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Solar arrays near completion at city schools

By Jim Sabataso Staff Writer Aug 24, 2020 0



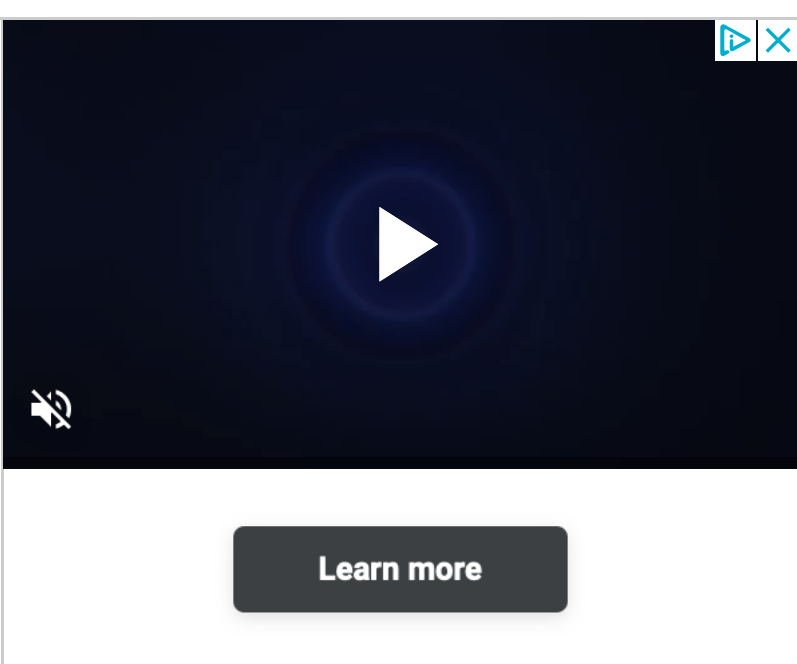
The solar canopy at Rutland High School.
Jim Sabataso / Staff Photo

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Rutland City Public Schools is ready to soak up the sun.

The district is about to complete installation of multiple solar arrays on several RCPS properties. It's the final piece of a decade-long energy-efficiency project that, as a whole, is expected to cut energy consumption district wide by about 50%, according to Ted Plemenos, director of finance for district.

Plemenos, who has only been on the job since July 1, explained that he is still getting up to speed on the project and didn't have hard numbers readily available. He said the 50% reduction is compared to the rate of energy usage in 2010, the year the project was launched.



The overall project included installation of LED lighting and energy-efficient windows, the replacement of oiler boilers with wood pellet boilers, a water heater and upgrades to ventilation systems, including computerized controls, in buildings throughout the district.

In this final phase, rooftop solar arrays were installed at Rutland High School, Stafford Technical Center, Rutland Middle School, Keefe Gym and Allen Street Campus.

The most visible array was recently completed at the RHS/Stafford campus, where a solar canopy now covers the parking lot at the corner of Woodstock Avenue and Stratton Road.

The installation of the canopy was slated to happen sooner, however, last fall, then-Superintendent David Wolk announced it would be delayed until June in order to avoid temporarily displacing 100 parking spaces during the school year.

The contract for the project is with Johnson Controls International, a multinational company with a North American headquarters in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Rutland-based company Same Sun of Vermont has been hired for the installation of the arrays.

Michael Derevjanik, director of buildings, grounds and transportation for RCPS said Monday that out-of-pocket expenses for phase three of the project were limited to a small amount for roof work. An exact figure was not immediately available.

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He explained that the rest of the capital for the project, about \$3 million, was put up by an outside investor through JCI. The district will then pay that money back to JCI in energy savings.

"Those monies that we save on our energy bills for the district are what's funding the work," Derevjanik said.

In October 2019, Peter Amons, then-director of finance at RCPS explained, "The solar panels create energy that will get sold into the grid at 15.7 cents per kilowatt plus another three cents per kilowatt for the next 10 years. ... So 18.7 cents for the first 10 years."

"Over 21 years, those savings will basically pay for the new facilities," Amons said. "There's no new incremental net (expense) out of pocket."

Superintendent Bill Olsen said the project was mostly completed when he began his tenure in July, but noted that he is pleased with how it turned out.

"It looks like it's going to be beneficial to the district," he said, adding that the canopy has a secondary benefit of providing cover from sun and snow, and will make plowing snow easier.

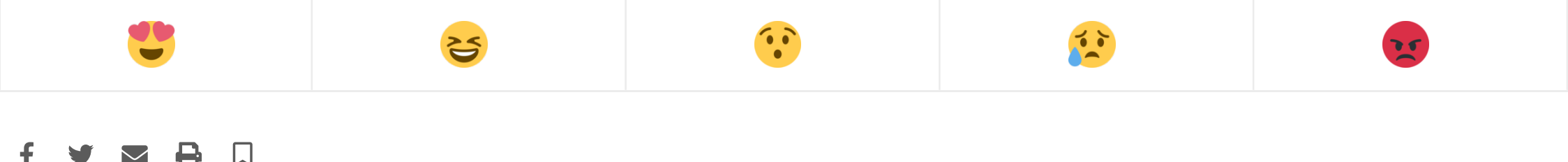
"We did not lose any parking spaces, which will make a lot of the staff up there rather happy," Derevjanik said.

jim.sabataso

@rutlandherald.com



jim.sabataso@rutlandherald.com



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Jim Sabataso



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