College bond to fuel success, changes

Clackamas measure bankrolls projects to upgrade, expand

Chemistry instructor Nick Hamel has got a stockpile of ideas just waiting for the money to make them happen.

“There’s nothing I would say is really high-tech in here,” says Hamel, opening the door to his 1982 chemistry lab in the Pauling Center at Clackamas Community College’s Oregon City campus.

The chemistry instructor, who started at the college in 1999, has dealt with out-of-date and unsafe equipment for years. The hoods where six people are forced to stand shoulder-to-shoulder as they conduct experiments on Bunsen burners; the eye-level shelf that does nothing but get in the way of his students’ learning; and the emergency shower with no drain sitting in the corner next to the refrigerator — these are just some of things he would like to see gone.

“It’s not updating for the sake of updating,” Hamel says of the college’s $90 million bond request to taxpayers this Nov. 4. Ballots arriving to Clackamas County residents — excluding those outside the college’s special district in the Lake Oswego, Boring, Damascus and Sandy school districts — will list it as Measure 3-447.

Hamel just might get his chance this go-around. After voters defeated a more ambitious 2011 bond request, CCC officials spent two years in a information-gathering project called Imagine Clackamas. More than 1,500 people in the CCC community responded to an online survey; 750 high school students and others participated in face-to-face surveys and more than 100 business professionals took part in focus groups.

The resounding message the CCC board heard?

“Keep it cheap,” says Gregory Chaimov, a Milwaukie attorney and board chairman.

They listened. This year’s bond request keeps the tax rate at its current 19 cents per $1,000 of assessed property value, or about $38 a year for the average household.

Clackamas County Business Alliance Executive Director Burton Weast says that thoroughly impressed his board, which voted unanimously to support the measure.

“We’re businesses, so we’re all about the services — which we’re very happy with — and the cost — which we’re very happy with,” Weast says.

The measure faces no organized opposition and enjoys broad support from the community, including the Board of County Commissioners.

The only dark note in the symphony seems to be that the $111.8 million in revenue that the college hopes to get in...
November is far distant of the $155.2 million it says it needs to maintain its buildings.

A 2013 Facility Condition Assessment put in perspective the magnitude of the projects the college is facing, such as $14.1 million to resurface its parking lots and $9.6 million to upgrade its heating and cooling systems.

“‘You have to balance competing priorities,’ said Jim Huckestein, CCC’s vice president of College Services. Chaimov says the board is tied to public opinion. ‘We try to be responsive to what the folks want us to do,’ Chaimov says. ‘If there’s a clamoring in the community in eight years for something different, we’d probably work pretty hard to make that happen.’

The bond will be supplemented with $21 million in other funding sources, including $16 million in matching grants from the state.

The funding will focus on three main projects.

First, a new 53,000-square-foot Industrial Technical Center that would dramatically upgrade and replace the college’s facilities for automotive, manufacturing, welding and renewable energy sciences.

CCC President Joanna Truesdell says she wants the college poised to offer cutting-edge instruction for the growing electric car manufacturers. “We can’t even entertain those conversations — they’re very interested — with the type of facilities we have now,” Truesdell says.

Touring around the machine shop, the college president says the high-tech machines employees are expected to master now — such as a multi-access milling machine or a computer-aided design system — were inconceivable when that building was built in 1970.

“It doesn’t support anything you could imagine today,” Truesdell says. CCC has a partnership with Gosiger machine tool designers to keep a sort of working showroom of its latest equipment.

The second project is a total tear-down and replacement of a 61-year-old building on the Harmony Community Campus. The former middle school is falling apart, with myriad maintenance issues such as rot and wear. The proposed 43,850-square-foot facility would expand classroom space and allow the college to offer full two-year degrees at each of its three campuses.

Truesdell says the additional space is needed to be able to offer required classes more consistently, particularly for those who are using the college to transfer to a four-year university.

CCC students “do well upon transfer,” Truesdell says. “We could do better.”

The final project the bond would fund is a new 18,355-square-foot science lab facility, Hamel’s dream. The addition would expand DeJardin Hall with five state-of-the-art facilities for chemistry, biology and microbiology instruction.

Hamel yearns for group work spaces, updated equipment and a lab without numerous safety hazards.

“This has come around in the past,” says Hamel, “and, by golly, I’d like to see it come to fruition.”
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