering firm **Triage Corp.** and **Cochise County Land** LLC in Mesa are working on the 1,300-acre Ranch at Tombstone development between Tombstone and Bisbee, in the state's southeastern reaches. A large solar garden will provide power to the homes and help run the community association's facilities.

Triage is providing the solar engineering, and Cochise County Land is the developer. The two companies believe it is the first such development proposed in the state, allowing the cooperative placement of solar panels serving a variety of residences, said Robert Orsello, CEO and principal engineer of Triage.



The plan is to make it easier for homeowners to install solar panels, but keep the equipment off the rooftops. Orsello said he also hopes homeowners will take advantage of a program that would make the community association responsible for the care and maintenance of the power generators.

"The powers that be make (installing solar) just inconvenient enough that people don't want to do it," he said. "I wanted to make it easier."

The project would set aside 4 to 6 acres for the solar garden, where homeowners could install solar systems that would tie in with Sulfur Springs Valley Electric Co-op power lines at a central point and distribute power to the homes or into the electric grid, Orsello said.

Alan Thome, manager of Cochise County Land, said the project began as a way to set up a water district and feed money to the community association. To develop the property, a water district had to be created. Thome said using solar energy to power the pumping equipment was seen as a way to keep costs low by eliminating the need for the water company to use an outside power source.

Once established, the community association would own the water district. Instead of collecting association fees from homeowners, it would use the utility bills to cover the costs of equipment maintenance and take whatever remained as its fees. Because the power — one of the highest costs of running a water utility — would be covered by solar, Thome said he expects the bulk of the utility bill to help the association. And, since maintenance costs would be low, the money could be used to improve amenities, Thome said.

"If you're going to develop a piece of real estate, you have to take into account how these people are going to work it in the future," he said.

The solar garden would be separate from the community association, but the association would take care of cleaning and maintenance of the panels. Each homeowner could install up to a 10-kilowatt array of panels in the garden. Having the panels on the ground instead of on rooftops also will make it easier to maintain and clean them, thus keeping them at high efficiency, Orsello said.

Having the panels in a central location offers several other benefits, including tying in with the local utility and making sure homeowners still have control over the power they receive from the units. The garden will be equipped with meters so each home will use the power produced by its owner's panels, and any remaining power will go into the grid, Thome said.

"We're trying to maximize the efficiency as well as think of the aesthetics of not having panels on the roof," he said.

While there are solar communities in Arizona, they typically have the panels mounted on the rooftops and don't equate to a ground-mounted mini-power plant, said Steven Gotfried, a spokesman for Arizona Public Service Co.

Homeowners placing panels in the solar farm will be eligible for any utility and tax incentives for installing the systems, Orsello said.

The development is in the planning stages within the Cochise County Planning Department, which did not return calls by press time. The first tentative plat has been approved for 115 lots, primarily an acre or more each, and the developer is looking for home builders, Thome said.