

**BEFORE
THE OHIO POWER SITING BOARD**

In the Matter of the Application of Frasier)
Solar, LLC for a Certificate of Environmental)
Compatibility and Public Need to Construct a) Case No. 23-0796-EL-BGN
Solar-Powered Electric Generation Facility)

**DIRECT TESTIMONY OF ETHAN ROBERTSON ON BEHALF OF
ETHAN ROBERTSON**

1 **Q-1. Please state your name, home address, and business address.**

2 **A-1.** My name is Ethan Robertson. My home address is 18 Old Farm Road, Granville, Ohio
3 43023. My business address is 8920 Columbus Road, Mount Vernon, Ohio 43050, which
4 is in Clinton Township.

5
6 **Q-2. What is your occupation?**

7 **A-2.** I own and operate the Robertson Truck Group family of businesses, which sells medium-
8 and heavy-duty trucks and equipment. My father started the company in 1984, and we
9 pride ourselves as a local employer, small business, and tax base contributor. The
10 company is based in Mount Vernon and currently employs roughly 50 team members in
11 the greater Knox County area.

12
13 In addition to my role in the Robertson Truck Group, I co-own and help manage two
14 tracts of land with my cousin Richard Piar that we are planning to lease out as part of the
15 Frasier Solar Project. This land was previously owned by our two fathers, and we intend
16 to keep it in the family for the benefit of our children and their children. For that reason,
17 we've put this land into an LLC called HELKER LLC. Each letter of the name HELKER
18 stands for a member of our family: the H is for Richard's daughter Hannah, the first E is
19 for my son Easton, the L is for my daughter Lena, the K is for my son Knox, the second
20 E is for me, Ethan, and the R is for my cousin Richard. I have a 50% ownership stake in
21 HELKER LLC, and Richard holds the remaining 50% interest. Richard is a farmer and is
22 currently using the land to grow corns and soybeans on rotation.

1 **Q-3. In addition to your employment and the farmland you described above, can you**
2 **describe your family’s connections to central Ohio?**

3 **A-3.** My great-grandfather, grandfather, and father grew up on Fosdyke Road, on the division
4 line between Knox and Licking Counties. I grew up in Franklin County, as well as
5 Licking County. My father had a farm outside of Utica on the border of Licking County
6 and Knox County when I was growing up, and I spent a lot of time at the farm on my
7 weekends and summers. We currently live in Granville, Ohio, and still have the farm
8 where I grew up, which we will pass down to my children one day. My kids are 9, 7, and
9 5 years old and love spending time at the farm on the weekends.

10

11 **Q-4. What is the nature of your involvement in the project?**

12 **A-4.** Richard and I have signed lease agreements with Open Road Renewables to allow some
13 of the land we own together to be used for the Frasier Solar Project. Under the lease
14 agreements, the owner and operator of Frasier Solar will manage the land for the 40-year
15 lifespan of the project. The land will be used for solar energy generation and sheep
16 grazing during that time.

17

18 **Q-5. Can you describe your decision to participate in the project?**

19 **A-5.** My father was first contacted by Open Road Renewables about the possibility of a lease
20 and spoke with Craig Adair on January 21, 2022. We did some research together about
21 how the economics of a solar lease would work, and we did some due diligence to inspect
22 the legitimacy of the company. I also spoke with my cousin and business partner Richard
23 about whether this was something he would like to do. Before entering into a lease,

1 Richard and I spoke many times with Open Road. We explained during these
2 conversations that it is very important to us that the soil and drainage be protected
3 throughout the life of the project so that it can be returned to growing crops at the end of
4 the project. Open Road was responsive to this concern, and we decided that we would be
5 comfortable participating. Many of the guarantees that we hoped to get from Open Road,
6 such as limiting topsoil disturbance and promising to restore drain tile, are part of the
7 conditions proposed in the Staff Report of Investigation.

8
9 This was a major financial decision for us. My father and Richard's father managed this
10 land for our benefit, and now we are managing the land for our children's and future
11 grandchildren's benefit. The lease allows us to diversify our assets, and it functions like
12 an annuity, providing a steady income to our family. When the lease-term expires, the
13 next generation will be able to determine the best use of the land at that time. In the
14 meantime, our family will have earned annual lease payments for 40 years.

15
16 All the while, the project guarantees that the land will continue to be farmed, through a
17 contract with local sheep farmers. With land costs so high, there are few opportunities
18 like this for local first-generation farmers. The project will also include pollinator plants
19 and flowers, which will benefit the local ecosystem. In that way, the project is a win-win.

20
21 Finally, it is important to me that I be able to exercise my rights as a property owner by
22 participating in a project that I feel is best for my family and my land. As farmers and
23 investors in the land, we should have the opportunity to ensure that it can remain in our

1 family and maintain its viability as farmland into the future. It is my hope that when the
2 time comes and the lease expires for the Frasier Solar Project, my children and
3 grandchildren will be grateful for my decision to participate in the project.

4
5 **Q-6. What is the purpose of your testimony?**

6 **A-6.** I am testifying in support of the Frasier Solar Project because I believe it will bring
7 benefits to my family, my farm, the local community, and the state of Ohio.

8
9 **Q-7. In your opinion, what are those benefits?**

10 **A-7.** As a participating landowner, the project will allow me to keep this land in my family
11 while earning an annual lease income. I believe that the conditions proposed in the Staff
12 Report of Investigation will help to ensure that the land can be returned to growing crops
13 at the end of the lease term. This will allow my children and grandchildren to decide, in
14 their best judgment, whether they want to farm the land or make another productive use
15 of it. We do not know right now what the best use of the land will be 40 years from now,
16 and this project will allow future generations of our family to keep all of their options
17 open. The project will also financially benefit Knox County through the payment-in-lieu-
18 of-taxes (PILOT) agreement and through supporting local agricultural work on the
19 property. Finally, the project will help Ohio meet its growing electricity needs.

20
21 **Q-8. Can you describe in more detail how the project will benefit you as a participating**
22 **landowner?**

1 **A-8.** Leasing out the land for Frasier Solar is good for my family and me because it will allow
2 us to keep the property in our family while earning a steady income that is not dependent
3 on agricultural price fluctuations.

4
5 **Q-9. Can you describe in more detail how the project will help maintain the viability of**
6 **the parcels for farming?**

7 **A-9.** The project ensures that the land will stay in my family and be viable for growing crops
8 at the end of the project's 40-year lifespan. Before entering into a lease, Richard and I
9 spoke with Open Road Renewables about the plans for construction, operation, and
10 decommissioning, in order to ensure that the property would be taken care of and be
11 viable as cropland at the end of the lease. I am confident that the provisions in Open
12 Road's application, subject to the conditions proposed in the Staff Report of
13 Investigation, are sufficient to conserve the land for growing crops in the future. For
14 example, Open Road has included conditions to maintain existing drain tile and avoid
15 significant topsoil disturbance. Open Road has also included conditions to return the land
16 to a cultivation-ready state during decommissioning, including by restoring the same or
17 functionally similar pre-construction drainage patterns, decompacting the soil, and
18 seeding with appropriate vegetation.

19
20 In the meantime, the project will provide an opportunity for first-generation Knox County
21 farmers to graze sheep on the parcels during the project's lifespan, meaning that the land
22 will continue to be used as farmland. Open Road contracted with New Slate Land
23 Management, LLC, which is run by Mount Vernon residents Brad and Katie Carothers.

1 They will maintain the vegetation on the property using their sheep. In other words, the
2 project will not convert our property into something that is not farmland, it will just
3 temporarily change the agricultural use.

4
5 In contrast to the Frasier Solar project, alternative forms of development, such as
6 residential development, would not permit the land to be farmed in the future, and they
7 would not support other Knox County farmers.

8

9 **Q-10. Can you describe in more detail how the project will financially benefit Knox**
10 **County?**

11 **A-10.** I believe the surrounding region will benefit greatly from the boost of economic activity
12 and tax revenue that the Project will deliver through the PILOT agreement. In addition to
13 creating jobs, the Project will deliver over \$19 million to the Mount Vernon City School
14 District, along with over \$11 million to the County General Fund, over \$3 million to the
15 Knox County Career Center, and over \$8 million to other Knox County taxing
16 jurisdictions.

17

18 As an employer in Knox County, I believe that all of these revenues from the PILOT
19 agreement will be highly beneficial to my employees. Many of my employees and their
20 family members have graduated from the Knox County Career Center. Out of our 50
21 team members, 18 are graduates of the career center. Many of our team members send or
22 have sent their children to school in the Mount Vernon City School District.

1 As a local small business owner, I believe that all of the increase of jobs, investment, and
2 PILOT revenues will stimulate economic activity that will help small businesses like
3 mine throughout the county. Furthermore, I believe that the Frasier Solar project will
4 signal to the business community that Knox County is a reasonable, free market, and
5 business-oriented place.

6

7 **Q-11. Does this conclude your testimony?**

8 **A-11.** Yes. However, I reserve the right to update this testimony to respond to any further
9 testimony in this case.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that The Ohio Power Siting Board's e-filing system will electronically serve notice of the filing of this document on the parties referenced on the service list of the docket card who have electronically subscribed to the case on this 14th day of August 2024.

/s/ Jacob Elkin

Jacob Elkin

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Summary: Testimony of Ethan Robertson electronically filed by Mr. Jacob Elkin on behalf of Robertson, Ethan.