

PRE-FILED DIRECT TESTIMONY OF
KARA PRICE
ON BEHALF OF FERN SOLAR LLC
NCUC DOCKET NO. EMP-104, SUB 0

OFFICIAL COPY

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INTRODUCTION

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

A. My name is Kara Price. I am Director of Project Development for Geenex Solar LLC, a Delaware limited liability company (“Geenex”), a solar energy development company based in Charlotte, North Carolina. My business address is 1910 Abbott Street, Suite 200, Charlotte, North Carolina, 28203.

Q. PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE.

A. I have more than eight years’ experience in the solar development industry. I have been personally involved in the development and permitting of more than 455 megawatts (“MW”) of solar projects in the southeastern United States. I have served in my current role as director of project development with Geenex Solar since 2016. Prior to joining the solar industry, the majority of my career was spent in marketing and project management. I earned a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill.

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

A. Geenex is the development partner of BayWa r.e. Development, LLC (“BayWa”), for the Fern Solar LLC project (“Fern” or the “Applicant”). Fern Solar LLC is a North Carolina limited liability company. As development partner, Geenex is responsible for the initial stages of development for the project including site identification, land acquisition, initial environmental reviews, and local land use permitting. In my current role for Geenex and BayWa, I manage the due diligence process to ensure that Fern Solar LLC has adhered to all regulations and obtained all permits necessary for solar facility construction and operation.

Q. HAVE YOUR PREVIOUSLY TESTIFIED BEFORE THIS COMMISSION?

A. No.

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

25 A. The purpose of my testimony is to provide the Commission with a project development
26 overview about the proposed Fern Solar LLC solar power generating project in Edgecombe County, North
27 Carolina (the “Project” or the “Facility”). My project overview will address particulars about the Project’s
28 site, including its use, location, site control, and regulatory approvals, and permitting. Another purpose of
29 my testimony is to describe to the Commission the anticipated community benefits of the Project and the
30 level of community engagement that Fern has undertaken at the current stage of its development.

31 **SITE AND FACILITY**

32 **Q. PLEASE DESCRIBE THE LOCATION OF THE PROJECT, AS WELL AS**
33 **CURRENT LAND USE AND ANTICIPATED USE.**

34 A. The Project will be located on approximately 1,235 acres of privately-owned land in
35 Edgecombe County, North Carolina, in the location shown on the colored site plan map attached as
36 Schedule 6 of the Application (the “Site”). The Site is composed of rural land that is primarily used for
37 agricultural activities. Fern has entered into ground leases for the solar array area of the Site and a lease
38 with a purchase option for the portion of the Site on which the substation will be constructed. Most of the
39 landowners will continue to farm and live in proximity to the site. The leases provide Fern the right to
40 develop and use the property for solar energy purposes, including the installation of solar panels, inverters,
41 transformers and other elements of the Facility described in the Application and my testimony.

42 Approximately 961 acres of the Site will be fenced, and the Site will primarily be separated from
43 roadways and dwellings on adjacent properties by agricultural land with ongoing farm operations and
44 natural vegetative buffers. The Fern Site plan has been developed in consultation with neighboring
45 landowners, and has been revised several times to address landowner concerns regarding such issues as
46 sightlines and visual impacts. As seen from the Site Plan filed with the Fern application, these revisions
47 have resulted in the proposed facility being spread out over several adjacent properties, rather than sited on
48 a single contiguous parcel of land.

REGULATORY APPROVALS AND PERMITS

Q. DESCRIBE THE PERMITS AND APPROVALS YOU ANTICIPATE WILL BE NECESSARY TO COMMENCE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FACILITY.

A. Fern requires a Special Use Permit (“SUP”) to satisfy Edgecombe County zoning requirements. The Edgecombe County Board of Commissioners, which has final authority to approve the Fern SUP, unanimously voted to approve the SUP at a public hearing held on September 4, 2018. A final Order approving the SUP is attached to the Application as Schedule 7 to the Application. In addition to the SUP, Fern has submitted an application for a stormwater permit to Edgecombe County. The county has confirmed that the Facility has satisfied all of the requirements for a stormwater permit application. Fern will also require a Building Permit and Electrical Permit from Edgecombe County.

From the State, the Facility will require (a) a driveway permit from the North Carolina Department of Transportation, and (b) approval of an erosion and sedimentation control plan from the Department of Environmental Quality. The Facility will also be registered as a Generator-Owner with NERC.

With respect to federal approvals, the facility may apply for Market-Based Rate Authorization from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (“FERC”), pursuant to Sections 205 and 206 of the Federal Power Act, and may seek to self-certify with FERC as an Exempt Wholesale Generator pursuant to the Public Utility Holding Company Act of 2005. The Facility may need a wetlands permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the “Corps”). Fern has submitted a wetlands study to the Corps, no jurisdictional determination has been made by the Corps at this time.

Q. DOES EDGECOMBE COUNTY HAVE A SOLAR ENERGY ORDINANCE?

A. Yes, Edgecombe County established a Solar Energy Development Ordinance (“SEDO”), adopted December 1, 2014 and amended March 2, 2015.¹ The Ordinance requires a permit for solar energy facilities proposed in Edgecombe County based on the size of the facility and the facility’s zoning district.

¹ The SEDO is available online at <http://www.edgecombecountync.gov/Departments/Planning,%20Inspections%20&%20E-911/SOLAR%20ENERGY%20SYSTEMS%20%20ORDINANCE-AMENDED.pdf>.

72 Depending on the size of the facility, the ordinance requires certain setbacks, vegetative buffers, height
73 limitations, aviation notification, site plan specifications, and a decommissioning plan for the removal of
74 equipment and return of the property to its prior condition upon the end of the facility's production.

75 As required by the SEDO, the Project Site is buffered from view from most roadways by natural
76 vegetative buffering and continuing farm operations, and significant setbacks and buffering consideration
77 has been given to neighboring landowners. The decommissioning plan, which was submitted and signed
78 by all landowners of the Site, is attached as Exhibit A to this prefiled testimony. The decommissioning
79 plan provides that at the end of the Facility's useful life, the Site will be stabilized and restored in such a
80 manner to ensure it is clean, safe, and environmentally stable. Environmentally conscious practices are
81 developing so that solar photovoltaic ("PV") panels can be collected and recycled at the end of their useful
82 life rather than deposited in a landfill.² The site plan and SUP application for the Facility were prepared in
83 order to satisfy all applicable requirements as defined in the Edgecombe County SEDO. The SEDO also
84 requires a stormwater permit and a Special Use Permit as previously mentioned in my Testimony and in
85 the Application.

86 **COMMUNITY**

87 **Q. PLEASE DESCRIBE THE ANTICIPATED BENEFITS TO THE LOCAL**
88 **COMMUNITY.**

89 A. As mentioned in the Application, Fern will bring a variety of financial benefits to
90 Edgecombe County. Fern anticipates that Edgecombe County will realize property tax revenues of an
91 additional \$93,672 annually from the Facility. Rollback taxes on the 961 acres taken out of agricultural use
92 will equate to another \$32,163. Assuming system construction costs of approximately \$100,000,000, and
93 factoring in North Carolina's 80% property tax abatement on commercial solar systems under G.S. § 105-
94 275, the facility will also pay approximately \$210,000 in taxes on the system itself in its first year of

² NC Clean Energy Technology Center, "Health and Safety Impacts of Solar Photovoltaics" (May 2017), available at https://nccleantech.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Health-and-Safety-Impacts-of-Solar-Photovoltaics-2017_white-paper.pdf.

operation. The Site's landowners will receive revenue in the form of lease payments each year for the life of the Facility, and this revenue will assist them in maintaining agricultural operations on their land.

Aside from the financial benefits, Fern will also create community benefits. Fern will enhance Edgecombe County's reputation as an attractive and friendly environment for advanced manufacturing, technology and related jobs. Local contractors and businesses such as installation, fencing, landscaping, and machine rental companies will receive sales opportunities from the Facility construction and operations. During the approximately year-long construction process, the Facility will offer full-time construction jobs. Fern expects to hire approximately 175 local workers for the duration of the construction phase. Fern anticipates offering permanent, full-time job opportunities in landscaping and grounds-keeping and site operations and maintenance. Increased economic activity in the area is also expected to increase revenue for local hotels, restaurants, service stores and other vendors.

Lastly, through Geenex, Fern is planning educational and local workforce development programs through the Center For Energy Education (the "Center") by partnering with Edgecombe Community College and other area organizations. The Center also offers energy education workshops with free classroom materials and tools for local science teachers to use in their classrooms. The Center plans to continue these offerings and to host summer camp programs and field trips for area students focused on renewable energy education.

Q. WHAT ARE THE EXPECTED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE FACILITY?

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

Q. DOES THIS CONCLUDE YOUR TESTIMONY?

121 A. Yes.