

COCC is out to educate voters about bond's value

Proponents of the \$42M bond stress cost, need, benefits after a similar measure failed last fall

By [Erin Golden](#) / *The Bulletin*

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With less than three weeks to go before the Nov. 3 election, Central Oregon Community College leaders, students and other supporters are ramping up the campaign for a \$41.58 million bond that would help pay for new facilities in Bend, Redmond, Prineville and Madras.

When most residents receive their ballots — likely Saturday or by early next week, as they are being mailed today — the COCC bond will be the only issue up for a vote.

Organizers of the bond campaign said they are using a grass-roots strategy, speaking to community groups, canvassing in local neighborhoods and putting up hundreds of yard signs. Terry Link, a COCC student government member working on the campaign, said he's hopeful the efforts will capture the attention and support of voters who rejected a similar bond measure last fall.

Link said bond supporters are working hard to put out a simple message about how much people would have to pay and why the college needs the help.

“People were consumed with a huge presidential election, a hotly contested senatorial seat, hotly contested state campaigns with lots of money, lots of ads, and we got lost in the shuffle,” he said. “But the message of less than \$2 a month for the average homeowner, that's what we're focusing on now.”

The bond would cost property owners about 12 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value, or about \$24 per year for a home assessed at \$200,000. If it passes, the college will also be able to use \$11.47 million in matching state funds earmarked for capital projects.

COCC President Jim Middleton said the largest project the bond would help is the construction of a new health and science building on the Bend campus, which would cost an estimated \$35 million to \$40 million. The new building would open up space in popular health career programs, including nursing, and dental and medical assisting.

Over the past two years, the number of students attending COCC has increased by about 45 percent, making it the fastest-growing community college in Oregon. As a result, the college has struggled to provide enough classrooms and teachers to satisfy the growing demand.

“It’s just not in the DNA of a community college to turn students away,” Middleton said. “It’s been very hard for us to say to individuals that there is no more room.”

Other new facilities that would be built if the bond passes include a \$12 million technology education center in Redmond and new educational campus facilities in Madras and Prineville, which Middleton said will likely cost between \$750,000 and \$1 million each. In addition, some existing buildings on the Bend campus would be renovated for additional lab and clinic space for health career classes.

Middleton said most of the construction would be completed over the next couple of years.

Though bond supporters are reaching out to a variety of groups in the community, they are particularly targeting businesses, said Charley Miller, the vice chairman of the COCC board and the head of the bond campaign. Miller said he and others have been reaching out to business leaders about how more job training at COCC could have a positive impact on the local economy.

“The need has been established in Bend and the region,” he said. “You see us busting at the seams in record enrollment and having to shut off enrollment, but people are really flocking to COCC seeking training and retraining and credit courses.”

Link said most of those conversations have been positive, and the bond backers have received the endorsements of several local business and economic development groups.

“The secret to our success so far has been one-on-one conversations with people in the community, and businesses have been wholly supportive of us,” he said. “They understand a well-educated work force is a work force that’s going to stay around.”

Link said he doesn’t know of any organized opposition to the bond, another factor that has helped boost his group’s efforts.

Brenda Pierce, a student government member working on the campaign, said many students are reaching out with the help of social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, and are also planning large canvassing campaigns and events like a campaign kickoff party scheduled for next Thursday afternoon at COCC.

“We’re really optimistic,” Pierce said. “This is such a nonpartisan effort. There are students that are coming together and community members coming together that wouldn’t normally come together in a political campaign.”

Erin Golden can be reached at 541-617-7837 or at egolden@bendbulletin.com.