Community colleges belong to the community. They provide programs local businesses rely on for workforce needs. They offer education and job training that qualify students for family-wage jobs or transfers to a four-year university.

In 2016, we will celebrate the 50-year anniversary of Clackamas Community College with a better understanding of community values and greater responsiveness to what the community members want from its local college.

During the last two years, Clackamas Community College has engaged community members in Clackamas County through a process called Imagine Clackamas. This process helped the Clackamas Community College administration and board understand what students and community members value about its college and where the areas of improvement are.

We heard from more than 2,000 people through surveys and focus groups. Their input helped us understand what our community wants from Clackamas Community College. The results gave us clear goals that will carry us forward from this anniversary milestone.

Eighty-four percent of survey respondents rated Clackamas Community College excellent or very good. What that tells us is that we don’t need a massive overhaul; we need to make adjustments and add programs. We need to deliver the same quality programs and expand our offerings.

We confirmed that our greatest strengths are high-quality education, local campuses and affordable classes. We learned that some of the greatest barriers for student success can be fixed fairly quickly and some will require more effort from all of us.

The faster solutions include expanding the shuttle schedule and adding stops at Harmony Campus. We have already addressed this barrier.

Other challenges will take a little more time. In the coming months, we will share our plans for a bond proposal that will help Clackamas Community College evolve to meet a job market that has changed significantly over the last 50 years.
We know that employers want students trained on modern equipment for high-demand, hard-to-fill careers, such as nursing, engineering and manufacturing. We know there is a need for skilled workers in trades and apprenticeships, such as electricians, plumbers and welders.

Our plan is to ask voters to approve a bond measure in the November 4, 2014, election that would provide new and updated training facilities for students in these fields.

The proposal is under development, but we expect it to include a new industrial and technical learning center with labs and classrooms that will benefit electronics, automotive, manufacturing, welding and skilled trades. It will also provide modern equipment and facilities for training in high-demand careers, including healthcare, science and engineering, and it would replace the aging building at the Harmony Community Campus with an updated workforce development and training facility.

Imagine Clackamas was an opportunity to listen to our community. We heard what students, community members, business owners and our own staff said they want from their community college, and we will make every effort to provide it.

As the Clackamas Community College board and administrators go out into the community to share plans for this bond, we want to express our thanks for helping us shape the future of Clackamas Community College, our community’s college.

-- Greg Chaimov, vice chairman of the Clackamas Community College Board of Education. He represents zone 1, which includes the city of Milwaukie

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