

CONCERNED AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

C/O BELOVED COMMUNITY CENTER
P.O BOX 875
GREENSBORO, NC 27402

July 17, 2015

The North Carolina General Assembly
Legislative Building, 1600 West Jones Street
Raleigh, NC 27601

Delivered via email

Dear Members of the General Assembly:

We write you as African American Clergy to urge and encourage you to support the various policy efforts to promote low cost solar power in North Carolina. While we self-identify as African American clergy, we deeply believe that solar energy is a gift from God from which all can and should benefit.

We specifically ask you to support the Energy Freedom Act (HB245) which would open the door to solar competition, thereby helping low-wealth communities and all electricity customers in a number of ways.

Solar power helps all communities. One reason is that every new solar panel reduces overall usage from the electricity grid, thus reducing the need to keep building expensive power plants and continually raising rates. Reducing the cost of electricity and minimizing North Carolina's carbon footprint reflect moral, economic, and environmental progress.

Eighty percent of all North Carolinians already support low cost solar energy. We are convinced that after prayerful consideration, all religious traditions and the overwhelming majority of the citizens of North Carolina will support low cost solar energy. Our common interest is an energy future that benefits all communities by creating jobs, and reducing the pollution that is harming our health and fueling climate change.

With "No Money Down Solar" – under the Energy Freedom Bill – experienced companies with strong financial backing will install solar systems on the property of churches, businesses, homes and government buildings. They will then sell the customer the power at a fixed rate. The Energy Freedom Bill eliminates the up-front cost of rooftop solar, allowing everyone to reap the benefits of lower cost electricity.

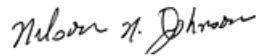
Solar power is already bringing many thousands of jobs to this state. We believe that solar power will also provide incentives and opportunities for all citizens of North Carolina and

for African Americans and other minorities to become business providers in this growing industry. We are, therefore, seeking your assistance to help ensure that those economic benefits are shared among historically disadvantaged communities.

We urge you to take a leading role toward a clean energy economy for North Carolina.

Thank you so very much.

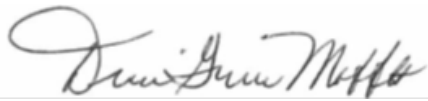
Sincerely yours,



Rev. Nelson Johnson
*Pastor, Faith Community Church &
Director, Beloved Community Center*



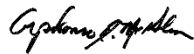
Rev. Dr. Cardes Brown
Pastor, New Light Missionary Baptist Church



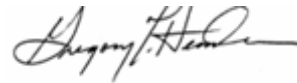
Rev. Dr. Diane Givens Moffett
Pastor, St. James Presbyterian Church



Rev. Dr. T. Anthony Spearman
Pastor, St. Phillip AME Zion Church



Rev. Alphonso McGlen
Pastor, Bethel AME Church



Rev. Dr. Gregory Headen
Pastor, Genesis Baptist Church



Rev. W. Steven Allen, Sr.
Pastor, Shiloh Baptist Church



Bishop James R. Woodson, II
Pastor, St. James Home of Fresh Start Cathedral



JOSEPH RODRIGUEZ/News & Record

The Rev. Nelson Johnson (second from left) leads the ribbon-cutting Wednesday for the solar panel project at Faith Community Church. In a partnership with the church, NC WARN installed the roof panels to help leverage solar power's savings and to reduce Duke Energy's monopoly.

CHURCH TO GO SOLAR

Congregation, activists join forces to challenge Duke Energy's grip

BY TAFT WIREBACK
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GREENSBORO.COM

See a video of Wednesday's event on our website.

A Greensboro church and a statewide activist group put themselves on a collision course with Duke Energy on Wednesday over the divisive issue of solar energy and who can sell the power it generates.

Faith Community Church and the advocacy group NC WARN unveiled a partnership in which the Durham-based nonprofit has installed solar panels on the African American congregation's rooftop to produce electricity for sale to the church.

The arrangement between two not-for-profit entities could represent a new twist on North Carolina utility rules that generally reserve the right to sell electricity for public utilities such as Duke Energy.

But the partners believe their plan should pass muster legally, and they say it

See Solar, Page A6



Courtesy NC WARN

Solar panels installed and maintained by NC WARN cover the roof at Faith Community Church on Arlington Street. The church says its ultimate aim is to make the benefits of non-polluting, and possibly cheaper, solar power more accessible to low-income and minority communities.

Solar

Continued from Page A1

could provide some of the church's power at a lower rate than it now pays Duke Energy.

"We see ourselves as a small church, but our mission is not small," said the Rev. Nelson Johnson, the pastor of the Arlington Street church.

The church ultimately aims to make the benefits of non-polluting — and possibly cheaper — solar power more accessible to low-income and minority communities, Johnson said.

Pastors from other African American churches throughout the community attended the groups' news conference Wednesday morning and said they share Johnson's vision.

Later Wednesday, NC WARN filed a petition with the N.C. Utilities Commission seeking the supervisory board's blessing on the new partnership. The group asked the commission for a "declaratory ruling" that the relationship is lawful.

Jim Warren, the executive director of NC WARN, said a favorable decision could be trendsetting and inspire similar partnerships statewide. He called the relationship with Faith Community Church a "test case" targeting the state's solar policy, and he questioned Duke Energy's hold on the sale of electricity.

"We believe the state needs competition, not monopoly control of rooftops," said Warren, the longtime leader of the group that takes a populist approach to issues ranging from

nuclear power to hazardous waste disposal.

Duke Energy plans to oppose the petition, arguing that allowing such arrangements on a large scale would erode the utility's ability to function successfully and leave some consumers without a reliable source of power.

Company spokesman Randy Wheelless said state law prohibits the sale of electricity by groups other than public utilities because such utilities are needed to provide power to any and all customers at reasonable rates.

In a setup like the one planned in Greensboro, solar panel owners could pick and choose who they want to serve, potentially leaving out many others, Wheelless said.

"We see the current laws as stating this type of arrangement is illegal," he said in an email. "They claim it is not. We'll see what the commission says."

Wheelless criticized NC WARN's role in the partnership, saying it sounds as though Warren's group "wants to get in the electricity business but get a free pass on following the rules and regulations of being in the electricity business."

Current state law allows homeowners and businesses to tap solar panels for their own electricity, but any excess can only be sold back to Duke Energy or a similar public utility. A bill is pending in the General Assembly to end that restriction, but it has languished in committee for months.

In the meantime, the Raleigh-based utilities commission — a seven-member regulatory board

TOP SOLAR STATES

What is a megawatt? In North Carolina, a megawatt is enough to power an average of 95 homes for a year. That number varies by state climate conditions.

State	Annual megawatts-AC
California	3,062
Arizona	215
North Carolina	205
New Jersey	181
Massachusetts	131

Source: Solar Electric Power Association

appointed by the governor — just received NC WARN's petition and has not taken any action on it yet, said Tim Dodge, a lawyer with the commission's public staff that represents the interests of state residents before the commission.

Dodge said the issue seems the type where commission members would put out a request for comment from the public and other interested parties before scheduling a hearing.

The commission's options range from approving the new partnership to finding it in violation of state law and ordering its end.

Solar energy has been controversial in recent years as advocates try to expand its reach and make it more available to individual homeowners, businesses and other institutions. Industry promoters have sought unsuccessfully to circumvent North Carolina's ban on them selling electricity as a way to help buyers finance new solar systems, much the way

cars and other big-ticket items are bought.

Critics said Duke Energy and other traditional utilities resist simply to preserve their highly profitable monopoly and protect the bottom line.

But defenders of the status quo counter that traditional utilities provide reliable energy for all and maintain the costly power grid needed for round-the-clock support no matter how widespread individual solar systems may become.

Warren estimated that the new \$20,000 rooftop solar array would save the church at least 6 percent on its electric bills and perhaps as much as 10 percent. The solar system that NC WARN will continue to own should provide the church with electricity at less than half the kilowatt-hour price that Duke Energy charges, he said. But the system is too small to meet all the power needs of the relatively large building, he said.

The building would rely on the Duke Energy grid whenever it needs more power than the solar panels can generate and when there's too little or no sunlight, he said. When the solar panels produce more power than the building needs, that power will flow back into the grid and Duke Energy will buy it.

Warren said the partners plan to activate the new solar units next month after receiving final permits. He said they do not need a favorable ruling from the commission on Wednesday's petition before flipping the switch.

Contact Taft Wireback at (336) 373-7100, and follow @TaftWirebackNR on Twitter.