

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           A.     The development of the Project is funded through readily available funds and a  
2 credit facility provided by a specialty lender. During the CPCN approval process, and prior to the  
3 purchasing of major equipment and commencing construction, Geenex will execute a partnership  
4 agreement with a financial partner. Together we will obtain a construction loan from a third-party  
5 lender, likely a commercial bank. About 80% of project cost can be financed through a loan.  
6 During construction, Geenex will work with our chosen partner to raise tax equity, additional cash  
7 equity, and long term debt. The loan will be retired when the project goes operational with proceeds  
8 from term debt and tax equity.

9                               **SITE AND FACILITY DESCRIPTION**

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

12           A.     The Project will be sited on approximately 1,235 fenced acres of privately-owned  
13 land north of Enfield in Halifax County, North Carolina. The site is largely rural and agricultural  
14 in nature and many of the landowners will continue to farm and live in proximity to the site. The  
15 Project's remote location will allow it to be shielded from roadway views and neighboring  
16 landowners through the use of generous setbacks, natural buffers and added vegetative screening,  
17 in compliance with the Halifax County Solar Energy Systems Ordinance.

18           Sweetleaf Solar has executed seven (7) lease or purchase options for the solar array area of  
19 the site. These land control agreements give Sweetleaf Solar the right to develop and use the  
20 property for solar energy purposes, including the installation of solar racking, solar panels,  
21 inverters, transformers, and the other elements of the Facility described in the application and my  
22 testimony.

23           **Q.     WHAT IS THE CONSTRUCTION TIMELINE FOR THE FACILITY?**

1           A.     As discussed in the Application **Exhibit 2, Item (i)**, Construction for the project is  
2     expected to proceed to begin construction in the second quarter of 2021 with an estimated date of  
3     commercial operation date in the fourth quarter of 2022.

4                               **REGULATORY APPROVALS AND PERMITS**

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

7           A.     Sweetleaf Solar proposes to develop, install, and operate a utility-scale solar  
8     photovoltaic solar energy system in Halifax County in a manner consistent with local zoning  
9     ordinance and in accordance with all federal, state, and local regulations. Sweetleaf Solar will  
10    meet and most often exceed all local and state zoning standards. The Project will use  
11    proven technology which has been used throughout the U.S. The design, installation and  
12    operations of the facility will comply with all applicable local, state, and national electrical  
13    standards and codes to ensure the safety and protection of local residents. The Applicant  
14    looks forward to continued engagement with County staff, officials, and citizens as the Project  
15    proceeds.

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

19           **Q.     HAS THE APPLICANT CONDUCTED ANY STUDIES OF THE PROJECT**  
20     **SITE?**

21           A.     Yes. The Applicant and its consultants have conducted several assessments of the  
22     site to ensure that development plans comply with all federal, state, and local requirements. These  
23     include: (1) a Cultural Resources Overview and Survey Plan, completed by Commonwealth

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.<sup>1</sup> “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,

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

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

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

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