Referendum FAQs

High School Auditorium

1. **How often is the high school auditorium used and how often does the demand for space exceed the current seating capacity?**
   The auditorium is used on a daily basis during the school day for theater elective classes. It is used on a daily basis after school from mid-September through Thanksgiving, and from mid-January through April 1 for the fall play and the spring musical. The auditorium is also shared between CHS and LAF, and used for school assemblies; band, orchestra, and choral programs; special events; and parent programs. The demand for seating has exceeded capacity at times for the high school musical and oftentimes for Lafayette concerts. The number of students enrolled at CHS exceeded the seating capacity roughly 15 years ago. The High School has also scaled back certain assembly programs because of seating constraints. The High School graduation has been moved to Mennen Arena because there is no suitable indoor space for the ceremony.

2. **If a new auditorium is built at the Middle School, will high school students need to be bused there?**
   High School students involved in the performing arts will not be bused to the middle school for rehearsals and performances. Currently, our High School athletes involved in lacrosse, soccer, field hockey, softball, and fencing all travel individually to Haas Field for their sports. We do not bus these students and we do not anticipate busing our performers.

3. **If performing arts productions take place at the middle school location, will the current high school auditorium still be used?**
   Yes, the current high school auditorium would still be used by both the High School and Lafayette Avenue School for assemblies, smaller-scale rehearsals, theater classes, and other events.

4. **Is there a penalty for not being ADA-compliant in this facility?**
   There is no penalty for being out of compliance from an ADA perspective. However, once the district refurbishes a space or facility, it is required to bring up said facility to compliance. It is necessary to refurbish the high school auditorium, and therefore the facility must be brought up to current ADA and other codes.

Middle School Auditorium

1. **How often is the current Middle School auditorium used and how often does the demand for space exceed the available seating capacity?**
   The Middle School auditorium is used every other day during school for theater electives courses. From early November through the end of February, it is used daily for the middle school production. It is also used for school assemblies, parent programs, and other events. The number of students enrolled at CMS exceeded the seating capacity
roughly 6 years ago. It is not possible to hold the eighth grade graduation ceremony in
the auditorium because of space constraints and a lack of air conditioning.

2. **Will there be parking added to the middle school site?**
   Yes, parking will be added to the site. Currently, the parking lot near the apartment
buildings is not fully utilized. The project would include full utilization of this space.

3. **What are the projected operating costs for the new auditorium?**
   The district will finalize the projected utility and custodial costs of the new auditorium
when the plans for the space are finalized. The district anticipates that the increase in
these expenses would be offset by the savings derived from moving the Board of
Education offices.

4. **Will students be bused from the elementary schools to the new auditorium for
   assemblies and productions?**
   No, we do not plan on busing students to the new auditorium. It is likely, however, that if
there were a modern facility in the district, there would be more interest to hold night
performances for families. In that case, the new auditorium could be used for this
purpose.

5. **What would it cost to simply renovate the current middle school auditorium without
   building a new one?**
   The district architect has estimated the cost of renovating the current Middle School
auditorium to be roughly $4 million. This estimate includes asbestos abatement, new
seating, and updates to the electrical and HVAC systems.

   One of the reasons why it is not ideal to simply renovate the current Middle School
auditorium is that currently there is no space for dressing rooms, storage, set construction,
and so forth. The most effective way to create these kinds of spaces is by building a new
auditorium.

6. **Will the auditorium be rented to “outside” groups? If so, will this pose a security
   risk?**
   The school district currently allows non-school district groups to use its facilities, in
accordance with Board of Education policy. Although it is common for outside groups to
use district gymnasiums, athletic fields, and other spaces, it has been rare that any group
has requested to use our auditoriums. We would anticipate that an updated auditorium
would create interest among local groups to use the space. We do not believe that any
such use would pose a security risk, as we would employ certain terms of use in
accordance with Board policy to the use of these spaces by outside groups. Further, **we
do not allow any of our facilities to be used by outside groups while school is in
session.**

7. **Is there a penalty to not being ADA-compliant in the current auditorium?**
   There is no penalty for being out of compliance from an ADA perspective. However,
onece the district refurbishes a space or facility, it is required to bring up said facility to
compliance. It is necessary to refurbish the middle school auditorium, and therefore the facility must be brought up to current ADA and other codes.

Classroom and Professional Space at the Middle School

1. **Is it possible to add new classrooms by adding an addition on to the school, as opposed to converting the current auditorium space into classrooms?**
   
The most cost-effective approach to building classrooms at the middle school is to either convert the current middle school auditorium into classrooms or to build new classrooms in the field in the middle of the circular driveway (the site of the proposed new auditorium). The district architect has advised that the cost on a square footage basis of either new classrooms or a new auditorium in the field in the middle of the circular driveway would be roughly the same.

2. **Why does the district seek to incorporate new professional office space into this project?**
   
The district has been operating without adequate professional office space for many years, in part because storage and office space throughout the district has been converted into classroom and instructional space. The project as currently formulated would develop enough professional office space to house the current Board of Education offices, the Special Services offices, and some space for other professional work.

   The Board of Education offices were at one time located on the third floor of the Borough Municipal building. The district outgrew that space and began to lease space in the Township Municipal building about seven years ago. In addition to lease payments, the district pays roughly $40,000 annually in utility and other costs at the current site. There is also an employee efficiency loss in having the district offices located at just about the farthest point within Chatham from the schools in the district. Roughly 20 minutes of travel time is lost for any employee who must travel to and fro, or vice versa, a school in the district and the district offices.

   The Special Services building has been located at the small house between the High School and Lafayette Avenue School driveways for a number of years. This is not a professional office space. The district utilizes an unfinished basement, accessible only via a floor hatch, for storage, and also houses two employees in the attic of the house, accessible only via a narrow and steep staircase. There is no dedicated meeting space in the building.

   District supervisors do not have adequate working space at Chatham Middle School. Three years ago the district converted the vestibule leading into a male faculty bathroom on the second floor of the Middle School into a shared office area for supervisors. Storage closets in other schools in the district have been utilized for the same purpose.

   In short, there is a shortage of professional office space in the district because to date all available space in buildings has been utilized primarily for instructional purposes.
3. **Would it be a security risk to have the Board of Education offices located at a school site?**
   No. If the Board of Education officers were located at the site of the current middle school auditorium, the district would utilize a card access system to control entry into and out of the school building. Like now, only school district officials would have access to the school building. Additionally, the plans for the auditorium conversion will include physical barriers between the office areas and the school building.

4. **What percentage of the $3.4 million dollar cost for this portion of the project is allocated to office space?**
   It is difficult to have a precise breakdown of this cost because there are general costs involved in the renovation of this space that are necessary regardless of the use of the space. For example, the asbestos abatement is estimated to cost $200,000. That and similar costs are part of the $3.5 million. On a square footage basis, the majority of the auditorium conversion would be dedicated to new classrooms. Taking into account the general costs and the square footage allocation, the district estimates that professional office space accounts for roughly $1-$1.25 million of this portion of the project.

5. **Why does the district seek to incorporate flexible or community-related space?**
   The district would ideally like to have versatile space that could be used for either classroom purposes or other purposes after school. For example, a lecture hall, a media viewing room, a yoga studio, or some other kind of space that could be used for curricular programs but also for non-school programs would be beneficial. The goal is to create something that would be used regularly by the middle school students, but that would also be attractive to community groups for certain kinds of activities or functions.

**High School Fields**

1. **What is the cost to upgrade these fields with natural grass as opposed to artificial turf?**
   The current estimate for turfing the high school fields is $4.2 million. This cost would be cut roughly in half if the fields remained natural grass.

2. **What would the operating and maintenance costs be if the fields remained natural grass?**
   The district architect and engineer are currently working on comparative maintenance cost estimates for turf and natural grass.

3. **Who would benefit from upgrades to these fields?**
   All high school students taking physical education courses would benefit from the upgrades, as these fields are the outdoor site for High School physical education classes. The High School Marching Band uses this field space every day in the fall. The high school baseball program and the freshman field hockey team are also currently housed at this site. Finally, the proposal would include a multi-use field that could be painted to accommodate other sports, such as soccer and lacrosse. It has been challenging for the
district to offer intramural sports in the fall due to a lack of field space; a multipurpose field could help in this regard.

4. What has been the district’s experience been with turf fields? How long do they last?
The turf fields at Cougar and Haas Fields were installed originally in 2006 and replaced in 2014. The level of use on these fields was especially high in the initial years, prior to the turfing of other fields in town. The district has contracted with the manufacturer to provide maintenance to the new fields to ensure maximum field life. Due to less use by community groups, it is the district’s expectation that the current Cougar and Haas turf fields will last at least ten years. The cost of replacement is significantly less than initial installation because the drainage and water management systems are already in place.

Cougar Field
1. Is there a penalty to not have ADA-compliant bleachers or other features at this site?
   There is no penalty at present, but if the district were to replace the bleachers, they would need to be brought up to code. The bleachers must be replaced and therefore they must be brought up to current ADA and other codes.

2. Why is it necessary to re-build the concessions stand?
The concessions stand is very small and does not have updated electrical at present.

3. Can a paved parking lot be considered as part of the project?
   Due to environmental considerations, it is cost-prohibitive to pave the lot. However, the project proposal includes other upgrades to improve the traffic flow and parking in and around the lot.

Elementary Classrooms
1. What are the projections for future district enrollment?
The most recent demographic projections call for a decline in enrollment due to falling birth rates in Chatham. However, the demographic report commissioned two years ago predicted the same thing, and the decline has not materialized. The experience of the district has been that demographic reports calling for declining enrollment have not held up. Should the enrollment in fact decline, additional classrooms would better position the district to consider additional programming.

2. Will new classrooms be used for full-day kindergarten? If the classrooms are not used for kindergarten, will they be utilized?
The new classrooms will not be used for full-day kindergarten at the current time. There are currently other demands on school facilities that would benefit from additional classroom space. For example, some of our support programs (like Basic Skills Instruction or Resource Center) that currently share classrooms or are held in other spaces would be accommodated in new classrooms.
3. If the classrooms are not used for kindergarten, will they be built with bathrooms so that they may be used in the future for kindergarten?
   Yes. The initial plans for the classrooms include bathrooms so that there is maximum flexibility with regard to future use.

4. Will eight additional classrooms be enough to handle future enrollment increases, the consideration of full-day kindergarten, or the consideration of other additional programs?
   The district estimates that six to eight classrooms would be sufficient to meet current needs and accommodate unforeseen enrollment increases. If district enrollment remains flat or in fact declines as projected, additional classroom space would better position the school district to consider the addition of new programs, such as full-day kindergarten.

5. If the classrooms are built, what would be the next steps toward implementing a full-day kindergarten program?
   Due to the operating costs associated with new programs and current New Jersey laws and regulations governing public school finance, it would likely be necessary to increase the operating budget through a second question in order to implement full-day kindergarten or any other program involving additional staff and resources. If new classrooms are in fact approved and built, the Board of Education would be in a position to consider these kinds of program improvements.

6. Can the district build “up” on existing facilities so that the footprint of the buildings remains unchanged?
   Putting additional stories on school buildings is more expensive than adding on to the footprint. Washington Avenue School in particular would prove costly to expand vertically because at present it is exclusively a one-story building.

Other
1. What are the anticipated increases to operating costs that would arise from these projects?
   The operating cost increases would arise primarily from utilities costs in the new classrooms and the new auditorium, and custodial costs for maintaining same. The district projects these costs to be less than the savings resultant from the move of the Board of Education offices.

2. What savings will be realized from the re-funding of the district’s current debt?
   The refunding will save approximately $3.8 million dollars over the life of the bond. The annual tax relief for an average-assessed home in the Borough and the Township is estimated to be $30 and $33, respectively.

3. Will the new auditorium be rented to outside groups? If so, what are the projected revenues associated with the rentals?
The school district already has policies and regulations pertaining to the use of facilities by outside groups. It is likely that the Board of Education would revise these policies if there were a performing arts space in the district attractive to non-school district users. It is not possible to project revenues from these rentals (see below).

4. Are there other area school districts with larger auditoriums that rent out those facilities to outside groups?
Yes, there are other school districts nearby with larger auditorium or performing arts centers. Watchung Hills Regional High School District, for example, completed construction in 2005 on a performing arts center that seats 957. Bernards Township School District has a modern auditorium, built in 2008, that seats 1,000. The cost to rent these facilities varies. The Watchung Hills facility, for example, charges daily rental fees ranging from $250 - $1,000, depending on the user and the length and day of use, plus fees for personnel on an hourly basis to facilitate the activity.

5. Will there be a single referendum question or will the Board of Education split these proposals into more than one question?
The Board of Education has decided to put forward only one referendum question. If the referendum were to pass, all projects would move forward.

6. If the referendum were to fail, would any of these projects be accomplished in some other way?
It would be impossible to move forward with all of the projects without bond financing. The two facilities targeted in this referendum in most urgent need of investment are the high school and middle school auditoriums. If the referendum were to fail, the priority of the school district would be to address these two facilities, possibly by diverting funds from the current operating budget.

7. Why are there not specific curricular or academic programs included in the referendum? For example, if we are building better auditorium spaces, why is there no proposal for additional theater production courses?
A bond referendum like the one proposed would authorize the Board of Education to borrow money in order to finance capital improvements. It does not authorize the Board of Education to increase its general fund for the purpose of staffing or ongoing operational costs. Several of the projects in this referendum will provide better space and more opportunity for new programs, but those programs would have to be included in a future operating budget of the district.

8. How many students would be affected by new auditorium space? Does auditorium space have a direct impact on the academic program?
Yes, auditorium space has a direct impact on academic programs. The current auditoriums were originally built (in 1958 and 1976) precisely because auditorium space is critical for curricular and extracurricular programming, assemblies, functions involving guest speakers, performing arts events, and so on. All students, whether directly involved in the performing arts or not, benefit from adequate auditorium space.
It is difficult to account for “unique” students involved in the performing arts because many students are involved in multiple activities. However, roughly 1600 students in the district participate in some way in the performing arts. This is about double the number of students that participate in a district-sponsored athletic activity at Chatham High School. At Lafayette Avenue School, 150 students are enrolled in a theater elective and 530 students are enrolled in band, chorus, or orchestra electives. At Chatham Middle School, 480 students elect to take band, chorus, or orchestra. More than 100 students are involved in the annual production as either cast or crew members. More than 250 students are also enrolled in either theater or music technology electives at Chatham Middle School. At Chatham High School, nearly 300 students participate in band, chorus, or orchestra. Like at the Middle School, more than 100 students are involved in the fall play and spring musical as cast or crew.

The above figures do not take into account the hundreds of students involved in music or theater at the K-3 level, both in district curricular programs and PTO enrichment programs.

9. Why is the district not seeking to address building envelope improvements, such as new roofs or windows?

The district is in the process of taking advantage of an Energy Savings Improvement Program sponsored by the State of New Jersey. It will enable the district to finance capital projects through the energy savings derived from those projects. These infrastructure-related improvements will be the target of the ESIP.

10. Why is the district not seeking to increase the size of the high school or other cafeterias in the district?

The 1998 referendum included plans to increase the size of the high school cafeteria, but it was defeated by the voters. The high school schedule has changed since that time and the enrollment of the school has nearly doubled. It is not possible to increase the size of the high school in any way that would accommodate even close to the total school population. There is always available seating during lunch at the current time by virtue of the seating available in the cafeteria and the picnic tables set up in the gymnasium. In terms of other school buildings, there is little if any space in most of the schools to increase the cafeteria size. It is the district’s determination that the projects proposed in this referendum are more important with respect to academic impact than the expansion of cafeteria space.