

**BEFORE
THE OHIO POWER SITING BOARD**

In the Matter of the Application of)	
Blossom Solar, LLC for a Certificate of)	Case No. 22-151-EL-BGN
Environmental Compatibility and Public)	
Need)	

DIRECT TESTIMONY OF JOHN WOODS

Q.1. Please state your name, title and business address.

A.1. My name is John Woods, Senior Associate, Landscape Architect. I work at MKSK, which is a planning, urban design, and landscape architecture company. My business address is 462 S. Ludlow St., Columbus, Ohio 43215.

Q.2. What are your duties as a Landscape Architect?

A.2. My duties vary depending on the project. However, project management and design and technical oversight are usually my main responsibilities. I design and/or oversee the design of landscapes for a wide range of project types, such as mixed-use development, site scale design, public infrastructure (streetscape work), public parks and utility scale solar projects, to name a few.

Q.3. What is your educational and professional background?

A.3. I received a Bachelor of Science degree in Landscape Architecture, College of Engineering, School of Architecture from the Ohio State University, in 1992. I have over 30 years of experience as a project landscape architect and have worked on a wide variety of notable projects in Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe as well as the United States. In addition to leading projects, I also serve as a resource to our landscape architecture practice at-large to provide guidance on landscape architecture, water feature design, planting design and paving design. Finally, I am an active member of the American

1 Society of Landscape Architects as well as a frequent occasional critic of student works at
2 the Ohio State University's Knowlton School of Architecture.

3 I assisted in the creation of the Preliminary Landscaping Plan created for this Project, which
4 was submitted as Exhibit Z to the Application. My previous experience with solar projects
5 includes the Clearview Solar Project (Case No. 20-1362-EL-BGN) and the Harvey Solar
6 Project (Case No. 21-164-EL-BGN). I have also previously provided testimony as an
7 expert witness before the Ohio Power Siting Board for the Harvey Solar Project and
8 provided written testimony for the Clearview Solar Project.

9 **Q.4. On whose behalf are you offering testimony?**

10 **A.4.** I am testifying on behalf of the Applicant, Blossom Solar, LLC ("Blossom Solar"
11 or "Applicant"), in support of its Application filed in Case No. 22-151-EL-BGN.

12 **Q.5. What is the purpose of your testimony?**

13 **A.5.** The purpose of my testimony is to discuss my review of the Visual Resources
14 Assessment (submitted as Exhibit Y to the Application on May 27, 2022) and the
15 Preliminary Landscaping Plan (submitted as Exhibit Z to the Application on May 27,
16 2022), and the minimization of the Project's visual impact using screening, specifically
17 landscape plant material.

18 **Q.6. Have you reviewed the Project application?**

19 **A.6.** Yes. I have reviewed the Application narrative and Exhibits Y and Z.

20 **Q.7. Based on your experience, is the landscape screening approach proposed in the**
21 **landscape plan typical in your industry for the purposes of visual mitigation?**

22 **A.7.** Yes. In the plan, the Applicant is proposing perimeter plantings composed of native
23 vegetative materials to screen or soften the view of the Project, which is typical for the

purpose of minimizing and mitigating the visual impact of the addition of a new element to the existing landscape. Based on my review, the conceptual planting proposed in the landscaping plan will provide visual screening, soften the horizontal line created by the installation of the solar panels, and aid in blending the Project into the surrounding landscape. In addition to helping to blend the Project into the surrounding rural landscape, the use of native plant species will also provide environmental benefits to native wildlife and pollinator species.

Q.8. Please describe the landscaping scenarios proposed in the plan.

A.8. The landscaping plan describes three mitigation options. The Medium-Density planting module will be used to provide screening where arrays are near the road network and existing residential property boundaries and existing topography and vegetation are not providing view mitigation. Medium density planting combines pollinator seed mixes, ranging in height from 2-4 feet tall with a mix of warm and cool season grasses, perennial wildflowers, with multi-stem trees, ranging from 15-25 feet in height at maturity, to help diffuse views of the arrays from vehicular and pedestrian vantage points. Woody shrub masses are interspersed throughout to provide additional screening and food and cover for wildlife.

The High-Density planting module will provide a greater degree of view filtering where the arrays are closest to homes and roads and additional height and mass are needed to help diffuse the views of the arrays. The high-density module builds on the medium density module by adding shade trees to the plant mix. Shade trees will provide long-term density and height to help screen views from higher vantage points. Large shade trees also provide

1 additional ecological benefits in the form of bird and small mammal nesting locations, food
2 and cover for beneficial insects and greater stormwater absorption capability.

3 The High-Density with Evergreens planting module will provide the highest degree of view
4 filtering where the arrays are closest to homes and roads, and additional height, mass, and
5 diffusion are needed to help diffuse the views of the arrays. With the addition of evergreen
6 trees and double the quantity of small trees and shade trees, the module will provide the
7 highest level of view mitigation, ecological benefits, and stormwater absorption.

8 **Q.9. When will each screening option become effective after planting?**

9 **A.9.** The proposed plantings specified will enhance the viewshed from the day of the
10 initial planting date; and the opacity of this visual barrier will increase over time, as most
11 plantings in this type of installation typically do. All of the three landscaping scenarios use
12 native plant selections which generally take less input energy (and water and soil
13 amendments) to establish and maintain long-term, since they are adapted to the
14 local/regional soil, and water, and climate conditions.

15 Given that Blossom Solar has proposed a matrix of pollinator plants, grasses, shrubs, and
16 trees for the landscape modules, planting should be strategically approached. As explained
17 in the Preliminary Landscaping Plan, trees, smaller trees/large shrubs, and smaller woody
18 shrubs should be planted first. Planting the larger materials first will allow the more
19 delicate seed mix to be planted without being disturbed. Also, this sequence gives the
20 smaller trees and shrubs time to establish as compared to grasses and perennials, which are
21 shorter in the first year or two, and are less likely to shade out the shrubs and trees.

22 Pollinator mixes typically require 2-3 years to fully establish themselves. During this
23 period, periodic mowing will take place as needed, and be limited to fall/spring seasons to

1 keep annual and perennial weeds at bay and encourage the establishment of pollinator
2 species. Woody plant materials (trees, shrubs) establish over the course of 1-2 years with
3 faster growth rates beginning in years 3-5 as root systems begin to recover from transplant
4 shock and emerge from the rootball (the ball of soil and roots that is part of a tree or shrub)
5 and root into native soils. The illustrations of the landscaping scenarios in the Preliminary
6 Landscaping Plan reflect the appearance of the modules approximately five years from
7 initial planting of the younger plant material (or seed) with typical growing conditions.

8 **Q.10. What is the goal of vegetative screening for this type of project?**

9 **A.10.** The goal of visual screening or mitigation is not to prevent a project from being
10 seen entirely. The use of an opaque “green wall” approach is generally not desirable or
11 effective, because it tends to contrast with the existing visual character of the surrounding
12 area, typically composed of wooded areas, hedgerows and farm fields, and actually draws
13 viewer attention because it looks out of place. Instead, the goal is to soften the appearance
14 of the project so that it blends more effectively into the background.

15 Based on my experience, including designing landscaping for solar projects, mitigation
16 strategies of this type have been successful in reducing and minimizing the potential visual
17 impacts. Vegetative mitigation, when applied appropriately, is very effective in reducing
18 and minimizing project visibility and visual impact. Additionally, the use of alternative
19 fencing materials like that proposed for this Project are effective in minimizing the visual
20 contrasts typically presented by traditional galvanized chain-link fence materials.

21 **Q.11. Based on your experience, what is your overall assessment of the potential visual**
22 **impact of the Project?**

1 **A.11.** Each of the three representative landscaping modules will provide a visual buffer
2 between the viewer and the Project. For the Medium-Density planting module, glimpses
3 of fence and panels would be viewed from certain angles, but the massing appears denser
4 when not looking directly (perpendicular) at the Project. With the variability of plantings
5 reflected in the High-Density planting module, visibility of fencing and panels would also
6 be variable. However, the differing shapes of species creates an organic pattern of
7 vegetation that breaks up and obscures the Project to a great degree. When using the High-
8 Density with Evergreens planting module, the use of evergreen species allows for a slightly
9 denser screening of the Project, although with a more regimented and consistent feel. Each
10 of these conceptual plans would provide for a meaningful visual buffer when looking
11 towards the Project.

12 Additionally, Blossom Solar has committed to Conditions 13 and 41 in the Joint Stipulation
13 that will further reduce or minimize the potential visual impacts associated with the facility.
14 In the Application, Blossom Solar committed to creating a final landscaping plan after
15 discussions with neighbors. Condition 13 memorializes this commitment and directs
16 Blossom Solar to submit a final landscaping plan to the Ohio Power Siting Board Staff,
17 focused on the line of sight from residences on non-participating parcels. The plan will be
18 developed in consultation with an Ohio licensed landscape architect prior to
19 commencement of any construction. The condition also directs Blossom Solar to
20 incorporate additional vegetative screening in certain areas identified in the initial glare
21 study (prepared by Burns & McDonnell and provided to Staff as a data request on July 20,
22 2022) to reduce and/or address glare at certain areas.

1 Condition 13 also contains two important prongs to ensure the effectiveness of mitigation
2 for adjacent, non-participating landowners. First, Condition 13 requires the Applicant to
3 maintain vegetative screening for the life of the Project. This requirement ensures that any
4 plant die-off during the life of the Project will not result in gaps in the three screening
5 modules. Second, Condition 13 requires the Applicant replace and/or substitute any failed
6 plantings during the first five years after construction to ensure that at least 90% of the
7 vegetation has survived as of the five-year point. The purpose of the five-year period is to
8 allow plantings to become established, after which time plant survival is likely to increase.
9 Finally, through Condition 41, Blossom Solar has committed to implement the Medium-
10 Density planting module along non-participating parcel boundaries which are 50 feet from
11 the Project's solar modules and have a direct line of sight to the Project. This will further
12 reduce the Project's visual impacts.

13 **Q.12. Does this conclude your direct testimony?**

14 **A.12.** Yes, it does.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

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Summary: Testimony Direct Testimony of John Woods electronically filed by Ms.
Anna Sanyal on behalf of Blossom Solar, LLC