

What do you think of the COCC bond measure?

Local residents give their thoughts on COCC's second attempt to bring higher education to Prineville

By [Jason Chaney](#)

Whether or not a Central Oregon Community College (COCC) campus will be built in Prineville may hinge on the success of their latest bond measure.

The measure will be the only item on Crook County's upcoming November ballot.

The 2008 measure, which included a variety of upgrades — including a campus building in Prineville — failed last November. However, COCC did not give up on it, tweaking the measure and putting it before voters once again.

When it comes to voter support in Crook County, residents appear to like the idea of a college presence in the community.

"Any educational thing they can get into Prineville, they need," said Crook County resident Suzon Schulz, an artist-in-residence painter. "Education means jobs."

For stay-at-home mother Wendy Slawter, who grew up in Prineville, a local college building would be an asset in the community.

"I think it would be very important to have (a college) in town," she said. "It's a great opportunity for our high school to easily access college classes."

Other residents like the idea of a local campus, but on the condition that it creates job growth.

"I think the city of Prineville needs something that stimulates jobs," said Apple Peddler general manager Frank Shreffler.

Slawter similarly would like a college campus to give local employment a boost. However, she is concerned that a building in Prineville may not guarantee more local workers.

"The overriding concern is are we training people who will leave?" she said. "What are we doing to bring jobs to Prineville?"

While Shreffler wants something to stimulate jobs in Prineville, he does not think a local college campus would do that.

"I'm not against having a college here," he said. "But this doesn't seem like it would fix our (unemployment) issues."

Some people, though they support a college presence in the community, have concerns about how much the bond would cost taxpayers. According to the bond language, property owners would be taxed about 11 cents per thousand dollars of assessed property value per year. For instance, a home assessed

for \$100,000 would receive a tax increase of about \$11 over a year, or 92 cents per month.

For Schulz, the tax increase is difficult in this economy, but ultimately worth it.

“I don’t like to see property taxes go up,” she said, “but it seems like a good cause. I think long-term planning is a good idea.”

Slawter, who also supports a Prineville campus, agrees that tax hikes are tough to swallow.

“It’s an awful time to ask for more money,” she said.

At least one Prineville resident, Jerry Hensley, who is now retired, does not feel any tax increase, for a college campus or otherwise, is beneficial.

“I think any time you try to raise the taxes (a ballot measure) is going to go down,” he said. “A lot of people here aren’t working anymore. What they need to do is get some work here.”

Along with the cost to taxpayers, it is likely that if the bond passed, it would still take two years or longer before the Prineville campus would be built. Various upgrades to the Bend and Redmond facilities and the construction of a Madras campus are included in the same bond measure, and have priority due to time constraints.

“I think it’s a good idea,” said retired retail clerk Pat Bell, of Prineville. “It’s important. I’d like to see more programs.” However, for her the wait is a greater concern than the cost. “I’d like to see them come here first,” Bell said. “I don’t have any complaint about the property tax (increase).”

For Crook County Commissioner Ken Fahlgren, the benefits of a COCC building in Prineville outweigh the cost.

“(The tax increase) is so small. It would be such a benefit,” he said. “The bond is going to be able to give us a fast track (to a local college presence).”

Not only does he feel the community needs a local college building, he believes that Crook County needs it more in this economy.

“I don’t think anyone should be against this,” he asserted, “especially with the tough times.”