

September 2021

City of Salem

Infrastructure Bond Focus Groups



Prepared by **DHM Research**

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Introduction & Methodology

1

During September 2021, DHM Research conducted two focus groups with Salem likely voters. The purpose of the focus groups was to understand voters' reactions and opinions to a potential bond measure and to gain insights into priority spending areas.

Research Methodology: The focus groups consisted of 20 Salem voters and were held on Zoom from September 1-2, 2021. Participants had voted in at least two of the last four elections. Within each focus group, efforts were made to recruit a sample that reflects demographics of Salem's likely voters by age, gender identity, political affiliation, race and ethnicity, education level, and home ownership. See Appendix A for complete participant demographics.

Statement of Limitations: The focus groups were led by professional facilitators and consisted of written exercises and group discussions. This kind of qualitative research is especially helpful for cultivating an in-depth understanding of complex issues.

This report highlights key findings from the focus groups. Each section reviews a major topic from the group discussions and includes representative quotations, as well as evaluative commentary. The quotes and commentary are drawn from both written exercises and transcripts produced from recordings of the group discussions. The referenced appendices provide the complete responses to all written exercises.

DHM Research: DHM Research has been providing opinion research and consultation throughout the Pacific Northwest and other regions of the United States for over 40 years. The firm is nonpartisan and independent and specializes in research projects to support public policy making.

DHM Research believes we have the responsibility as a company and as individuals to help build a more equitable workplace and world. We seek to better understand historical and continued imbalances of power and take care to consider them in our research and our workplace. We pursue ongoing learning to expand our perspectives, aim to develop and conduct more inclusive and equitable research, and do our best to employ equity-informed hiring practices and to create an inclusive workplace. DHM is a certified B Corp.

Summary & Observations

2

Voters believe homelessness and crime are top issues in Salem.

To help understand voters' priorities, and how they relate to this bond measure, we started the focus group by asking them what they think are the most important issues that they want Salem's elected officials to do something about. Homelessness was by far the most mentioned issue. Voters mentioned how these issues affected not only people who are homeless but are impacting all residents. Voters believe that if homelessness were fixed in Salem, it would help improve the city and it would help address other related issues, including crime.

Voters' support for the bond measure increased after learning more details on the bond, particularly that it would not increase property tax rates.

Voters were asked their likelihood to vote yes or no to the \$300 million bond measure a total of four times throughout the focus groups. Initially, they were provided minimal information on the details of the bond. With limited information they were divided on whether to support the bond. Voters were unsure of city's infrastructure needs, concerned about rising property taxes, and some were distrusting of the Salem government.

Voters were then provided additional information on the bond measure and asked if they were likely to vote yes or no on the bond. Each time voters were provided more information about the bond measure, their support for the bond measure increased. Democrats overwhelmingly supported the bond and Republicans split.

Voters attributed this increased support to learning:

- It will not increase property tax rates
- The projects align with their priorities, especially transportation and acquiring land for affordable housing and shelters
- There has been, and will be, community input for prioritizing projects
- Projects will occur over a ten-year period without needing to ask voters for additional funds.

Voters report that road and bridge maintenance and acquiring property for affordable housing should be a very high priority for the bond measure.

Voters discussed the top project priorities for the bond measure. They discussed how infrastructure is needed to bring new business and help future generations want to stay in Salem. In particular, voters reported that road and bridge maintenance and acquiring property for affordable housing are high priorities.

Voters have key questions regarding the bond measure to help inform their decision.

Voters want to know how the City will be transparent about the allocation of funds, which projects are selected versus which projects are not selected, and transparency on progress of projects. Some are also interested in receiving regular updates and communication on the progress of projects, such as updates through the City's website and social media.

Voters are most concerned about adding additional parking spots, rather than if parking is paid or free.

In addition to asking voters about the bond, the focus group took the opportunity to check in with them about parking in downtown. Some voters mentioned how they try to avoid going downtown, as there is limited parking available, and they cannot find a parking space. Others discussed how outdoor dining due to the pandemic is taking many of the parking spaces downtown, which is causing additional issues in finding parking spaces. Overall, voters suggested adding new parking options such as a parking structure but there was not a strong demand to either remove or to keep parking meters.

Key Findings

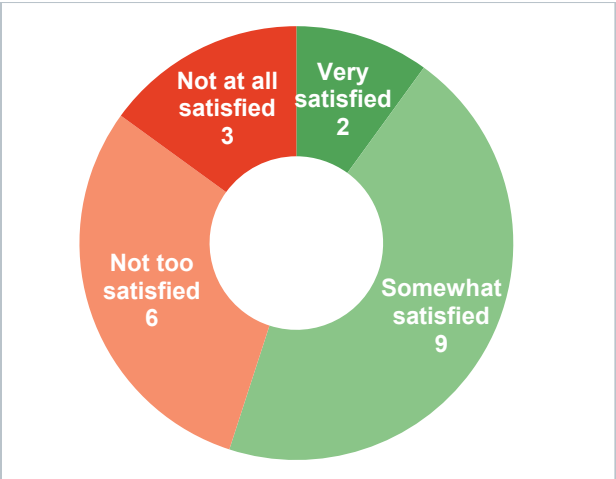
During September 2021, DHM Research conducted two focus groups with Salem likely voters. The purpose of the focus groups was to understand voters' reactions and opinions to a potential bond measure and to gain insights into priority spending areas.

3.1 Satisfaction with living in Salem

Salem voters report they are at least somewhat satisfied with life in Salem.

We asked voters how satisfied they are with the way things are going in Salem today. Just over half (11 of 20) reported that they are at least somewhat satisfied with life in Salem today and two said that they are very satisfied.

Chart 1
Satisfaction with the City of Salem



Source: DHM Research, September 2021

Voters who reported being somewhat satisfied often mentioned that although they enjoy living in Salem overall, they feel there is room for improvement.

“I enjoy living in Salem, and given the chance to move, my husband and I have decided to stay. We love our house, our street, our neighborhood. Although there are many things that we do not like, part of it just part of living in a city, and the other things, we hope will improve.” – Republican, South Salem

At this point in the focus groups, voters had not yet been informed of or asked any questions related to the proposed bond measure. Voters did not mention some of the potential project areas for the proposed bond measure, such as firefighting or parks.

Voters believe the key issues in Salem are homelessness and crime.

Voters who reported being not very or not at all satisfied with life in Salem also mentioned social problems in the city. The most common problems mentioned included homelessness, issues with housing, crime, and issues related to taxes. Multiple voters discussed how these issues are interconnected because the rental options for housing often have salary requirements which many people are unable to meet, including the voters in these focus groups. They also discussed how these issues impact all residents, even those who are not experiencing homelessness or housing issues. For example, one voter said, and others agreed, that they no longer go to city parks because they are often used by people who are homeless.

“The crime rate and drug use seem to be escalating, also the overwhelming amount of apartments being built in established areas are over populating the schools.” – Non-affiliated, North/Northeast Salem

“I am extremely concerned about the homeless situation. I am also frustrated about the traffic downtown and getting into West Salem.” – Republican, North/Northeast Salem

“Besides general social and political strife currently around COVID, Salem has serious issues with livability.” – Democrat, North/Northeast Salem

Voters discussed how life in Salem would feel if homelessness was fixed. While they agreed that not everything would be perfect, they feel that resolving homelessness in the city would both make more people want to live in Salem and help reduce or solve other related issues.

“I think because homelessness has such far-reaching tentacles, I think if you were able to get the homeless situation under some sort of control, I think we’d see a reduction in crime. We would see some business return to the downtown area. Like [voter] said, I think that would be a great start.” – Libertarian, North/Northeast Salem

Other issues mentioned included traffic over the bridge to and from West Salem, senior services, adding public restrooms in Salem, and restoring library services.

COVID-19 is impacting employment and housing.

Multiple voters discussed how the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is impacting both employment and housing for Salem residents.

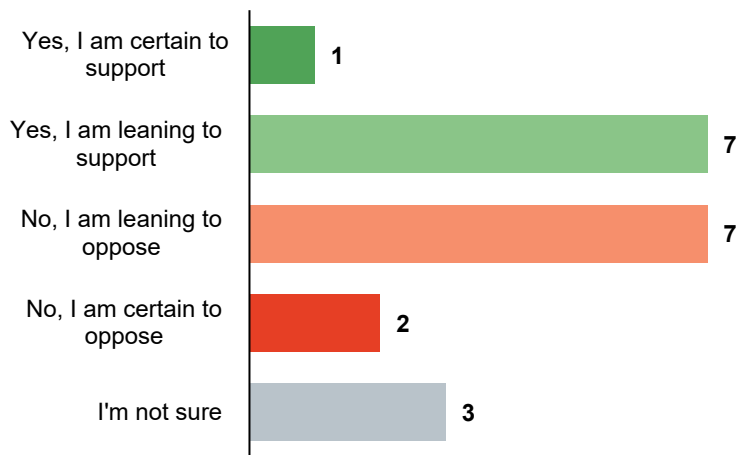
“I’m talking about, for starters, homelessness. We all know how houses are a bit more expensive. Trust me, if you can’t afford it, certainly, you’re going to be homeless. We talk about unemployment, trust me, I think that’s linked with COVID. I had a couple of friends who lost a significant portion of their salary due to COVID. Some even lost their jobs, so that’s contributing to unemployment. We actually had those who were unemployed before then, and now, we have COVID, and some still have to lose their jobs. There’s this increase in crime rates due to the pandemic and the level of unemployment.” – Democrat, South Salem

3.2 Voters' initial thoughts on the bond measure

Voters are initially divided on whether to support the bond measure.

We initially asked voters about their likelihood to vote yes or no to a \$300 million bond measure to maintain and improve local infrastructure including firetrucks and other essential fire apparatus, road and bridge maintenance, parks and recreation, city buildings, and IT services. They were provided minimal information about the bond measure to assess their first impressions.

Chart 2
Likelihood to Vote Yes or No to Bond Measure



Source: DHM Research, September 2021

With minimal information voters were divided with eight saying yes and nine voters saying no. Only three voters were certain of their response, with one voter certain to support the bond measure and two certain to oppose the bond measure. There were no significant political party differences as Democrats, Republicans, and voters who have no political party or some other political party were all represented as supporting, opposing, or not being sure about the bond measure.

These divided opinions on the bond measure may be due to the questions voters have about it. They had questions related to how the money would be spent and allocated, how there will be accountability and updates on results, how this would impact property taxes, and if the bond would be equally distributed to benefit all parts of Salem.

“We would want accountability to see how exactly the monies are being spent. How can we create jobs to support this with entry level jobs? When would we see results, and would there be quarterly updates to show this is being worked?” – Republican, North/Northeast Salem

“What types of road and bridge maintenance? What types of parks and recreation improvements? What is the breakdown of expenditures?” – Libertarian, North/Northeast Salem

“What would the accountability look like to make sure that the money is well spent? This is a very general statement. What would you specifically use the money for? Why are property taxes always the go-to to pay for these things? What other methods of funding have you considered?” – Republican, North/Northeast Salem

“How would the bond be distributed around Salem, i.e.: West, North, South? Would taxes only affect those benefiting?” – Democrat, North/Northeast Salem

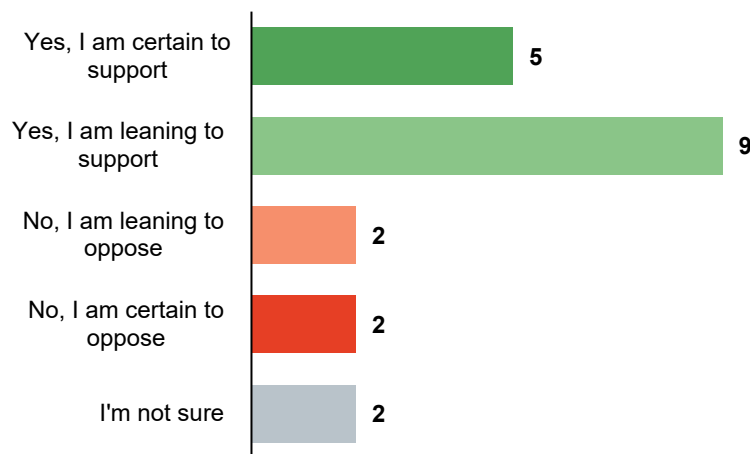
3.3 Voters’ thoughts on bond measure after being provided information

Voter support increased after being provided information on how the bond will not increase property tax rates.

The moderator of the focus groups provided voters with additional information on the bond measure, with a particular emphasis on how the bond measure is funded. Voters were told:

“Like other local governments, the City of Salem takes out bonds to pay for expensive infrastructure. Typically, these bonds must be approved by voters and are paid back with property taxes. Some of the existing bonds will be completely paid back in the next several years. If voters approve this new bond measure, property taxes are not expected to increase because it will replace these older bond payments. If voters do not approve the bond measure, property taxes will decrease, and the city will not make the planned investments.”

Chart 3
Likelihood to Vote Yes or No to Bond Measure



Source: DHM Research, September 2021

In total, 14 voters said they were leaning or certain to support the bond measure after being told more information on the funding of the bond measure. There were two voters who reported that they are leaning to oppose the bond measure and two voters who were certain to oppose the bond measure. Once provided more information, there were differences among political party support and opposition for the bond measure. All Democrats selected that they were either leaning to support or are certain to

support the bond measure. In contrast, Republicans were still divided on their views with two supporting or leaning to support the bond measure and three opposing or leaning to oppose the bond measure.

Voters discussed how learning about the funding of the bond measure helped increase their support to potentially vote in favor of the bond measure.

“My one question was how much it was going to raise property taxes. At first, I said, I lean towards it when I found out that they already had a method in place that wasn’t really raising anything. It wasn’t going to decrease them, but I think that, yes, our infrastructure could handle having some repairs no matter where you’re at in Oregon unfortunately, but there’s a lot of roads around here that some of them go into gravel. Some are, like somebody else mentioned, full of potholes. Sidewalks are iffy in a lot of places. It does make it hard for the walkability.” – Democrat, South Salem

“I have heard from different sources how poor our current infrastructure is, so I am very much for supporting it. I would just like more details.” – Republican, South Salem

“It needs to be done. Our city is growing, and infrastructure needs to keep up with demand.” – Democrat, Northeast Salem

“I have heard from different sources how poor our current infrastructure is, so I am very much for supporting it. I would just like more details.” – Republican, South Salem

However, some voters were still skeptical about the management of funds and the impact on property taxes.

“I think it’s somewhat disingenuous to say that the taxes would not go up. The appraised value of our homes goes up every year. The rate maybe doesn’t change, and maybe this bond measure won’t increase taxes because of the rate, but taxes will continue to go up because assessed valuation will go up” – Democrat, West Salem

“I want everyone to be safe, but the property taxes have gone up so much in the last five years. I feel it’s ridiculous. They have got to come up with the money somewhere else” – Republican, South Salem

Voters want infrastructure improvements that help with safety and the flow of traffic, attract business development, and help future generations to want to stay in Salem.

Voters were asked about their opinions on the most important infrastructure needs for the city. Multiple voters mentioned improving roads, sidewalks, bridges, and bike lanes to help improve traffic.

“Being that I do have to cross the bridge, it’s one of those you just drive and hold your breath and hope you don’t get stuck in traffic and stay on the bridge kind of thing...When I leave my kids at school and I work across the bridge, if something happens, are they going to be safe in their schools?” – Democrat, West Salem

“I would like to see better public transportation and better bicycle access...Bike lanes, paths that are away from the rest of traffic, so you don’t have to battle with fighting against cars that believe bicycles aren’t important...Bicycle paths that are on those main roads are not usually as enjoyable to ride on as a path that goes the same routes, though. So, paths that get across the city from one side to another where you don’t have to be riding right next to traffic.” – Libertarian, North/Northeast Salem

“Salem’s network of bike paths seems to have developed helter-skelter. There are bike paths that start and stop in the middle of nowhere and don’t connect to anything. Liberty Road in South Salem is a major connector, but there’s a huge chunk right in the middle where there are no bike paths and very narrow lanes, and I just refuse to ride on that because it’s a deathtrap.” – Democrat, West Salem

Other voters mentioned that infrastructure needs to be improved broadly and the goal should be focused on attracting new business to the area, along with helping future generations to want to live in Salem long-term.

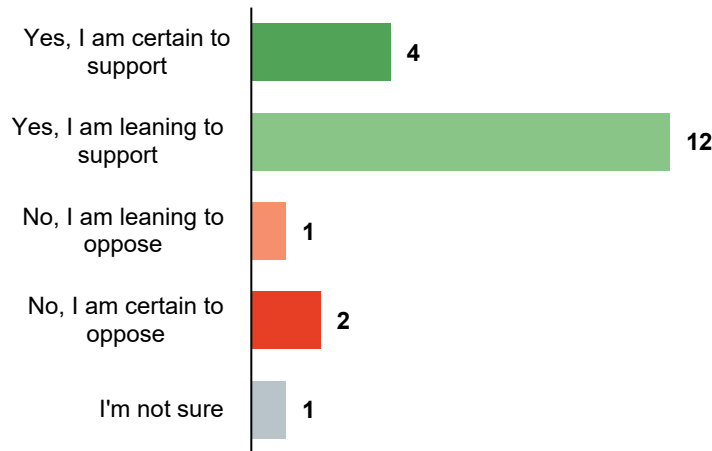
“I think something basically, general infrastructure, I think a lot could be done. I think there’s a lot that could be done. Basically, I feel I want my kids to grow in an environment where it inspires them to do more. I was actually discussing with my 15-year-old the other day. I was talking about what plans he had. He wanted out. He wanted to go to the big city. He wanted to go to New York. I was like, ‘Why?’ His first comment was, ‘This place sucks.’ I’m like, ‘What do you mean by that?’ He talked a lot about the roads, like everyone is saying...I think a lot generally in terms of infrastructure needs to be done to make this place a bit better, talking about jobs as well. That’s a part of the infrastructure. There’s very little or no jobs at all, or should we see high-paying jobs? Making of the city, what I would call a den for investors to come and help. That way, we won’t want to lose anyone. Everyone would want to actually stay and make the city a better place. I think generally, infrastructure, schools, roads, hospitals, you name it.” – Democrat, South Salem

Voters’ likelihood to support the bond measure increased after learning more about the long-term plan and scheduling of projects.

Voters were provided another round of additional information related to the bond measure, with an emphasis on the long-term plan for scheduling and having a set fund for projects. Voters were told:

“Previously, Salem has asked voters to support bonds for specific projects. For example, the recent bond measure for the new police station. This bond is different because it funds several different infrastructure projects over a ten-year period. The City plans to time the projects based on community-defined priorities, scheduled maintenance, and to ensure that property tax rates stay level. This will allow the City to make long-term plans, keep the rate consistent, and avoid coming back to voters several times to ask for new funding.”

Chart 4
Likelihood to Vote Yes or No to Bond Measure



Source: DHM Research, September 2021

The majority of voters continued to support or lean to support the bond measure (4 certain to support, 12 leaning to support). The number of voters who were leaning to or certain to oppose the bond measure decreased after learning about the long-term plan and schedule for the bond measure. Democrat voters were still supportive of the bond measure, whereas Republican voters remained divided.

Voters were more supportive of the bond measure because there was a long-term plan and a focus on community-defined priorities.

The additional information provided to voters helped to increase the number of people who may support the bond measure. Voters want the bond measure to have a clear plan while still preventing asking voters for additional funds in the future.

“It sounds sensible to plan out for several years. I think a good reason to keep some funds flexible is to be able to address unforeseen changing conditions. For instance, the ice storm last winter must have had a huge impact on the city’s budget, and no one saw it coming.” – Non-affiliated, North/Northeast Salem

“I am leaning in support because I like that they have stated that they will base projects on community-defined priorities and to ensure that property tax rates stay level.” – Democrat, South Salem

Despite the increased support for the bond, some voters still had reservations with transparency, the budget allocation, and trusting the government.

“I do think that long-term planning is wiser. I mean, it just makes things more efficient. But I think the trust also isn’t there, the trust from the public trusting their government that they’re going to carry through with this long-term plan and stick to budget.” – Democrat, West Salem

“I really like and agree with a lot of folks’ call for transparency. I feel like a lot of this is that a lot of these are hidden resources, thinks that you don’t normally see. So, I really do feel like this idea that we can’t really gauge what we’re getting is very

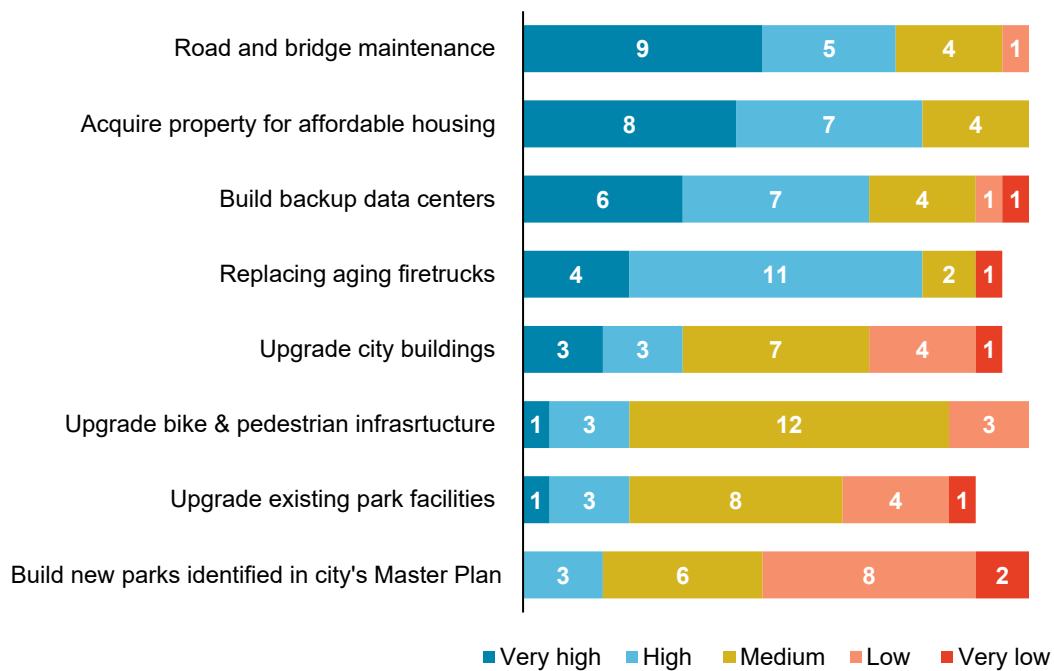
important. And I really think a super-transparent timeline and breakdown of what we're getting for what we would be paying would be super helpful.” – Democrat, North/Northeast Salem

3.4 Voters' opinions on project priorities

Voters report that road and bridge maintenance and acquiring property for affordable housing should be a very high priority for the bond measure.

Voters were asked to rate a variety of potential projects for the bond measure as a very high priority to very low priority.

**Chart 5
Projects to Prioritize for the Bond Measure**



Source: DHM Research, September 2021

Voters most frequently rated road and bridge maintenance (9 voters), acquiring property for affordable housing or shelters (8 voters), and building backup data centers (6 voters) as a very high priority. Replacing firetrucks (15 voters) and acquiring property for affordable housing (15 voters) were however most often ranked as either a high or very high priority.

Roads and bridge maintenance were a very high priority for multiple voters. They discussed wanting to see improvements on streets and deteriorating pavements, making safety improvements with bridges, and adding streetlights to dark streets.

“We’re over in the Northeast, far Northeast, over by Chemeketa. Some of the roads aren’t painted well. You can tell they’re very old.” – Republican, North/Northeast Salem

“One issue that’s been plaguing Salem for a long time is we need another bridge. I know that’s going to be costly, and hopefully it’d be somewhat covered by some federal funds, but Salem has been funneling all the traffic on our one set of bridges for so many years, and it’s terrible during rush hour, especially if there’s some sort of emergency, a wreck, or it’s plugged, and ambulances need to get through. It’s not good. It’s poor planning on the City of Salem’s part over the years in my opinion. This should’ve been addressed a long time ago.” – Democrat, South Salem

Voters rated acquiring property for affordable housing or shelters as another very high priority for the bond measure. However, when it comes to addressing homelessness voters believe that housing is not the only solution, but that issues such as mental health need to be addressed as well.

“I was going to mention that when it comes to affordable housing that’s not necessarily, I think, the answer to the people that you see on the streets that are homeless. I think that’s more mental health. That would be my comment on that. I think affordable housing is more for people that are not looking to survive on the streets.” – Republican, South Salem

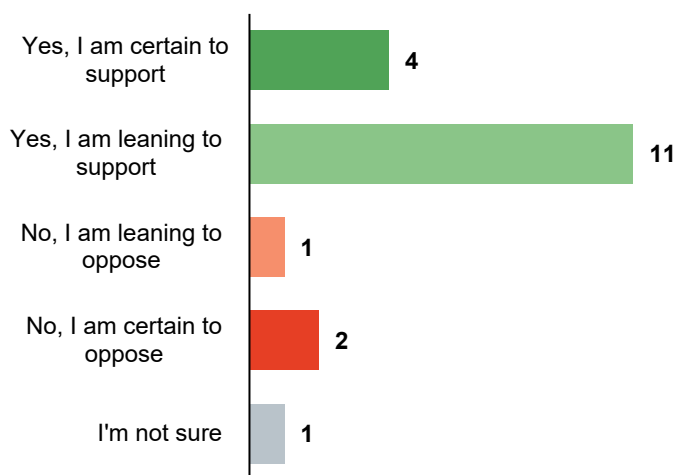
As noted above, bike and pedestrian improvements are important to some voters. However, compared to other needs, they rated lower. Parks were the lowest rated priority.

3.5 Reasons to support or oppose the bond measure

Voters remained likely to vote yes for the bond measure after hearing the various perspectives and information about the bond.

Voters were asked for a final time if they would be likely to vote yes or no to the bond measure. Most voters continued to support the bond measure (15 voters), whereas only three voters were leaning or certain to oppose the bond measure. Democrats and non-affiliated overwhelmingly leaned or were certain to support the bond measure, while Republicans remained divided.

Chart 6
Likelihood to Vote Yes or No to Bond Measure



Having a long-term plan and completing projects without increasing taxes were ranked among the top reasons a person may support the bond measure.

Voters were asked to rate the reasons that some people may support the \$300 million bond measure from very good to a very poor reason. The top three reasons that some may support the bond included:

- The proposed bond measure will allow Salem to make long-term plans to ensure basic maintenance of existing infrastructure is taken care of and that future needs are provided for.
- The proposed bond measure will allow the City to complete necessary maintenance to existing infrastructure and invest in high priority new projects without increasing taxes.
- The priority projects funded with this bond measure will be selected from the City's Master Plan, citizens advisory committees, and robust community engagement.

Voters also discussed their own reasons to support the bond measure. They often mentioned that voters will not be asked for additional funding for ten years, that there will be transparency with where the money is spent, and that having quality infrastructure requires maintenance.

"I think my argument would be that we're going to do this, and you're not going to be asked again for ten years. We're going to have complete transparency about where we're spending it, and this is things that need to be maintained if you want to live in a city that has good roads and good sidewalks and a safety department and everything. It costs money, and we have to spend money on it, and you're really not even going to notice that you're spending it, because it's going to be the same on your property tax bill." – Libertarian, North/Northeast Salem

"The need for this infrastructure boost is real. It's obvious. We all deal with the traffic. We all face issues with fire. For me, the biggest argument was where they talked about the cost of money. Bond rates are at historic low levels. We can get more mileage out of our dollars right now than we have ever been able to do before, and that's not going to last forever." – Democrat, West Salem

"I like the plan now for the future. 'Be prepared.' I would say in a flyer to plan now, and I really like that it would be low interest rates and get the best bang for your money and the long-term planning, but if it also included that we could see what the money was going for." – Republican, South Salem

Addressing the homelessness crisis and finding ways to reduce the cost of housing without creating new property taxes were ranked among the top reasons to oppose the bond measure.

Voters were asked to rank the reasons that some people may oppose the \$300 million bond measure from very good to a very poor reason. The top two reasons that some may oppose the bond included:

- With the rising cost of living, the City of Salem should be finding ways to reduce the cost of housing not creating new property taxes.
- The most important problem in Salem right now is the homelessness crisis. Anything that distracts the city from addressing homelessness is a mistake.

Again, voters also discussed their own reasons to oppose the bond measure. They often mentioned that they pay enough money to the city, do not see enough of the results, and a lack of trust in the government.

“Basically, the fact that’s been taking a lot these past few years. What have they done with it? What can I see with my money that has been spent in the last few years? If you’ve done so much with it, then why would you want to take more?” – Democrat, South Salem

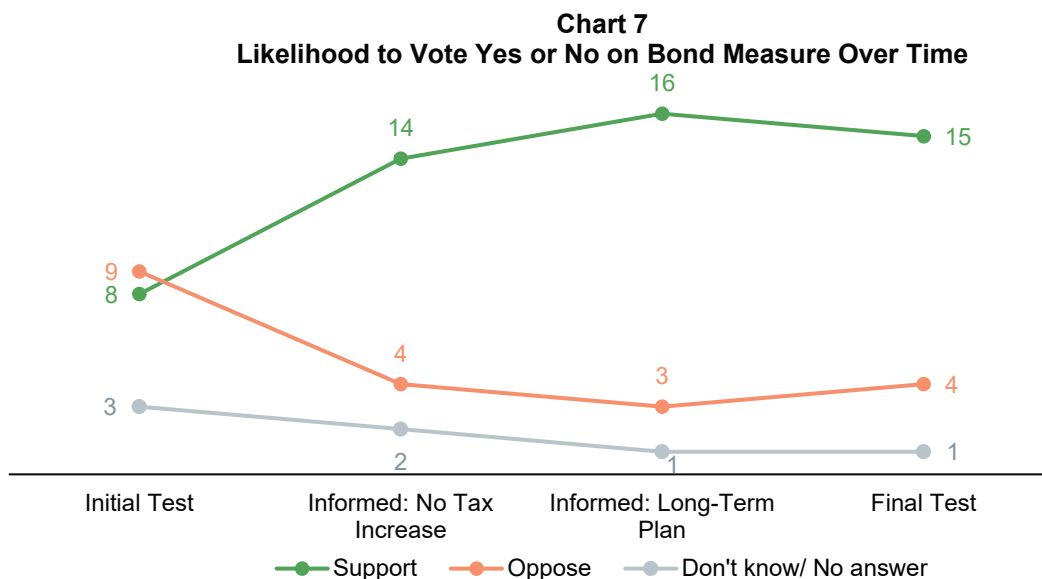
“Well, one of the kinds of popular tactics nowadays is mistrust of the government. So, I would talk about, ‘Oh, you can’t trust the local government, because we don’t know what they’re going to do with this bond issue, and we don’t know if they’re really going to fix whatever they say they’re going to fix,’ and put that kind of scare/mistrust tactic in people’s minds.” – Democrat, North/Northeast Salem

“I don’t know what ‘keep the property taxes level’ means. To me, that’s fancy jargon. Is that really a promise that they’re not going to go up? I just don’t have faith in our government, and it’s not transparent. I want to see what the money is going to be going to. And, you know, I could be dead in ten years, so it won’t matter to me, but I would like to know what the projects are.” – Republican, South Salem

Voters’ opinions on the bond measure changed to support the bond more as they discussed and learned more about the bond measure.

After asking voters four times about their support for the bond measure, each time with more information about it, they ended the focus group strongly in favor. Fifteen voters said that they would vote for a bond measure, while just four were opposed. One remained undecided.

The biggest jump in support was after the second test, when they were informed that if voters pass the new bond measure property taxes are not expected to increase. Additional information helped to affirm their position, and hearing opposition messages did not dissuade them.



3.6 Views on parking

We took an opportunity to ask voters about another topic of frequent discussion in the city: parking in downtown. Voters were asked about parking in downtown Salem to understand if they preferred to continue using meters or to go back to unpaid street parking.

Voters often avoid downtown parking due to the lack of options.

Voters discussed how it is to park downtown, along with how it compares to the past when street parking was free. Multiple voters mentioned how they avoid downtown due to the lack of places to park and how the current outdoor dining is affecting the availability of parking spaces.

“It just sucks. It’s the worst. My husband works downtown, so I’m able to park where his office is at...It’s really nice to have outdoor seating and dining, but then I can’t park. It’s like you’re doing loops. Kind of like in Portland, you’re doing loops upon loops upon loops until you find parking. Yes, you can walk, but as a woman at night, like if you got shopping and it gets late at night, I don’t necessarily want to park really far away. So, yes, they need to fix that. Also, because there’s a lot of businesses that do have parking—my husband’s office does parking, too – but then they don’t share it with other people. You can’t even park there, and they have signs like they will tow your car. This is one on the back of the mall. No one is ever there. No one ever parks there. Why can’t I park there? I will pay; just let me park there.” – Democrat, North/Northeast Salem

“I worked down there three years ago and it was pretty bad. I remember somebody saying that you can’t leave one space and go to another space on that same block. You have to go around the corner. Otherwise, you get ticketed for parking there too much. I think there is a time limit, if I remember right. But since all the outdoor seating, I absolutely agree that takes up so many spaces. Now, if it is something like a structure, they’re going to have people park in and it becomes paid, it needs to be affordable. It can’t be price gouged. That’s my thought.” – Republican, North/Northeast Salem

Voters are more concerned about adding additional parking spots than if parking is paid or free.

Voters were asked about the benefits and drawbacks to paid parking versus free street parking. They discussed how it depends on the location, since both paid and unpaid parking are available downtown. Multiple voters were less concerned about if parking was free or paid, but instead wanted there to be more parking spaces in the downtown area. One limitation of these findings is that only one voter that participated in the focus groups made less than \$25,000 a year. The over half of voters that participated in the focus groups reported their income as over \$75,000 a year. Additional information may be needed to understand residents who are lower income or living in poverty.

“Well, I had an office downtown on State Street, and I parked in paid parking because the unpaid spots you were limited to two hours. I don’t mind paying for parking, as long as it’s reasonable and as long as there is parking available. I think because a lot of restaurants took some of the parking for outside tents due to the pandemic, I think that really hurt, but they’re still up. I think if the city would release that, I think there’s over 120 spaces that are taken up by outside tents right now. In short, I don’t mind

paying for the parking. I think when you have free parking available, unfortunately, a lot of the employees of the businesses take those spots and you really can't enforce that." – Republican, South Salem

"I probably wouldn't go with totally free, but it would be nice to have some free areas available. I know that we were going to go out to eat, and we called it in to have take-out, because there was no way we could find any way to park. Another person and I in the family gathering are limited in our mobility, and we gave up. I'm not even sure if making it paid or not paid is going to solve that problem. There are not enough places to park. Maybe there needs to be parking structures or something. I'm not really sure." – Democrat, South Salem

"When I think of downtown, I think of government areas, capitol, as well, because there's mostly right now where all the paid parking spots are. I don't think paid parking would solve anything for downtown, because most of these people are talking about dinnertime when it's free anyway. We're going out for dinner in the evenings, the parking spots are then no longer a paid spot after 6:00 p.m. or whatever, so I don't think paid will actually solve anything. I know that I've been on jury duty, and you have to park really far away because you can't use the meter spot because you don't know how long you're going to be in there. Around that government area, I think it should all be free parking, yeah. I don't know. I loved Salem when it had all free parking." – Non-affiliated, North/Northeast Salem

3.7 Final Advice

Voters provided their final advice for the leaders in Salem at the end of the focus groups. Their main advice is to provide transparency and updates on projects to voters, to build trust, and to be specific about which projects will be done versus projects that will not be done.

"Number one, trust is actually a strong word. It's going to take years to build trust. It could be shot at an instant. I think I know that a lot of people who actually could hesitate on this bond is basically because of experiences they've had, a lack of trust. I'm going to say, you, the government, you have one shot at this. Don't mess it up. That's all." – Democrat, South Salem

"One thing I noticed it, and it wasn't ever brought up, it says in there that they actually targeted \$2 billion worth of infrastructure repairs that need to be done, but they're only allowing for \$300 million. I would like to know what it is that they're not going to do then to make it so that they can do this." – Democrat, South Salem

"I think the communications. [Another voter] brought up the newsletter. I know other cities will sometimes have a very special section of the webpage that they create, and maybe that can be linked through Facebook and other means where people can follow up online, and that's easy for the city to update and keep people abreast of what they've accomplished, what money has been spent, what money is left to be spent, and there could be an accounting there that's available for people to see, and maybe that would give them some trust too to be able to follow up and see that on the webpage." –Libertarian, North/Northeast Salem

"I would like more information. And I think maybe put a face on it. Like we were saying with the police building, say, 'We're going to get three new fire trucks with this

money, and we're going to repair these four parks.' Be real specific." – Republican, Northeast Salem

**City of Salem
Infrastructure Bond Focus Groups**

**DHM Research
Project #: 01051**

**Group 1; Tuesday September 1, 2021; N=9
Group 2; Wednesday September 2, 2021; N=11**

**Appendix A
Participant Demographics**

Area

Group 1	Group 2
South	North/Northeast Salem
South	North/Northeast
South	North/Northeast
North/Northeast	North/Northeast
South	South
North/Northeast	West
South	North/Northeast
South	South
South	North/Northeast
North/Northeast	North/Northeast
	North/Northeast

Age

Response category	Group 1	Group 2	Total
18–24	--	--	0
25–34	--	2	2
35–44	2	1	3
45–54	3	3	6
55–64	3	2	5
65 or more	1	3	4

Gender

Response category	Group 1	Group 2	Total
Male	3	3	6
Female	6	7	13
Non-Binary or Gender Non-Conforming	--	1	1
Something else	--	--	0

Race or Ethnic Identity

Response category	Group 1	Group 2	Total
White	6	7	13
American Indian, Alaska Native or First Nations	--	--	--
Asian	--	1	1
Hispanic or Latino	1	2	3
Middle Eastern or North African	--	--	--
Black or African American	1	--	1
African	--	--	--
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	--	--	--
Another race or ethnicity	1	1	2

Political Party

Response category	Group 1	Group 2	Total
Democrat	3	6	9
Republican	2	3	5
No political party	2	1	3
Some other party	2	1	3

Education Level

Response category	Group 1	Group 2	Total
Less than high school	--	--	--
High school degree/GED	2	--	2
2-year degree or some college	4	5	9
4-year degree	2	3	5
Post-graduate degree	1	3	4

Income

Response category	Group 1	Group 2	Total
Less than \$25,000	--	1	1
\$25,000–\$49,999	3	2	5
\$50,000–\$74,999	1	1	2
\$75,000–\$99,999	3	3	6
\$100,000–\$150,000	1	2	3
More than \$150,000	1	2	3

Employment Status

Response category	Group 1	Group 2	Total
Employed full-time	4	6	10
Employed part-time	2	--	2
Unemployed: Looking for work	--	--	--
Unemployed: Not looking for work	1	2	3
Retired	2	3	5

Occupation

Group 1	Group 2
Supervisor	IT Help Desk
Auto body repair and paint	Teacher
Business engineer	Credentialing assistant
Teacher	Administration
State of Oregon Security Tech	Elementary School Administrator
Homemaker	Forester for BLM
Substitute Teacher	Customer Service
Real estate broker	Librarian
Customer service	Manager I/DD services
	Stay at home mom

**Appendix B
Written Exercise 1**

How satisfied are you with the way things are going in Salem today: not at all satisfied, not very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, very satisfied?

Response category	Group 1	Group 2	Total
Very satisfied	1	1	2
Somewhat satisfied	4	5	9
Not too satisfied	3	3	6
Not at all satisfied	1	2	3

Why?

Group 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ [Very] No answer ▪ [Somewhat] I feel more can be done. ▪ [Somewhat] I enjoy living in Salem, and given the chance to move, my husband & I have decided to stay. We love our house, our street, our neighborhood. Although there are many things that we do not like, part of it is just part of living in a city, and the other things, we hope will improve. ▪ [Somewhat] A lot of issues that involve the citizenry as a whole have been politicized. ▪ [Somewhat] So far, I see a lot of homeless. ▪ [Not too] Overtaxed. Money not well spent. ▪ [Not too] Issue with affordable housing and the large amounts of homeless. ▪ [Not too] The homeless problem is out of control. ▪ [Not at all] The crime rate and drug use seems to be escalating also the over whelming amount of apartments being built in established areas are over populating the schools.
Group 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ [Very] No answer ▪ [Somewhat] No answer x4 ▪ [Somewhat] Homeless problem and panhandling problem. ▪ [Not too] I am extremely concerned about the homeless situation. I am also frustrated about the traffic downtown and getting into West Salem. ▪ [Not too] Unnecessarily mandates, homelessness, taxes, rental costs. ▪ [Not too] Homelessness, closed businesses, pollution. ▪ [Not at all] Besides general social and political strife currently around COVID, Salem has serious issues with livability. ▪ [Not at all] Homeless crisis, creates unsafe areas, and garbage. Way too high property taxes. Don't like the vaccine mandate for certain occupations. Don't like the mask mandate. Don't like the camera at stop lights even though I do abide by the traffic laws. Do not like the teaching of critical race in our public schools even though I don't have school age children. Do not like the way our government and police let rioters vandalize.

Appendix C

Written Exercise 2

Make a list of the most important issues in Salem that you would like your local leaders to do something about. Place a star (*) next to the most important one.

Group 1

- *The homelessness; COVID; more jobs
- *Help the homeless; the condition of our city; leaders need to represent ALL people and not just those that they agree with politically.
- *Affordable housing; homelessness; drugs; crime
- *Homelessness; stop building on new land; keep our green spaces and surrounding lands; and work on the enormous amount of petty crime happening.
- *Homelessness; filth and garbage; parks are over run.
- *Crime rate; drug use; homelessness; political unrest
- *Homelessness
- *Homelessness on our streets; improving the downtown business environment
- No answer

Group 2

- *Affordable housing; improved environmental protections and sustainability; city planning; affordable and green transportation; more public spaces
- *Homeless; affordable housing; COVID-19 issues
- *Unhoused population; additional bridge to West Salem
- *Homeless people
- *Traffic in/out of West Salem; homeless camps
- *Homeless; panhandling; senior services
- *Pandemic; homeless; education
- *Unnecessary mandates; rental costs; crime
- * Homelessness; unemployment; better access to library services
- *Homelessness; authoritarianism; freedom
- *Houselessness; roads

Appendix D
Written Exercise 3

The City of Salem is considering asking voters to support a \$300 million bond measure to maintain and improve local infrastructure, including firetrucks and other essential fire apparatus, road and bridge maintenance, parks and recreation, city buildings, and IT services. The bond would be paid for with property taxes.

If the election were today, would you be more likely to vote YES to support this bond measure or NO to oppose it?

Response category	Group 1	Group 2	Total
Yes, I am certain to support	--	1	1
Yes, I am leaning to support	4	3	7
No, I am leaning to oppose	2	5	7
No, I am certain to oppose	--	2	2
I'm not sure	3	--	3

Appendix E

Written Exercise 4

Make a list of questions you have about this proposed bond measure.

Group 1

- Who are those to support the bond? Everyone or the elite? What's the contribution per household?
- We already pay high property taxes. Where is that money going? Before I am willing to pay more, I want to know what is being done with the existing money.
- We would want accountability to see how exactly the monies are being spent. How can we create jobs to support this with entry level jobs? When would we see results, and would there be quarterly updates to show this is being worked?
- How exactly would the money be allocated? What are the time frames? More details?
- What does the City of Salem do with all the money they have received up until now? Must we give more money instead of making them budget what they are already given?
- What about the homeless that are utilizing our parks and sidewalks, where they aren't safe to use right now?
- What types of road and bridge maintenance? What types of parks and recreation improvements? What is the breakdown of expenditures?
- I would like to see a detailed plan of expenditures and improvements.
- How much would it increase property taxes?

Group 2

- What would be the impact on taxes rates be? How would the tax rate increase be assessed? What would be the expected outcome on said local services?
- How much of the bond measure is going to support firetrucks and the other essential fire apparatus? What type of IT services?
- What would the accountability look like to make sure that the money is well spent? This is a very general statement -what would you specifically use the money for? Why are property taxes always the go-to to pay for these things? What other methods of funding have you considered?
- What else is included in the bond? How long would the money last/cover the projects? Would the property taxes increase?
- What percentage of the bond would be allocated to the improvements in Polk County? I feel our property taxes are already really high.
- What would the cost be to me? Would the services be equally spread-out over-all areas of Salem?
- These all sound like basic city services, what are our taxes going for now?
- What is happening with the marijuana money?
- I need a lot more details about what that huge amount of money would buy for us, and what it will cost me (and of course all of us).
- How would the bond be distributed around Salem, i.e.: west, north, south? Would taxes only affect those benefiting?
- No answer

**Appendix F
Written Exercise 5**

Here is additional information about the possible bond measure. Like other local governments, the City of Salem takes out bonds to pay for expensive infrastructure. Typically, these bonds must be approved by voters and are paid back with property taxes. Some of the existing bonds will be completely paid back in the next several years. If voters approve this new bond measure property taxes are not expected to increase because it will replace these older bond payments. If voters do not approve the bond measure, property taxes will decrease, and the city will not make the planned investments.

Now knowing this, if the election were today, would you be more likely to vote YES to support the measure or NO to oppose it?

Response category	Group 1	Group 2	Total
Yes, I am certain to support	2	3	5
Yes, I am leaning to support	5	4	9
No, I am leaning to oppose	--	2	2
No, I am certain to oppose	--	2	2
I'm not sure	2	--	2

Why?

Group 1

- [Certain to support] I feel the information now is clearer and more understandable, so I'd support to make the city more fun for everyone and future generations.
- [Certain to support] It is to benefit all of Salem to fix our infrastructure and still keep the same level of property taxes.
- [Lean to support] Taking out the bonds are a good way to handle.
- [Lean to support] I have heard from different sources how poor our current infrastructure is, so I am very much for supporting it. I would just like more details.
- [Lean to support] Some of the money would be given back.
- [Lean to support] While I would love property taxes to go down, I realize it costs money to maintain our city. Doing so without an increase sounds promising.
- [Lean to support] I am skeptical of "...taxes are not expected to increase..." I have seen this before with other bonds presented by other taxing authorities and the bonds have been "replaced" with other measures. There's always a need, it seems.
- [I'm not sure] See previous answer [We already pay high property taxes. Where is that money going? Before I am willing to pay more, I want to know what is being done with the existing money.]
- [I'm not sure] No answer

Group 2

- [Certain to support] Resolves questions regarding funding.
- [Certain to support] I am ok with no increase at this time.
- [Certain to support] It needs to be done. Our city is growing, and infrastructure needs to keep up with demand.
- [Lean to support] Because I've already budgeted for the current rates. These improvements need to be done instead of decreasing rates.

- [Lean to support] There would be no additional cost to me, and the funds are already available due to older bonds.
- [Lean to support] No change from the current cost out of my pocket.
- [Lean to support] The cost to the individual taxpayer is a main concern. If this scenario is actually true, it could sway my vote.
- [Lean to oppose] I do not feel that money has been well-spent, and I am not convinced it will be in the future.
- [Lean to oppose] We have too high of property taxes already. They go up each year. And they increase a lot.
- [Certain to oppose] What happened to the lottery money?
- [Certain to oppose] I don't believe the increased costs to those who don't wish to pay are merited.

Appendix G
Written Exercise 6

Now, here are more details about the proposal and what makes this bond different. Previously, Salem has asked voters to support bonds for specific projects. For example, the recent bond measure for the new police station. This bond is different because it funds several different infrastructure projects over a ten-year period. The City plans to time the projects based on community-defined priorities, scheduled maintenance, and to ensure that property tax rates stay level. This will allow the City to make long-term plans, keep the rate constant, and avoid coming back to voters several times to ask for new funding.

Now knowing this, if the election were today, would you be more likely to vote YES to support the measure or NO to oppose it?

Response category	Group 1	Group 2	Total
Yes, I am certain to support	2	3	5
Yes, I am leaning to support	6	4	10
No, I am leaning to oppose	--	2	2
No, I am certain to oppose	--	2	2
I'm not sure	1	--	1

Why?

Group 1

- [Certain to support] Its nice for the proposal to be done based on community defined priorities. That's nice.
- [Certain to support] If the city puts this verbiage in the bond resolution presented to the voters, I will support it wholeheartedly.
- [Lean to support] Sounds like more accountability with this proposal.
- [Lean to support] Thinking ahead sounds like a good way to go however how are they accounting for cost increases over the 10 years and how would they be accountable for the projects, and let the public know what is being worked on in what order.
- [Lean to support] I do appreciate the level of property taxes, and not coming back to ask for more funds.
- [Lean to support] No answer
- [Lean to support] It doesn't sway me a lot. I am still likely to support.
- [Lean to support] I would like to know the timeline for each project
- [I'm not sure] What they say sounds good but, in the end, would it really be as they've outlined it?

Group 2

- [Certain to support] City can make long term plans, tax rate is constant, avoids future bond issues-at least for 10 years.
- [Certain to support] This information further supports that it won't raise taxes all at once.
- [Lean to support] As previously stated, I generally see infrastructure as an investment. I would like for the expenditures and timeline to be transparent though.
- [Lean to support] I am leaning in support because I like that they have stated that they will base projects on community-defined priorities and to ensure that property tax rates stay level.
- [Lean to support] I guess that I am leaning yes because I like the two statements: keep the rate constant and avoid coming back for new funding.

- [Lean to support] I think the long-term planning will reduce waste and be more efficient. However, I also realize that the trust is not really there for this method.
- [Lean to support] Okay but I don't want the city coming with another bond request in less than 10 years. Also, no bonds on schools or police.
- [Lean to support] It sounds sensible to plan out for several years. I think a good reason to keep some funds flexible is to be able to address unforeseen changing conditions. For instance, the ice storm last winter must have had a huge impact on the city's budget, and no one saw it coming.
- [Lean to oppose] What does stay "level" mean.
- [Certain to oppose] The rate doesn't always match the actual cost.
- [Certain to oppose] Same reason, I don't approve of the mandatory taxes that will harm some people.

**Appendix H
Written Exercise 7**

The City of Salem’s Master Plan has identified \$2 billion of long-term infrastructure maintenance and improvement needs. The proposed \$300 million measure would only pay for a portion of this. Therefore, the City is looking for input for the types of projects to prioritize now.

For each of the following, indicate if you think it should be a very high, high, medium, low or very low priority for this bond measure.

Response category	Very high	High	Medium	Low	Very Low	No answer
Acquire property for affordable housing or shelters.						
Total	8	7	4	0	0	1
Group 1	3	2	3	--	--	1
Group 2	5	5	1	--	--	--
Replace aging firetrucks and other essential firefighting equipment						
Total	4	11	2	0	1	2
Group 1	1	6	--	--	--	2
Group 2	3	5	2	--	1	--
Road and bridge maintenance, such as streets with deteriorating pavement and making safety improvements to bridges with weight restrictions						
Total	9	5	4	1	0	1
Group 1	5	--	3	--	--	1
Group 2	4	5	1	1	--	--
Upgrade and expand bike and pedestrian infrastructure, such as connecting sidewalks, construct new walking and pathways, and improve crosswalk safety						
Total	1	3	12	3	0	1
Group 1	--	1	6	1	--	1
Group 2	1	2	6	2	--	--
Upgrade city buildings to make them seismically resilient in preparation for a large earthquake						
Total	3	3	7	4	1	2
Group 1	1	--	3	3	--	2
Group 2	2	3	4	1	1	--
Upgrade existing park facilities, such as new play structures, shelters, and restrooms						
Total	1	3	8	4	1	3
Group 1	1	--	4	2	--	2
Group 2	--	3	4	2	1	1
Build new parks identified in the city’s Master Plan, such as McKay Park and other parks in parts of the city that have poor access						
Total	0	3	6	8	2	1
Group 1	--	--	4	4	--	1
Group 2	--	3	2	4	2	--

Build backup data centers to ensure reliability in case of a natural disaster or other system failures						
Total	6	7	4	1	1	1
Group 1	2	3	3	--	--	1
Group 2	4	4	1	1	1	--

**Appendix I
Written Exercise 8**

The following are reasons that some people support the proposed \$300 million bond measure. For each, indicate if you think it is a very good, good, poor, or very poor reason.

Response category	Very good	Good	Poor	Very Poor	No answer
The proposed bond measure will allow the City to complete necessary maintenance to existing infrastructure and invest in high priority new projects without increasing taxes.					
Total	9	9	1	0	1
Group 1	4	4	--	--	1
Group 2	5	5	1	--	--
This proposed bond measure will allow Salem to make long-term plans to ensure basic maintenance of existing infrastructure is taken care of and that future needs are provided for.					
Total	10	9	0	0	1
Group 1	5	3	--	--	1
Group 2	5	6	--	--	--
Bond interest rates are historically low now but are expected to increase in the years to come. By acting soon, Salem can take advantage of these lower costs and save taxpayers money.					
Total	10	6	3	0	1
Group 1	6	2	--	--	1
Group 2	4	4	3	--	--
These high priority infrastructure projects are investments in Salem's future and will ensure that the city is a safe and enjoyable place to live, with efficient transportation, effective public safety, and desirable parks.					
Total	9	8	1	1	1
Group 1	5	3	--	--	1
Group 2	4	5	1	1	--
The priority projects funded with this bond measure will be selected from the City's Master Plan, citizens advisory committees, and robust community engagement.					
Total	12	4	0	2	1
Group 1	7	--	--	--	1
Group 2	5	4	--	2	--

Appendix J
Written Exercise 9

The following are reasons that some people oppose the proposed \$300 million bond measure. For each, indicate if you think it is a very good, good, poor, or very poor reason.

Response category	Very good	Good	Poor	Very Poor	I'm not sure
This bond measure is far more money than the City needs. It will create a slush fund for politicians to spend on their pet projects without voter approval.					
Total	4	7	7	1	1
Group 1	1	2	5	--	1
Group 2	3	5	2	1	--
The world is changing quickly and we don't know what Salem's infrastructure needs will be in the next ten years. It is better to ask voters to fund specific projects when needed.					
Total	3	8	7	1	1
Group 1	--	3	4	1	1
Group 2	3	5	3	--	--
With the rising cost of living, the City of Salem should be finding ways to reduce the cost of housing not creating new property taxes.					
Total	8	6	4	0	2
Group 1	3	1	3	--	2
Group 2	5	5	1	--	--
The most important problem in Salem right now is the homelessness crisis. Anything that distracts the city from addressing homelessness is a mistake.					
Total	4	8	7	0	1
Group 1	2	4	2	--	1
Group 2	2	4	5	--	--

Appendix K
Written Exercise 10

After hearing these perspectives, if the election were today, would you be more likely to vote YES to support the measure or NO to oppose it?

Response category	Group 1	Group 2	Total
Yes, I am certain to support	2	2	4
Yes, I am leaning to support	6	5	11
No, I am leaning to oppose	--	1	1
No, I am certain to oppose	--	2	2
I'm not sure	--	1	1
No answer	1	--	1

Why?

Group 1

- [Certain to support] I want my community to be a better place and this bond I feel is a step in the right direction. The bond would bring much more trust in the government (if it works). It would create more jobs, more business opportunities would be created, etc.
- [Certain to support] If property taxes remain static and the community is involved with project identification and some oversight.
- [Certain to support] No answer
- [Lean to support] It is needed, and I hope that it will work.
- [Lean to support] I think it is necessary for Salem to take care of its infrastructure.
- [Lean to support] If these things help where I live, I have to support it.
- [Lean to support] No answer
- [Lean to support] I do believe it is necessary to maintain current infrastructure and doing so at a time when it will not increase taxes makes sense.
- [Lean to support] No answer

Group 2

- [Certain to support] Creates a long-term plan, no higher tax rate, projects are decided by various groups and committees.
- [Certain to support] No answer
- [Lean to support] Still in sort of the same place, would love to see increased community involvement in planning.
- [Lean to support] I like the long-term plan and the community involvement.
- [Lean to support] No answer
- [Lean to support] The need is real; it will only get more expensive as time goes on.
- [Lean to support] I am more swayed by the reasons to support that were given.
- [Lean to oppose] It should be broken up into individual issues.
- [Certain to oppose] I would need to see the measure.
- [Certain to oppose] I don't want mandatory taxes.
- [I'm not sure] I think there were some good arguments against this.