

# STILLWATER TWP. SCHOOL REFERENDUM

FALL 2026

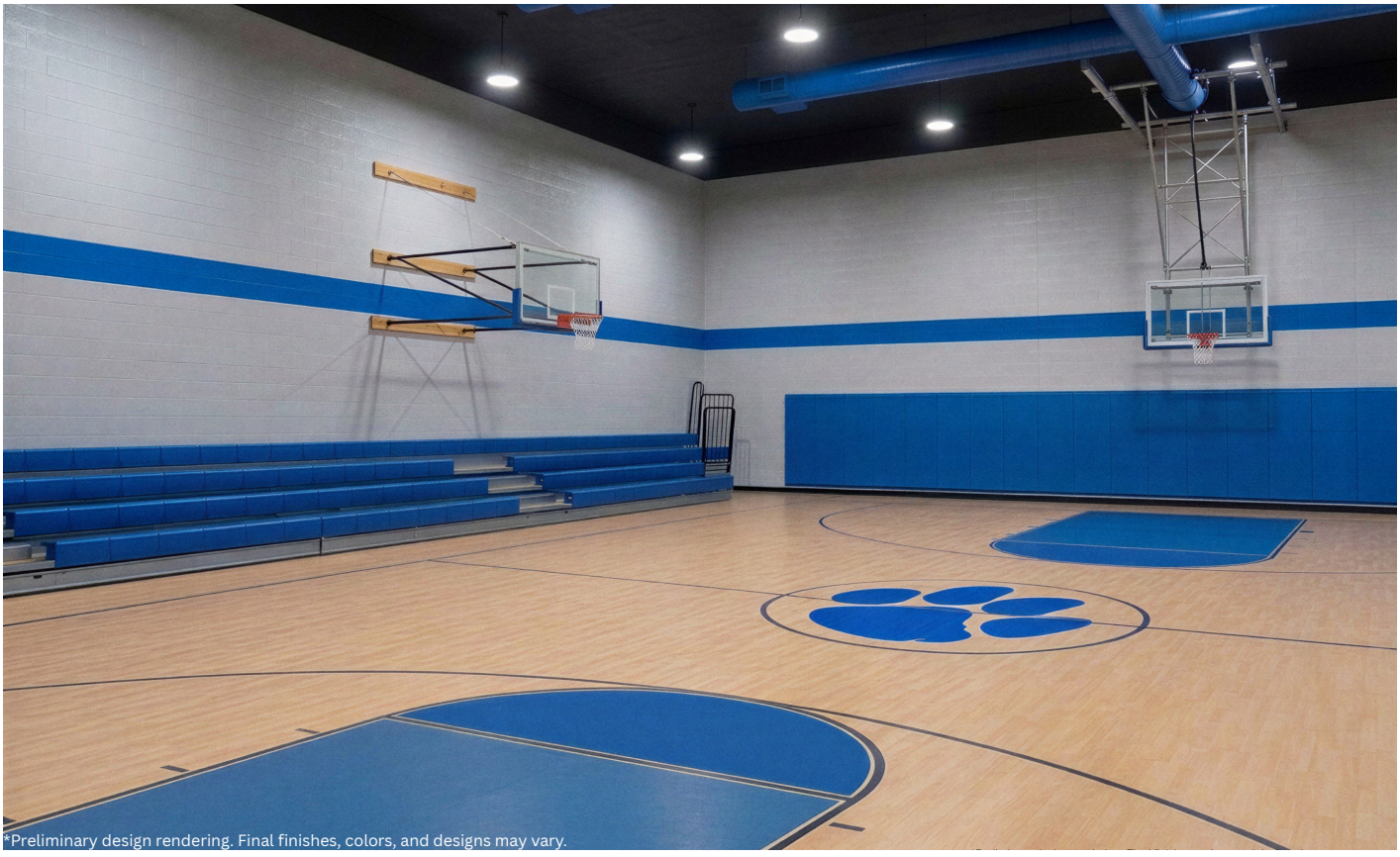
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## A Message from the Board of Education

The Stillwater Township Board of Education is holding a special bond referendum vote on **Tuesday, December 8, 2026**, to fund essential structural stabilization, repairs, and modernizations for the 1988 Gymnasium and Classroom Addition at Stillwater Township Elementary School. Engineering revealed sub-surface soil settlement beneath portions of the 1988 footings, causing the foundation to settle approximately 1.5 and 2.25 inches along the northern and eastern exterior walls, leading to visible interior and exterior masonry cracking. To permanently secure the facility, the referendum addresses these long-standing issues through deep-soil stabilization; utilizing compaction grouting across approximately 100 targeted foundation areas, prior to completing structural wall and surface repairs.

Beyond foundation stabilization, the scope of work encompasses comprehensive facility and infrastructure upgrades designed to benefit both students and community groups. Proposed renovations include fully updated heating, ventilation, and the incorporation of air conditioning (HVAC) systems, fully renovated ADA-accessible restrooms, and new energy-efficient exterior doors and windows. The gymnasium will undergo a complete modernization featuring a high-durability floor, protective wall padding, energy-efficient LED lighting, updated basketball backboards and scoreboards, an automated divider curtain, and new ADA-compliant retractable bleachers.

Passing the referendum enables the district to benefit from **$1,382,142.84 in New Jersey State Debt Service Aid,** substantially offsetting the financial impact on local taxpayers. Proactively completing these repairs through state funding prevents far costlier emergency repairs in the future that would otherwise fall entirely on the local operating budget. Community members have attended meetings on June 29 & September 15, and are invited to learn more at a Special Public Information Session on November 12, 2026, prior to the December 8 vote, with approved construction scheduled to take place during Summer and Fall 2027. Thank you for taking the time to learn more about this referendum and for your continued support of Stillwater Township School.



*Preliminary design rendering. Final finishes, colors, and designs may vary.



# THE CHALLENGE

The original construction blueprints from the 1956 addition state, “push all excavated earth into ravine.” In 1988, that is the location where the gymnasium was constructed. When the addition was built in 1988, cracks began to appear soon after construction. In 1989, the Heikki K. Elo Consulting Engineers investigated the cracking and they recommended the installation of expansion joints and repairs to the hairline cracks. Even though the Heikki Engineers concluded that the cracks were normal due to settling, the cracks continued to appear over time. Due to the district repairing cracks and new cracks continued to appear, the BOE decided to conduct further research and hired ENV Architects and SOR Consulting Engineers who conducted a geotechnical investigation in 2023. They concluded that, “the existing fill does not appear to have been placed and compacted in a controlled manner and has settled unevenly, causing distress to the addition which is appearing as cracks in the walls and floors.” In 2026, the BOE hired Parette Somjen Architects to further investigate the stabilization of the gym structure. In April, French and Parrello Associates confirmed the findings of SOR that the soils below the foundation is “loose to very loose.” Both SOR and FPA recommend to stabilize the structure to prevent further settlement through the installation of compaction grouting.

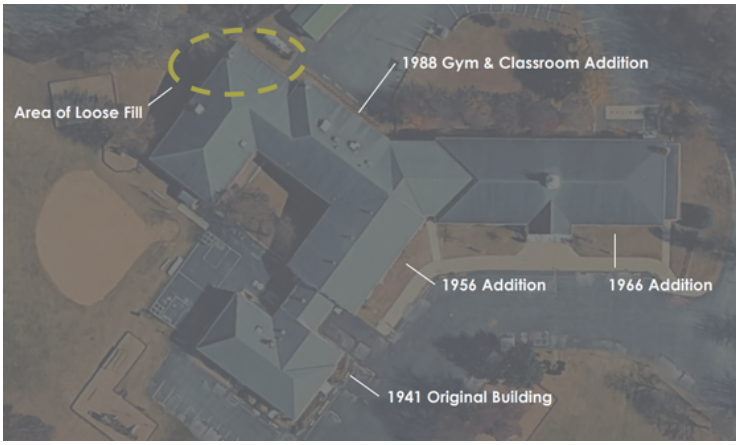



*Fig. 1 - Identifies area of loose fill under the North Eastern Walls*



*Fig. 2 - Current conditions of interior walls*

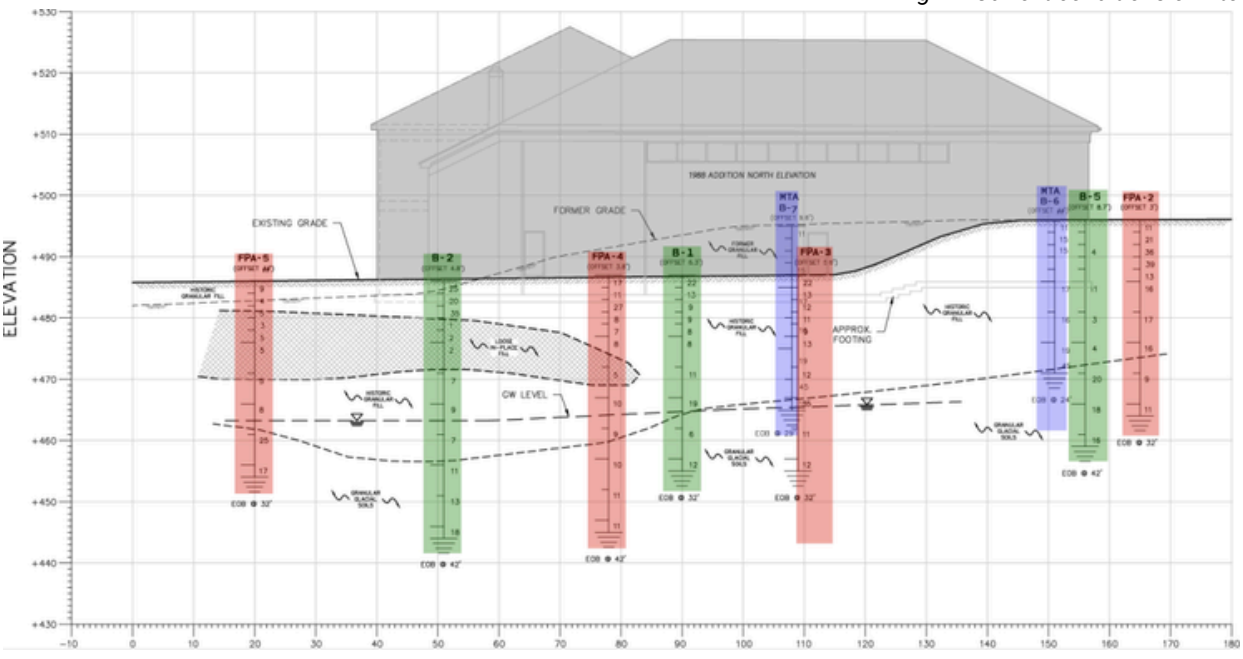



*Fig. 3 - Soil boring results include FPA & SOR findings. Area of loose in place fill located in the shaded area*



# THE SOLUTION

**Compaction grouting** is a ground improvement technique used to densify weak sub-surface soils and stabilize settling foundations. It involves injecting a thick, low-slump, mortar-like grout mixture into targeted soil layers under high pressure. Unlike thin liquid grouts that flow freely into soil pores, compaction grout expands as a cohesive, bulb-shaped mass. As this grout bulb grows, it displaces and tightly compresses the surrounding loose soil laterally and vertically, significantly increasing the soil's density and load-bearing capacity. Because it allows for targeted soil stabilization with minimal site disruption, compaction grouting is widely used to repair foundation settlement, fill sub-surface voids, mitigate sinkhole risks, and relevel sunken structures without requiring extensive excavation.

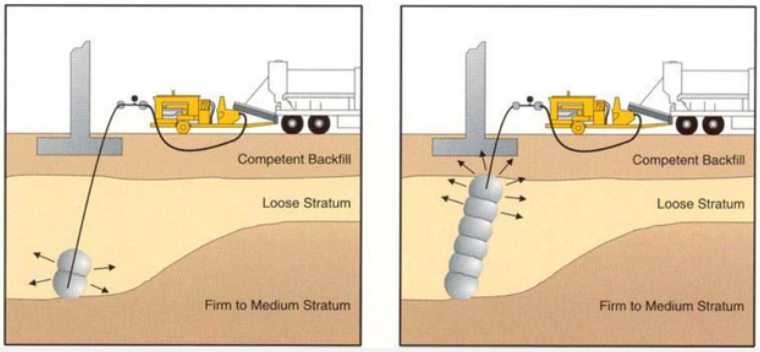



*Fig. 4 - Compaction grouting to stabilize the settling foundation*




*Fig. 5 - The proposed grout locations for stabilization*

## PROPOSED PROJECT TIMELINE

Following the last day of school on June 10, 2027, the construction plan prioritizes classroom spaces by allocating an 8–10 week period during the summer break to complete the required 4–6 weeks of soil stabilization. This work begins with classroom and stairwell soil stabilization from June 15 through July 15, 2027, followed immediately by gym soil stabilization from July 15 through August 31, 2027. Just as students return for the first day of school on September 1, 2027, the project transitions into the final phase of gym repairs and renovations, which runs from August 31 through December 31, 2027.

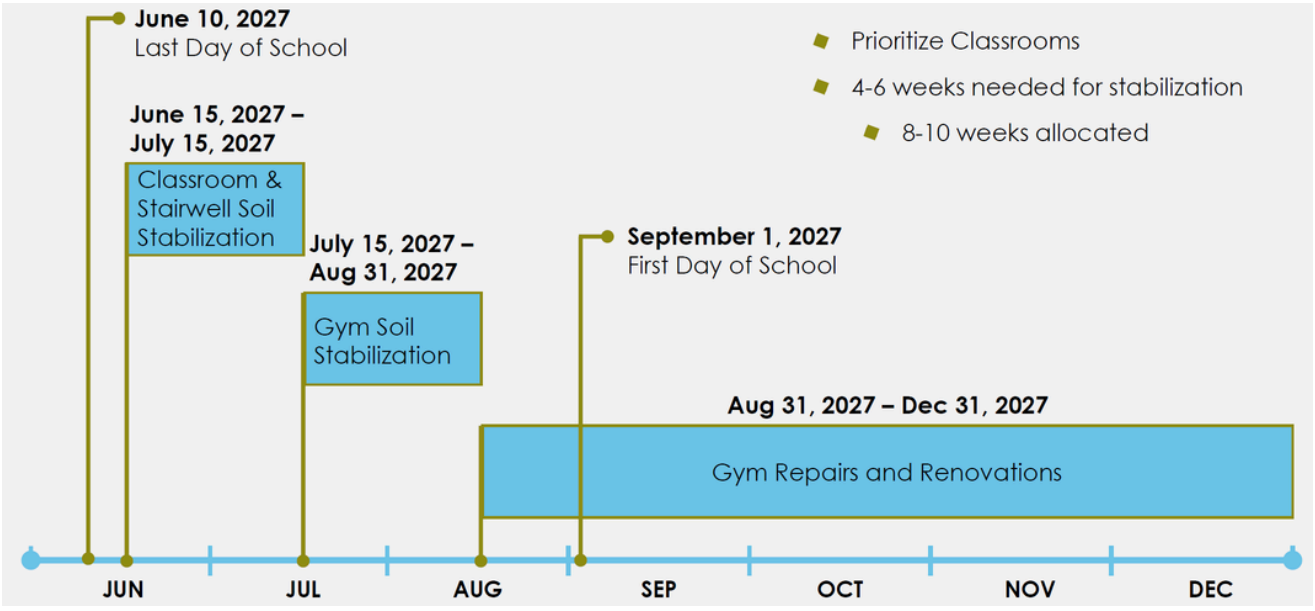



*Fig. 6 - The proposed construction timeline for stabilization, repairs, and renovations*

# REFERENDUM OVERVIEW

**BOND PROPOSAL QUESTION #1**

**BUILDING STABILIZATION & REPAIRS**

100 COMPACTION GROUT AREAS

INTERIOR & EXTERIOR CRACK REPAIRS

**GYM UPGRADES**

FLOOR & WALL FINISHES

WINDOW & DOOR REPLACEMENT

BLEACHERS (ADA COMPLIANT)

HEATING & VENTILIATION UPGRADES

RESTROOM RENOVATIONS

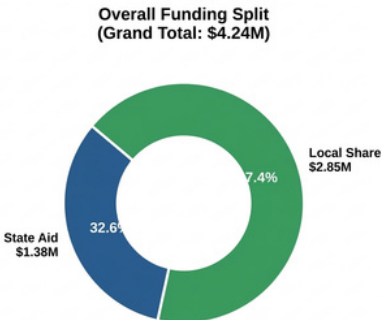
**BOND PROPOSAL QUESTION #2**

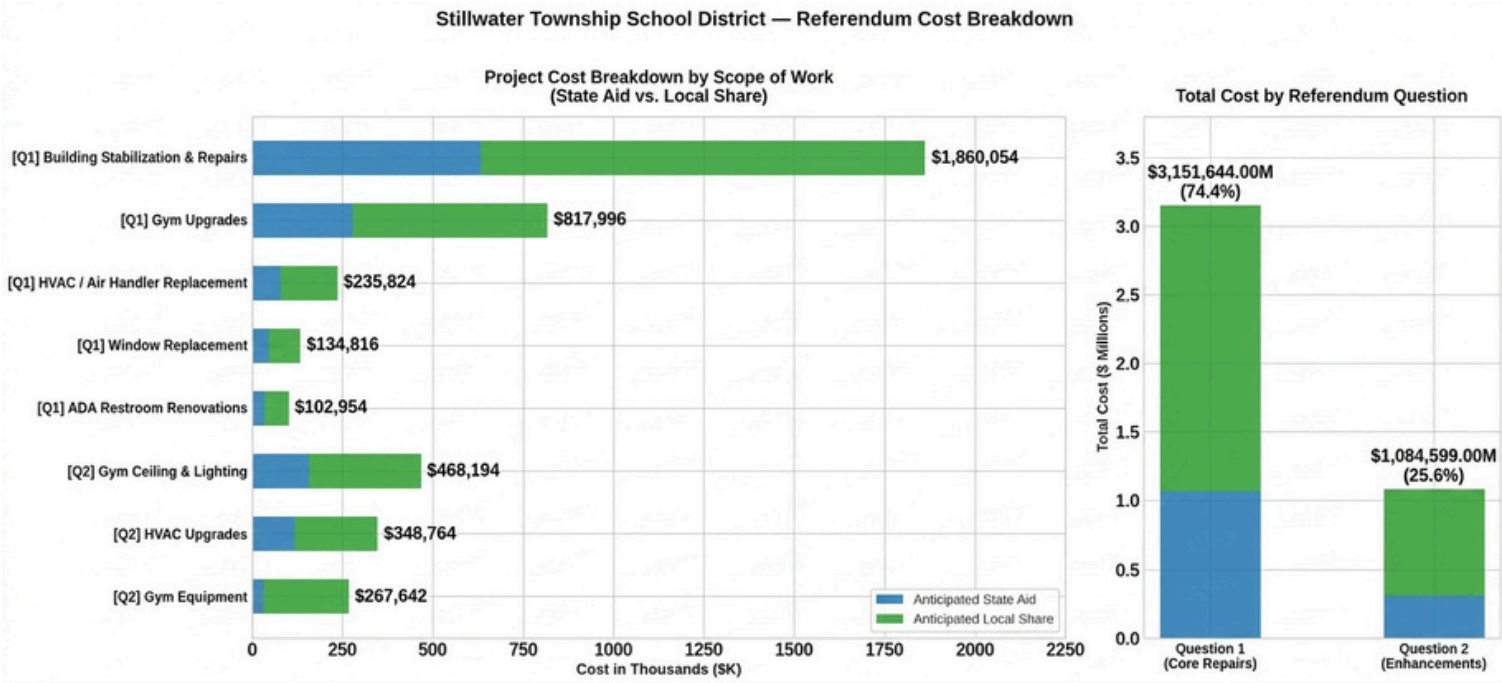
**GYM AIR CONDITIONING**

**GYM CEILING & LED LIGHTING**

**GYM EQUIPMENT**

- BASKETBALL HOOP REPLACEMENT
- NEW GYM DIVIDER
- WALL MATS




## TAX IMPACT

| Question | Per $100 Assessed Value | Per $100,000 Assessed Value | Annual $207,179 Avg. Assessment | Monthly $207,179 Avg. Assessment |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| #1 | $0.038 | $37.60 | $78.04 Annually | $6.50 Monthly |
| #2 | $0.015 | $14.57 | $30.23 Annually | $2.52 Monthly |
| Total | $0.053 | $52.17 | $108.27 Annually | $9.02 Monthly |

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Total Referendum Cost:** The combined proposed expenditure across both questions is $4,236,243.00 ($3,767,000 in direct construction costs and $469,243 in soft costs).
- **State Aid Offsets:** Anticipated New Jersey State Aid covers **$1,382,142.85** (32.6%) of the overall total, reducing the net local share to **$2,854,100.17.**
- **Building Stabilization & Repairs** accounts for 59% of the overall Question 1 budget.
- **Question 1 Allocation:** Represents 74.4% ($3,151,644.00) of the overall budget, focusing primarily on essential building foundation stabilization ($1.86M) and structural gym upgrades ($818k).
- **Question 2 Allocation:** Represents 25.6% ($1,084,599.00) of the project total, funding supplemental enhancements including ceiling/lighting, HVAC upgrades, and new athletic equipment.

# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**#1 What is debt service aid?**
Debt Service Aid is a state-funded financial assistance program designed to offset the cost of school district capital construction, renovation, and infrastructure projects. When local school districts issue municipal bonds to finance major building improvements, the state pays a designated percentage of the annual principal and interest payments (debt service) over the life of the loan.

**#2. How much of this referendum qualifies for debt service aid?**
100% of Question 1 will receive debt service aid which is .34 cents on every dollar spent. The large majority of Question 2 qualifies for debt service aid.

**#3. Why does the BOE feel it is important to install HVAC in the gymnasium?**
The original heating and ventilation equipment serving the 1988 gym wing has reached the end of its functional life cycle and requires full replacement. The gymnasium is a primary venue for physical education, school-wide events, performance activities, and local community groups. Adding air conditioning prevents extreme heat and excessive humidity, ensuring the space remains safe, comfortable, and usable during warm spring, summer, and early autumn months. Funding the heating and ventilation replacement in Question 1 ($235,824.25 total) and full HVAC upgrades in Question 2 ($348,763.50 total) through the bond referendum secures $198,759.84 in state debt service aid. Replacing failed HVAC units through the standard annual operating budget would instead require local taxpayers to pay 100% of the cost without state funding.

**#4. Why is the vote for the referendum being held on December 8?**
The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) issued its official project approval and Preliminary Eligible Costs (PEC) determination on September 9, 2026. Following state authorization, county election officials and school districts require a mandatory lead time (typically 60+ days) to publish legal notices, finalize ballot language, print and distribute vote-by-mail ballots, and hold required public information sessions. Placing the referendum on the November general election ballot required receiving NJDOE approval sooner; however, state approval arrived nearly a week after that deadline passed. A ballot question any later than December 8, would substantially delay the construction which could lead to higher materials and labor costs, essentially driving the overall costs up.

**#5. Is it possible for money to be returned to the tax payer?**
Under New Jersey school finance laws, if a referendum project is completed under budget, remaining bond funds cannot be used for routine operating expenses (such as salaries or general supplies). Instead, those excess funds must be applied directly toward paying off the principal and interest on the project's debt service.

**#6. Why did the BOE decide to bring two questions to the community?**
Splitting the referendum clearly separates urgent infrastructure needs from broader facility upgrades. Question 1 focuses strictly on critical structural stability, foundation soil grouting, ADA compliance, and basic building preservation, while Question 2 allows voters to decide independently on enhanced amenities like full air conditioning and modernized athletic equipment. The BOE wants the Stillwater Twp. community to have more of a voice in the decision making progress.

**#7. What will happen if the referendum does not pass?**
The sub-surface soil settlement beneath the 1988 gymnasium and classroom footings (which has caused 1.5 to 2.25 inches of movement along the northern and eastern exterior walls) will remain uncorrected. Continued foundation movement will lead to further masonry cracking and worsening structural wear over time. Because essential building stabilization, wall repairs, and aging heating units cannot be deferred indefinitely, necessary repairs will eventually have to be addressed through emergency capital projects or the regular operating budget, forcing local taxpayers to pay 100% of the cost without any state funding. Overall, Stillwater Township will forfeit $1,382,142.85 in New Jersey State Debt Service Aid. Ultimately, any future stabilization projects will carry a significantly higher cost.

**#8. Did the BOE consider a hardwood floor in the gym?**
Yes, the BOE considered a hardwood floor. However, the rubber floor cost was a third of the cost of the wood floor and would require less maintenance, therefore the BOE believes the vinyl floor is a better option for Stillwater Township School and for the tax payer.

**#9. How will the gym upgrades benefit the Stillwater Twp. community?**
A modernized, safe, and fully ADA-accessible athletic facility for student and community basketball, volleyball and PTA events. Featuring energy-efficient LED lighting and upgraded windows, the gymnasium will also serve as a designated township emergency hub, providing residents with heating, cooling, and power-charging stations during local crises. The BOE envisions the renovated gymnasium serving as a shared community hub for local events, youth sports, and civic gatherings.

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# VOTE

## TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8

## POLLS OPEN 6AM-8PM

**For more information visit:** stillwaterschool.net/referendum-information