

PRE-FILED DIRECT TESTIMONY OF  
KARA PRICE  
ON BEHALF OF MACADAMIA SOLAR LLC  
NCUC DOCKET NO. EMP-119, SUB 0

OFFICIAL COPY

Aug 31 2021

**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 ten (10) years of experience in the solar development industry. I have been personally involved in the development and permitting of more than 3,500 MW of solar projects in the southeastern United States. I have been employed with Geenex Solar for five 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 Macadamia Solar LLC (“Macadamia Solar” or “Applicant”) for the Macadamia Solar Facility (hereinafter, the

1 “Facility” or “Macadamia Solar Facility”). Macadamia Solar LLC is a North Carolina  
2 limited liability company. As the owner and developer, Geenex Solar is currently  
3 responsible for certain stages of development for the project including site identification,  
4 land acquisition, environmental reviews, local land use permitting, and state permitting. In  
5 my current role for Geenex Solar and Macadamia Solar, I manage the due diligence process  
6 to ensure that Macadamia Solar adheres to all regulations and obtains all permits necessary  
7 for solar facility development construction and operation.

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

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

20 **Q. HAVE YOU PREVIOUSLY TESTIFIED BEFORE THIS**  
21 **COMMISSION?**

22 A. I have previously offered testimony before the North Carolina Utilities  
23 Commission on behalf of Fern Solar LLC in its application for a Certificate of Public

1 Convenience and Necessity in NCUC Docket No. EMP-104 Sub 0; on behalf of Sumac  
2 Solar LLC in its application for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity in  
3 NCUC Docket No. EMP-110 Sub 0; and on behalf of Sweetleaf Solar LLC in its  
4 application for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity in NCUC Docket No.  
5 EMP-111 Sub 0.

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

7 A. The purpose of my testimony is to support the Application for a Certificate  
8 of Public Convenience and Necessity for a Merchant Plant (“Application”) filed by  
9 Macadamia Solar in this docket and provide the Commission with background information  
10 about Geenex Solar, as well as the Macadamia Solar Project and its development process.  
11 The information I am providing will serve to expand on topics in Macadamia Solar’s  
12 application, including the regulatory and permitting process for the Project, community  
13 engagement related to the Project, and its current permitting status. ’

14 **Q. WERE YOU INVOLVED IN THE PREPARATION OF**  
15 **MACADAMIA SOLAR’S CPCN APPLICATION?**

16 A. Yes. I collaborated in preparing the Application on behalf of Macadamia  
17 Solar, both by providing information from my personal knowledge and also by gathering  
18 information from other members of the Geenex team. I am familiar with the contents of  
19 the application, which are hereby incorporated by reference.

20 **COMPANY BACKGROUND AND PROJECT FINANCE**

21 **Q. PLEASE DESCRIBE THE COMPANY’S TECHNICAL**  
22 **EXPERIENCE AND FINANCIAL CAPABILITIES TO OWN AND OPERATE**  
23 **THE PROJECT.**

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

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

11           A.     The development of the Facility is funded through readily available funds  
12           and a credit facility provided by a specialty lender. During the CPCN approval process,  
13           and prior to the purchasing of major equipment and commencing construction, Geenex  
14           Solar expects to complete the sale of Macadamia Solar LLC to EDF Renewables  
15           Development, Inc. (USA) (“EDF”) in accordance with an option agreement. EDF proposes  
16           to construct, own and operated the Macadamia Solar site as it is described herein. EDF is  
17           a direct subsidiary of EDF Renewables, Inc. Both EDF and EDF Renewables, Inc. are  
18           subsidiaries of EDF Renouvelables S.A., itself a 99.99%-owned indirect subsidiary of  
19           Electricite de France S.A. (France) (“EDF S.A.”)<sup>1</sup> a societe anonyme (a form of  
20           corporation analogous to joint stock company) registered in France and governed by  
21           French law. EDF builds projects on-balance sheet, some of which have capital costs

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<sup>1</sup> EDF Renouvelables S.A. has 0.01% of its shares either owned by employees or consisting of treasury shares in the aggregate.



1 exceeding \$500 million. Successful construction of EDF projects is not contingent on third  
2 party capital. Alternatively, Geenex Solar with a partner will obtain a short-term  
3 construction loan from a third-party lender, likely a commercial bank. During construction,  
4 Geenex Solar will work with our chosen partner to raise tax equity, additional cash equity,  
5 and long-term debt. The short-term construction loan will be replaced when the project  
6 goes operational with proceeds from long-term debt and tax equity.

7 **SITE AND FACILITY DESCRIPTION**

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

10 A. The Facility will be sited on approximately 4,813 fenced acres of privately-  
11 owned land located generally on and around Highway 32 and Highway 99 outside of  
12 Plymouth in Washington County, North Carolina. The site is largely rural and agricultural  
13 in nature and many of the landowners will continue to farm and live-in proximity to the  
14 site. The Facility's remote location will allow it to be shielded from roadway views and  
15 neighboring landowners through the use of generous setbacks, natural buffers and added  
16 vegetative screening, in compliance with the Washington County's Solar Energy  
17 Development Ordinance ("SEDO").

18 Macadamia Solar has executed six (6) lease or purchase options for the solar array  
19 area of the site. These land control agreements give Macadamia Solar the right to develop  
20 and use the property for solar energy purposes, including the installation of solar racking,  
21 solar panels, inverters, transformers, and the other elements of the Facility described in the  
22 application and my testimony.

1           **Q.    WHAT IS THE CONSTRUCTION TIMELINE FOR THE**  
2 **FACILITY?**

3           A.    As discussed in the Application **Exhibit 2, Item (i)**, Construction for the  
4 Facility is expected to proceed to begin construction in the 4th quarter of 2023 with an  
5 estimated date of commercial operation date in the 4th quarter of 2025.

6                           **REGULATORY APPROVALS AND PERMITS**

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

10          A.    Macadamia Solar proposes to develop, install, and operate a utility-scale  
11 solar photovoltaic solar energy Facility in Washington County in a manner consistent with  
12 local zoning ordinance and in accordance with all federal, state, and local regulations.  
13 Macadamia Solar will meet and most often exceed all local and state zoning standards.  
14 The Facility will use proven technology which has been used throughout the U.S. The  
15 design, installation and operations of the facility will comply with all applicable local, state,  
16 and national electrical standards and codes to ensure the safety and protection of local  
17 residents.

18          Macadamia Solar will require a special use permit (“SUP”), a building permit, and  
19 an electrical permit from Washington County. From the state, the Facility will require a  
20 certificate of public convenience and necessity for an electric merchant plant; stormwater  
21 management permit from the Department of Environmental Quality; an erosion and  
22 sedimentation control plan permit for construction-related activities and N.C. Department  
23 of Transportation driveway permits. Also, the Facility received final wetlands

1 determination and may need a possible permit from the Army Corps of Engineers if the  
2 design changes.

3 Macadamia Solar's local SUP application confirmed the Facility's adherence to all  
4 applicable zoning district requirements, parcel line and equipment setbacks, height  
5 limitations and vegetative buffering as defined by the Washington County's SEDO.  
6 Aviation notification and glare study requirements have been followed. In addition, a  
7 detailed draft decommissioning plan was submitted that sets forth process and timeline for  
8 decommissioning of the site at the end of the project's useful life. The draft  
9 decommissioning plan will be updated and submitted to Washington County while  
10 obtaining the construction permit. As required by Washington County's SEDO, the  
11 decommissioning plan is guaranteed by financial security in a form acceptable to the  
12 County, and final reporting at the conclusion of decommissioning is required before any  
13 guarantee is released.

14 As mandated by Washington County's SEDO, Macadamia Solar obtained its SUP  
15 approval on April 1, 2019 by a unanimous vote of the Washington County Planning Board.  
16 The official documentation of this SUP approval was provided by Washington County on  
17 April 3, 2019 and has been extended through June 7, 2022.

18 A list of the federal, state, and local approvals that will be required for the project,  
19 and the status of such approvals, is included in **Exhibit 2, Item (v)** of the Application,  
20 which is hereby incorporated by reference.

21 **Q. HAS THE APPLICANT CONDUCTED ANY STUDIES OF THE**  
22 **PROJECT SITE?**

1           A.     Yes. The Applicant and its consultants have conducted several assessments  
2 of the site to ensure that development plans comply with all federal, state, and local  
3 requirements. These include: (1) Aviation Glare Study and Analysis by Harris Miller,  
4 Miller & Hanson Inc. (HMMH) on December 14, 2018; (2) a Phase I Cultural Assessment  
5 on August 30, 2018 and (3) a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment report completed in  
6 August 30, 2018 and February 19, 2019; and (4) Wetlands Delineations on June 7, 2018  
7 and February 15, 2019.

8                               **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND BENEFITS**

9           **Q.     PLEASE DESCRIBE THE ANTICIPATED BENEFITS OF THE**  
10 **PROJECT TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY.**

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

16           Macadamia Solar also expects to generate a significant amount of property taxes  
17 for Washington County. First, by leasing land, with purchase options to acquire the site on  
18 which the Facility is located, Macadamia Solar estimates approximately \$9,269,568 of real  
19 property tax revenue over the thirty-five (35) year project life for Washington County.<sup>2</sup>  
20 “Rollback taxes,” or the amount owed for three-year agriculture deferral, will amount to  
21 approximately \$115,008, and business property taxes are estimated to reach \$14,534,683

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<sup>2</sup> Assumed value after solar of \$8,000 per acre.



1 over the life of the project. Totaling these property taxes, the estimated property tax revenue  
2 resulting from the Facility is \$23,919,259.

3 Macadamia Solar also will bring employment opportunity and development for the  
4 local Washington County workforce. The Applicant anticipates that the proposed Facility  
5 will require the hiring of 175 to 225 local positions during construction, consistent with  
6 similar projects of this type and size. Construction materials will need to be purchased,  
7 delivered, and installed during construction as well. In addition to local hires, there will  
8 be a demand for locally-sourced contractors during construction (fencing, landscaping,  
9 etc.) and during facility operation (landscaping, groundskeepers, maintenance etc.).  
10 Contractors and employees traveling from outside Washington County to assist with the  
11 Facility will require the services of local accommodation providers and local  
12 restaurants/grocery stores. For a project of this size, the cumulative spending in the area  
13 from the development and construction process (beyond the direct costs associated with  
14 project development and construction) is estimated to be between \$1 million and \$2  
15 million.

16 The location of Macadamia Solar in Washington County will also bring additional  
17 community engagement and support opportunities such as educational and workforce-  
18 development programs offered by the Center of Energy Education (“C4EE”). Washington  
19 County teachers and student have participated in a variety of the C4EE’s programs and  
20 field trips over the past four years of 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021. The developers of  
21 Macadamia Solar also anticipate the value of funds and programs provided for specific  
22 community needs to be in the \$350,000 range.

1           The location of solar energy facilities within Washington County will allow County  
2 officials to promote their “green energy” for business opportunities. Many data and  
3 distribution centers, due to their high energy demands and renewable energy mandates,  
4 specifically look for communities that support renewable energy for the new or expanding  
5 facilities.

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

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

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

17           A.     By design and by its nature as a solar PV facility, the Facility will provide  
18 clean renewable power with minimal environmental impacts. The Facility will create no  
19 air or water emissions or other environmental contamination, nor will it create any noise  
20 impacts outside the fence line. Minimal reflectivity or glare will be created, as the panels  
21 are designed to absorb as much sunlight as possible. Solar facilities are a passive land use.  
22 The way a solar facility is designed and constructed makes it one of the only types of  
23 development where they land can be returned to its former agricultural use after its life as

1 a solar facility. At the end of the Facility’s useful life, materials can be recycled or sold  
2 for scrap, and the land can be returned to its former use in accordance with the  
3 Decommissioning Plan discussed previously.

4 Another unique feature of the Facility are the drainage canals on the site, that as  
5 jurisdictional wetland features, we will be required to maintain and setback from as riparian  
6 buffers. The upland buffers, in addition to the canals, will provide wide and safe corridors  
7 for local wildlife to continue to traverse the site.

8 **Q. HOW HAVE THE APPLICANTS ENGAGED THE LOCAL**  
9 **COMMUNITY IN RELATION TO THE PROJECT?**

10 A. Geenex Solar, EDF, and C4EE, on behalf of Macadamia Solar, LLC, have  
11 been actively engaged in the Washington County community since early 2018. Geenex  
12 and the C4EE invited then Washington County Planning Director Ann Keyes, and  
13 Washington County staff and officials, to join us at a “Utility-Scale Solar Workshop for  
14 Public Staff/Officials” held at the C4EE on February 8, 2018. Ann Keyes, along with the  
15 County’s Tax Administrator and the Chairman of the County Commissioners, attended this  
16 day-long event that included presentations from various industry experts and a local solar  
17 farm tour.

18 Geenex Solar also coordinated and conducted a solar workshop at the Vernon G.  
19 James Agricultural Research Center in Plymouth, NC on April 10, 2018. More than 50  
20 local decision-makers and influencers attended this event where they learned about utility-  
21 scale solar technology and its health and safety aspects; they were informed how a solar  
22 project is developed and permitted, and they learned about the benefits of solar to local  
23 citizens and communities.

1           On February 5, 2019, Geenex Solar and EDF held a community information event  
2 regarding the Macadamia Solar Facility. Approximately 50 landowners, whose property  
3 was within 300 feet of Macadamia Solar’s project parcels, were invited to attend an open  
4 house at Union Chapel Free Will Baptist Church (itself a bordering landowner). At this  
5 event, details on the project’s location and scope were shared with neighboring landowners  
6 and church members. Solar development experts and engineers were on hand to address  
7 questions relating to the project’s impact.

8           Some nearby landowners had questions regarding setbacks and screening. By  
9 utilizing large-scale site plans for review, we were able to share minimum distances of  
10 neighbors from the security fence and solar equipment. In addition, a few landowners  
11 expressed concerns regarding drainage from the site, and in particular whether the Project  
12 would have any impact on existing drainage canals located on the site. As discussed above,  
13 the site plan includes significant buffers around these canals to ensure that there is minimal  
14 impact. Furthermore, future construction plans, processes and permitting will ensure the  
15 Facility addresses stormwater and erosion control as well as the protection of any  
16 Federally-designated wetlands.

17           For the past three summers, the C4EE has conducted a “Train the Trainer” program  
18 for Washington County teachers. The workshop for teachers is designed to introduce solar  
19 education into science lesson plans. The C4EE provided materials and kits for teachers to  
20 take back and use in the classroom.

21           The C4EE has also conducted several summer camps for middle school children in  
22 Washington County. The summer camps for middle school students are designed to



1 introduce students to renewable energy and emerging careers in the industry. Students had  
2 the opportunity to make projects with energy conservation in mind.

3 Geenex Solar and EDF are currently working with Washington County on  
4 additional community support programs which may include the funding of training  
5 programs for the County's system of volunteer fire departments and potential upgrades to  
6 the County's 911 call center.

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

8 **A. Yes.**