

BEFORE THE NORTH CAROLINA UTILITIES COMMISSION  
DOCKET NO. E-34, SUB 54

In the Matter of: )  
Application of Appalachian State )  
University, d/b/a New River Light )  
And Power Company For )  
Adjustment of General Base Rates )  
And Charges Applicable to Electric )  
Service )

**SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY OF  
NANCY LAPLACA**

My name is Nancy LaPlaca, and I am Principal of LaPlaca and Associates LLC consulting. Both my home and business are located at 239 Wildwood Lane, Boone NC 28607. I've worked in energy policy for nearly 20 years, as sole policy advisor to an elected public utilities commissioner, as staff to two congresspersons, worked as an independent consultant, researcher, strategist, expert witness and intervener in AZ, CO and NC, worked for the U.S. Department of Energy, and created and taught three courses on energy and climate change at Appalachian State University (2019-2020). I have a Juris Doctorate (J.D.) and Bachelor of Fine Arts from Arizona (AZ) State University.

The purpose of my testimony is to show that: NRLP's current rooftop solar rules, "buy-all sell-all," have *predictably* resulted in close to zero rooftop solar for NRLP customers; NRLP's proposed net metering charge of \$6.17 per installed kilowatt (kW) is so high that few people will be able to afford rooftop solar, resulting in a continuation of zero rooftop solar in Boone; NRLP's electricity mix of 85% fossil gas is 84-86 times worse for the climate than CO2, with a side helping of staggering health and environmental damages; and, most importantly, *NRLP knew from surveys that tying its captive customers to fossil gas until ~2036 – nearly 14 years from now -- is not what its customers want.*

## **Forced Sale Has Resulted in Zero Rooftop Solar in Boone; and a \$6.17/kW Monthly**

**Charge for Solar Customers Will Also Kill Local Solar** It's obvious that there is zero rooftop solar in Boone. Although Mr. Miller lists other utilities that use forced sale, those other utilities also have pretty much zero rooftop solar. Bad policies used elsewhere are not a justification for NRLP's poor choices. It's noteworthy that Australia, population 25 million, has as many solar roofs as the U.S.,<sup>1</sup> population 330 million. Only 4% of U.S. homes have solar, while one in three Australian homes have solar.<sup>2</sup> Under forced sale, a customer-site solar system would *cost almost double the installation price*. We need all types of solar, utility-scale, rooftop, community and virtual power plants. Sadly, AppState has not lived up to its own stated sustainability goals to provide utility-scale solar to its customers, despite over 10 years of promises. In 2015, AZ utilities Salt River Project (SRP) and AZ Public Service imposed high monthly fees and changed solar reimbursement, so that rooftop solar installations fell 95%.<sup>3</sup> The same thing will happen in Boone with such a high monthly fee.

**NRLP Surveys Repeatedly Show Customers Want Clean Energy** NRLP doesn't mention the surveys that it's done over the years, asking its customers what they want. Over and over, customers have indicated they want local, clean energy such as rooftop solar. As a council member in 2020-2021,<sup>4</sup> I spoke with hundreds of people who want clean energy. The Boone

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/08/opinion/environment/defense-production-act-solar-power-australia.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://pv-magazine-usa.com/2022/10/28/nearly-4-of-u-s-homes-have-solar-panels-installed/#:~:text=In%202020%2C%203.7%25%20of%20U.S.,reports%20the%20Energy%20Information%20Administration>. The U.S. and Australia each have ~3.5-4 million solar installations.

<sup>3</sup> <https://grist.org/energy/utility-monopolies-are-hurting-rooftop-solar-can-antitrust-lawsuits-rein-them-in/>

<sup>4</sup> In the 2021 election for the Town of Boone, an AppState-affiliated PAC spent \$25,000 to elect "friendly" candidates. Despite this huge expenditure in a local race where candidates spend less than \$3,000, and winners get ~900 votes, the Appstate PAC's candidates lost badly.

Town Council submitted a letter stating that they want fair net metering,<sup>5</sup> with a fee of no more than \$2.00/watt, as did the Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture, which represents over 100 local food producers and at least 200-350 customers who order local food every week.<sup>6</sup> Further, electrification of transportation, and increased use of heat pumps will result in NRLP selling *more* electricity, not less. Since my household installed mini-splits, and have two electric vehicles, our electricity bill has doubled.

**Climate Change is Rapidly Getting Worse** Climate change is affecting our normal weather patterns in increasingly extreme ways.<sup>7</sup> Increasing heat waves that last longer,<sup>8</sup> catastrophic amounts of rain,<sup>9</sup> devastating drought<sup>10</sup> and wildfires abound.<sup>11</sup> Distributed generation such as rooftop solar, local batteries, electric vehicles (EVs), and energy efficiency allow individuals as well as entire communities to be more resilient to these climate-exacerbated disasters, because local solar provides access to electricity even if the grid goes down. Last week, on Monday, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the world experienced the hottest day ever recorded. That record was broken 24 hours later, on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023. People are dying of heat exposure in places like India and the Middle East. Because fossil gas/methane is a far more potent greenhouse gas than CO<sub>2</sub>, it's super-charging climate chaos.<sup>12</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC's) 5<sup>th</sup> Assessment in

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<sup>5</sup> While the Boone Sustainability Committee does not particularly support rooftop solar, they are an advisory body *only and has no authority to advocate policy*. Policy decisions are made by the Boone Town Council, which supports fair net metering, i.e. no more than \$2.00/watt monthly charge for installed solar.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.brwia.org/home-old.html>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2023-el-nino-climate-change-extreme-weather/?mc\\_cid=5a6b053497&mc\\_eid=7e24fc0e68#xj4y7vzkg](https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2023-el-nino-climate-change-extreme-weather/?mc_cid=5a6b053497&mc_eid=7e24fc0e68#xj4y7vzkg)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/25/climate/extreme-heat-waves.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-heavy-precipitation>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/20/us/lake-mead-colorado-river-water-releases-climate/index.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/04/business/allstate-insurance-california.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/fighting-climate-chaos/issues/natural-gas/>

2014, states fossil gas is *84 times worse than CO2 for the climate*. Climate scientist Kevin Anderson says that *fossil gas is a bridge fuel – to a planet that’s four (4) degrees C hotter*.<sup>13</sup>

### **Clean Energy Saves Money on Fuel, and Most of the Cost to Run a Gas Plant is Fuel**

An example of the cost benefits of clean energy recently happened in Texas. Wind and solar saved \$11 billion in fuel costs in a single year -- 2022 -- for Texas utility customers. It’s highly likely that high fuel costs for fossil gas plants will eventually make them uneconomic. Most of the cost to run a fossil gas power plant is the fuel, and fuel costs are increasingly volatile, with prices spiking during ever-increasing heat waves and cold snaps. Utilities can only “hedge” future fossil gas fuel costs for a fairly short time, perhaps a year or two. Thus, upwards of 70% of the cost to run the fossil gas power plant is unknown.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

I am an energy policy expert, but first, I’m a human being. I’m distressed that many scientists are alarmed at recent temperature anomalies. There are many young people and children in my life who I love dearly, and who keep me going in this work. Over the past 20 years, I have watched as utilities have killed clean energy over and over, especially local, distributed solutions like rooftop solar and energy efficiency programs. I know that we need both utility and rooftop solar. NRLP customers want rooftop solar for many reasons: reduce toxic emissions, address climate change, provide local jobs, and give our young people hope. That last one, which isn’t in any rule or law, is clearly the most important. As a society, we are about to

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXEL4ZfDbdE> and <https://tyndall.ac.uk/people/kevin-anderson/>

find out how climate chaos will interact with society-wide hope and fear about the future. Here are my observations and recommendations:

- NRLP’s “forced sale” residential solar has resulted in close to zero residential solar installations in Boone over the past decade, and its proposed solar fee of \$6.17/kW of installed capacity will similarly kill rooftop solar in Boone.
- Despite multiple customer surveys over the past decade, NRLP has ignored the clear directive from its customers to increase local clean energy such as rooftop solar.
- By tying NRLP customers to an electricity mix that’s 85% fossil gas, NRLP is supercharging climate chaos, and setting up customers for rapidly increasing bills due to volatile and rising costs of fuel.

Submitted electronically this 7<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2023.

/s/ Nancy LaPlaca, J.D.  
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**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I certify that a copy of the Direct Testimony of Nancy LaPlaca, J.D., has been served on all parties of record or their attorneys, or both, in accordance with Commission Rule R1-39, by electronic delivery.

This 7<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2023.

Electronically submitted

Nancy LaPlaca