

PRE-FILED DIRECT TESTIMONY OF
KARA PRICE
ON BEHALF OF SWEETLEAF SOLAR LLC
NCUC DOCKET NO. EMP-111, SUB 0

INTRODUCTION

Q. PLEASE STATE YOUR NAME, TITLE, AND BUSINESS ADDRESS.

A. My name is Kara Price. I am senior vice president of permitting and development for Geenex Solar, LLC (“Geenex Solar”) based in Charlotte, North Carolina. The company’s address is 1930 Abbott Street, Suite 402, Charlotte, NC 28203.

Q. PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE.

A. I have more than eight (8) years of experience in the solar development industry. I have been personally involved in the development and permitting of more than 1,000 MW of solar projects in the southeastern United States. I have been employed with Geenex Solar for three and a half years and have been actively engaged in the oversight of permitting and project development of Geenex Solar-initiated projects since August 2016. Prior to joining the solar industry, the majority of my career was spent in business development and project management. I earned a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Q. PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE APPLICANT IN THIS DOCKET AND YOUR EMPLOYMENT RESPONSIBILITIES.

A. Geenex Solar is the owner and developer of Sweetleaf Solar LLC (“Sweetleaf Solar” or “Applicant”) for the Sweetleaf Solar Project (hereinafter, the “Project” or “Sweetleaf Solar Project”). Sweetleaf Solar LLC is a North Carolina limited liability company. As the owner and developer, Geenex Solar is currently responsible for all stages of development for the project including site identification, land acquisition, environmental reviews, local land use permitting,

1 and state permitting. In my current role for Geenex Solar and Sweetleaf Solar, I manage the due
2 diligence process to ensure that Sweetleaf Solar adheres to all regulations and obtains all permits
3 necessary for solar facility development construction and operation.

4 My current responsibilities in my role at Geenex Solar include obtaining all local land use
5 permits for utility-scale solar projects. This oversight includes understanding all zoning and
6 comprehensive plan guidelines for each jurisdiction, submitting permit applications and all
7 required studies/documentation, coordinating expert witnesses, engaging with local officials and
8 the community, and managing legal processes relating to permit approval. These responsibilities
9 listed here are my primary focus in directing development activity for the Sweetleaf Solar Project.

10 Geenex Solar develops high-quality solar projects ultimately for sale to its partners and
11 investors. Geenex Solar is skilled in all aspects of a solar project's development including site
12 evaluation, real estate procurement, facility and interconnection engineering, environmental
13 analysis, power purchase agreements, as well as federal, state, and local permitting processes.

14 **Q. HAVE YOU PREVIOUSLY TESTIFIED BEFORE THIS COMMISSION?**

15 A. I have previously offered testimony before the North Carolina Utilities Commission
16 on behalf of Fern Solar LLC in its application for a Certificate of Public Convenience and
17 Necessity in NCUC Docket No. EMP-104 Sub 0; and on behalf of Sumac Solar LLC in its
18 application for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity in NCUC Docket No. EMP-110
19 Sub 0.

20 **Q. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR TESTIMONY?**

21 A. The purpose of my testimony is to support the Application for a Certificate of
22 Public Convenience and Necessity for a Merchant Plant ("Application") filed by Sweetleaf Solar
23 in this docket and provide the Commission with background information about Geenex Solar, as

1 well as the Sweetleaf Solar Project and its development process. The information I am providing
2 will serve to expand on topics in Sweetleaf Solar’s application, including the regulatory and
3 permitting process for the Project, community engagement related to the Project, and its current
4 permitting status.

5 **Q. WERE YOU INVOLVED IN THE PREPARATION OF SWEETLEAF**
6 **SOLAR’S CPCN APPLICATION?**

7 A. Yes. I collaborated in preparing the Application on behalf of Sweetleaf, both by
8 providing information from my personal knowledge and also by gathering information from other
9 members of the Geenex team. I am familiar with the contents of the application, which are hereby
10 incorporated by reference.

11 **COMPANY BACKGROUND AND PROJECT FINANCE**

12 **Q. PLEASE DESCRIBE THE COMPANY’S TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE**
13 **AND FINANCIAL CAPABILITIES TO OWN AND OPERATE THE PROJECT.**

14 A. As described in the application, Geenex Solar is a Delaware Limited Liability
15 Company formed on July 18, 2013, with its principal place of business in Charlotte, North
16 Carolina. Sweetleaf Solar LLC was formed on August 1, 2015, as a North Carolina limited liability
17 company. Sweetleaf Solar and Geenex Solar are wholly-owned subsidiaries of the same parent
18 company, Geenex Holding LLC (“Geenex Holding”). More information about Geenex’s
19 corporate history, business model, financial capabilities, and expertise in the development of solar
20 projects, as well as a list of Geenex-developed projects, are set forth in **Exhibit 1, Items (ii) and**
21 **(iii)** to the Application, which are hereby incorporated by reference.

22 **Q. HOW WILL THE PROJECT BE FINANCED?**

1 Heritage Group on December 20, 2019; (2) a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment report
2 completed in March 25, 2019.

3 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND BENEFITS**

4 **Q. PLEASE DESCRIBE THE ANTICIPATED BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT**
5 **TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY.**

6 A. In addition to satisfying in part the growing demand for renewable energy, Geenex
7 Solar also anticipates bringing economic benefits to Halifax County. While the operation of the
8 Facility will allow many of the landowners to live and farm nearby, the landowners will gain
9 income that will allow them to continue agricultural activities on their remaining properties.

10 Sweetleaf Solar also expects to generate a significant amount of property taxes for Halifax
11 County. First, by leasing land, with purchase options to acquire the site on which the Facility is
12 located, Sweetleaf Solar estimates approximately \$2,019,060 of real property tax revenue over the
13 thirty-five (35) year project life for Halifax County.¹ “Rollback taxes,” or the amount owed for
14 three year agriculture deferral, will amount to approximately \$17, 306, and business property taxes
15 are estimated to reach \$3,561,622 over the life of the project. Totaling these property taxes, the
16 estimated property tax revenue resulting from the project is \$5,597,988.

17 The Project also will bring employment opportunity and development for the local Halifax
18 County workforce. The Applicant anticipates that the proposed Project will require the hiring of
19 150 to 200 local positions during construction, consistent with similar projects of this type and
20 size. Construction materials will need to be purchased, delivered, and installed during construction
21 as well. In addition to local hires, there will be a demand for locally-sourced contractors during
22 construction (fencing, landscaping, etc.) and during facility operation (landscaping,

¹ Assumed value after solar of \$8,000 per acre.

1 groundskeepers, maintenance, etc.). Contractors and employees traveling from outside Halifax
2 County to assist with the Project will require the services of local accommodation providers and
3 local restaurants/grocery stores. For a project of this size, the cumulative spending in the area
4 from the development and construction process is estimated to be between \$100 million and \$120
5 million.

6 The proposed Project will not meaningfully increase demand for County services. It will
7 have no adverse impact on schools, law enforcement, or fire and rescue. Construction of the
8 Project will not necessitate any new or expanded public infrastructure and/or improvements. Once
9 operational, the Project will not substantially change the character of the area.

10 Lastly, the Project's site control arrangements allow landowners involved in the Project to
11 keep their land under family control while ensuring them a long-term and stable income source
12 through long-term solar lease agreements. Many of our landowners will use this income to
13 continue agricultural operations on other land in the area.

14 **Q. WHAT ARE THE EXPECTED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE**
15 **FACILITY?**

16 A. By design and by its nature as a solar PV facility, the Facility will provide clean
17 renewable power with minimal environmental impacts. The Facility will create no air or water
18 emissions or other environmental contamination, nor will it create any noise impacts outside the
19 fence line. Minimal reflectivity or glare will be created, as the panels are designed to absorb as
20 much sunlight as possible. At the end of the Facility's useful life, materials can be recycled or
21 sold for scrap, and the land can be returned to agricultural use, in accordance with the
22 Decommissioning Plan discussed previously.

1 **Q. HOW HAVE THE APPLICANTS ENGAGED THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**
2 **IN RELATION TO THE PROJECT?**

3 A. Sweetleaf Solar and its developer Geenex Solar have been actively engaged with
4 county officials and the community regarding the development of this project in Halifax County,
5 since 2018. In addition, Geenex Solar has been developing solar facilities in Halifax County since
6 2012 and currently has seven (7) other solar facilities in various stages of operation, construction,
7 or development in the County. Sweetleaf Solar has met with the County Manager, various County
8 Commissioners, and the County Economic Development Director to discuss the Project and its
9 benefits to the Halifax County community. Sweetleaf Solar held a project-specific community
10 information meeting at the Smith Chapel Baptist Church in Enfield on July 25, 2019. Neighboring
11 landowners within 300 feet of the Project's boundary were notified by mail about this event.
12 Development professionals associated with the Project, along with industry experts, were on hand
13 to answer questions and review Project details. The Center for Energy Education was also on hand
14 to discuss its renewable energy programs.

15 Attendees at the meeting included local officials, church parishioners, and approximately
16 20 neighboring landowners. After the meeting and up until local permit approval, Project
17 representatives continued to engage with neighboring landowners one-on-one to address their
18 particular concerns and offer additional vegetative screening or setbacks where appropriate.

19 Sweetleaf Solar submitted an application for a conditional use permit under the guidelines
20 of the Halifax County Solar Energy Systems Ordinance in July 2019. The County Board of
21 Adjustment held a public hearing on the Project on August 13, 2019 and subsequently voted
22 unanimously to approve the Project's permit.

1 Sweetleaf Solar has also financially supported several key community programs in the area
2 of the Project, including the Enfield Economic Development & Revitalization Commission, the
3 Halifax Community College Foundation, and the Halifax County Schools' Green Farms project.

4 Due to its location in the heart of Halifax County, the Center for Energy Education (the
5 "Center") has provided a wealth of opportunities for the community's citizens, students, and
6 teachers to become engaged with and be a part of the solar industry and projects such as Sweetleaf
7 Solar. The Center has hosted hundreds of Halifax County students on educational field trips. In
8 addition, numerous Halifax County teachers have participated in training and received materials
9 to help teach their students about renewable energy. Sweetleaf Solar sponsored a learning event
10 at the Center that was specifically designed for the area's senior citizens to learn about renewable
11 energy. The Center will continue to engage with the community in the coming years through
12 programs such as these that are financially supported by projects such as Sweetleaf Solar.

13 Q. **DOES THIS CONCLUDE YOUR TESTIMONY?**

14 A. Yes.