REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 7

Newbury Library Media Center
Board of Education Building Committee Meeting
June 10, 2026 – 5:00 p.m.
APPROVED 10.14.26

PRESENT: Chair Ms. Molly Sexton Read (B), Vice-Chair Mr. Robert Jerram (NH), Secretary Noel Gauthier (NH), Director of Finance & Operations, Mr. James Gaskins, Superintendent Steven K. LePage, Keith Boyle

1. Call to Order & Attendance

The meeting was called to order by James Gaskins at 5:02 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes

- **Motion to approve:** Rob Jerram
- **Seconded by:** Keith Boyle
- **Vote:** All in favor; motion carried unanimously.

3. Presentation: Aces Up Solar Initiative

James Gaskins introduced the topic of exploring solar canopies (carports) for the district's parking lots, noting that previous research with municipal organizations yielded cost-prohibitive results. He introduced **Aces Up**, a program under ACES (a Regional Education Service Center), which acts as a public purchasing consortium offering turnkey sustainability solutions.

Background on Aces Up

- **Brendan Sharkey** provided an overview of Aces Up, highlighting that ACES is a forward-thinking, quasi-state agency that has deployed solar on its own buildings and launched the state's first EV school bus.
- **Statutory Framework:** The program leverages a state statute (originally sponsored by Sharkey) that empowers RESCs to run public purchasing consortia, allowing school districts and towns to bypass the traditional RFP process (equivalent to being on a state bid or working with the Connecticut Green Bank).
- **Agnostic Approach:** Aces Up is agnostic regarding vendors, technology (solar, battery, fuel cells), and upfront financing. They run internal bidding to ensure best pricing and partner with the Connecticut Green Bank or utilize internal RESC financing, avoiding the misaligned motives of third-party commercial investors.
- **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):** A standard MOU was provided at the top of the meeting packet for review. Aces Up is currently working with roughly eight school districts and municipalities.

4. Project Design & Engineering Logistics

Adam Burkitt and **Jim Daly** shared a presentation detailing the proposed design.

- **Site Selection:** Representatives from Aces Up recently performed a site visit with electrician Ryan Maynard. A ground-mount array was initially explored but rejected immediately to protect the local aesthetics, trees, and the student cross-country path.
- **Carport Infrastructure:** The team highlighted that building carports is a major civil construction undertaking compared to rooftop solar. It requires extensive engineering, geotechnical soil studies, deep concrete footings, structural steel columns, rafters, and purlins.
- **Site Management & Safety:** The layout ensures that the driveway/pathway leading down to the agricultural/shared services building remains fully accessible for vans and small buses. Conduit will run beneath the asphalt, up the side of the school, and cross the roof to connect to the transformers.
- **Parking Spaces:** Aces Up confirmed that no parking spaces will be lost. The structural design deliberately lines up the columns and pairs with the existing width and boundaries of the current parking lot spaces.
- **Weather & Maintenance:**
    - *Snow Management:* The panels feature snow guards at the bottom (similar to the district's Agriscience building) to prevent massive shelves of snow from sliding off onto vehicles or pedestrians.
    - *Production Projections:* The standard generation metrics already factor in standard New England weather/snow degradation.
    - *Water Runoff:* Melting snow and rain will shed directly off the panels into the existing ground storm drains and sewers.

System Technical Comparison:

Specification	Existing Rooftop System	Proposed Carport System
System Size	385 kW (DC)	712 kW (DC)
Panels	Lower efficiency (low 200W range)	1,308 high-efficiency panels (545W)
Inverters	N/A	24 Inverters (with extended warranties)
Project Lifespan	N/A	> 30 Years (Framework lasts 75–100 years)

- **Energy Generation & "Buy All" Structure:** This project utilizes a "Buy All" framework with Eversource. The carport is an isolated generation spot that sells **722,000 annual kWh** directly to the utility. The school is "out of the loop" electrically and continues to draw its facility power normally.

5. Financials & On-Bill Credits

The project financial data was reviewed directly from page five of the informational packet.

- **On-Bill Credits:** In exchange for hosting the generation site, Region 7 receives a direct, guaranteed reduction on its Ever Source utility bill via an "on-bill credit" system. Credits will mirror seasonal generation spikes (higher in summer, lower in winter) with a conservative 0.8% annual panel degradation rate factored in.
- **Zero Capital Outlay:** Regional School District No. 7 will have **$0 out-of-pocket costs**. Traditional financing firms demand 5-to-6-year returns and refuse to touch these complex builds, whereas Aces Up absorbs the long-term payback timeline internally.
- **Financial Risk Mitigation:** It was clarified that because this is a *Buy All* generation credit rather than a PPA buy-back scheme, the district is completely insulated from grid rate drops. The district will pay market rates for its standard $475,000 electricity budget, but will pocket a year-one savings credit of **~$22,000**, totaling an estimated **$410,524 accumulated savings** over the 20-year term.

6. Critical Timelines & Agreement Options

Critical Deadline Notice: July 4, 2026, is the final deadline to "Safe Harbor" the federal Investment Tax Credit (ITC) program.

- **The Federal Safe Harbor Rule:** To secure the **$750,000 federal tax credit** on this **$2.5 million project**, Aces Up must execute the agreement and fund a **minimum 5% project deposit (~$175,000)** within the next few weeks. If successful, the district secures a 4-year construction runway, targeting a completed connection in either the Summer of 2027 or Summer of 2028. Missing this deadline risks zero financial viability if utility interconnection studies drag out past program expiration.
- **State NRES Program:** The project will utilize the state's NRES school set-aside program monitored by PURA, securing a specific incentive bonus for carports.
- **20-Year End-of-Term Options:** At the conclusion of the 20-year agreement, the district holds an option to buy out the system based on Fair Market Value (FMV). Historically, industrial buyout structures of this age transfer to the host for nominal fees (often down to hundreds of dollars) rather than premium costs.
- **Framework Longevity:** The heavy-duty structural steel and 12.5-ton concrete footings have an estimated operational lifespan of **75 to 100 years**. If panels hit their end of life, the underlying framework remains intact to host a secondary, updated panel array system.

7. Next Steps & Adjournment

The Aces Up representatives were excused from the room. The committee determined that a full presentation to the Board of Education was unnecessary, as a quorum of the board was already present and capable of accurately conveying the details. The board will take a brief period to process the financial mechanics of the MOU before scheduling a potential vote or special meeting ahead of the July 4th deadline.

- **Motion to adjourn:** Rob Jerram
- **Seconded by:** Keith Boyle
- **Vote:** Unanimous; motion carried. Meeting officially adjourned at 6:10 p.m.