

**Silver Falls School District**

**Findings and Recommendations  
C&M Communications' Extended Analysis  
of November 2019 Nelson Report  
Community Survey**

**Presented November 20, 2019  
For Long-Range Facilities Planning  
Committee Reference**

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# **C&M Communications' Findings and Recommendations**

## **Silver Falls School District Long-Range Facilities Planning Survey**

### **Presented November 20, 2019**

Between Nov. 1 and Nov 4, 2019, Silver Falls School District (SFSD) surveyed district voters to get community input on educational program and facility improvement priorities the district should consider. The survey was conducted by The Nelson Report, Salem, Oregon. This extended analysis validates and underscores the survey data and conclusions in The Nelson Report's Executive Summary. It also includes recommendations for the district's Long-Range Facilities Planning Committee to use in determining priorities for a potential bond measure.

Specifically, the survey measured:

- Voters' perceptions of the district's operations and performance;
- Community support for maintaining all of SFSD's rural K-8 schools;
- Voters' level of knowledge about district facilities, especially the middle school;
- Voters' priorities for providing additional space for certain educational programs.

Based on this extended analysis of the survey data, C&M Communications finds that Silver Falls School District voters view the district positively and generally believe SFSD students are getting a good education. Sixty-seven percent of all survey respondents rated the district's operation and performance excellent or pretty good, while only 21% rated it only fair or poor.

Maintaining the district's rural K-8 schools for the foreseeable future is a high priority and is linked to voters' willingness to construct a new middle school. In fact, 70% of survey respondents said they would be willing to invest in a new middle school if it would allow SFSD to maintain all rural schools for the foreseeable future. Knowing the current condition of the middle school and the fact that replacing it would save thousands of dollars that could be directed to classrooms further increases support for replacing the middle school. (See Table II, pages 10-14 for voters responses to these questions.)

All seven educational program areas the survey tested were ranked as high priorities. The four programs with the highest priority rankings (70% or higher) were additional space for hands-on learning such as science labs for 6-8 grade students (81%), for enhanced vocational programs for grades 6-8 such as agriculture, woodworking and metals (76%), for enhanced technology and computer science programs K-8 (76%), and for music programs district-wide (74%).

These findings are consistent with the conclusions in The Nelson Report's Executive Summary and are described and demonstrated in more detail in this extended analysis of the survey results. In addition, Table II, pages 9-20, show how each of the survey's demographic groups responded to each of the survey questions. The survey's demographic groups are gender, age, voter history and geographic area.

## C&M Communications' Findings

In reviewing data from the Nelson Report survey and comparing that data with Silver Falls voter profiles provided by L2 Voter Data, Bellingham, WA, as well as demographic data for Silverton and Scotts Mills found on [www.usa.com](http://www.usa.com), [www.city-data.com](http://www.city-data.com), and [www.point2homes.com](http://www.point2homes.com) websites, C&M Communications found:

**Survey results are valid.** The demographic profile of survey respondents in The Nelson Report survey matches the L2 Voter Data cross tabulated voter counts of SFSD's current voters. See details in Table I, pages 7-8.

The 368 individuals surveyed were randomly selected and represent a statistically accurate cross-section of SFSD voters. The survey's margin of error is +/-5.0% at the 95% level of confidence. This means survey accurately reflects the opinions of those voters most likely to vote in a future bond election. In addition, those called were very willing to participate in the survey and had no difficulty responding to any of the questions, according to The Nelson Report's call center supervisor.

The survey included a number of open ended questions aimed at determining voters' perceptions of issues the district faces and the condition of school facilities, especially the middle school. See The Nelson Report Survey Research Report, pages 2-10, for the responses to these open ended questions. Many of the responses, e.g., issues of overcrowding and lack of funding, also are expressed in the December 2018 Focus Group report.

In addition, voters believe children are getting a good education in Silver Falls schools. They also know facility improvements are needed "depending on the school". At the same time there appears to be some concern about fiscal accountability and money management that the district should address. This concern may be especially important to the large number of respondents that said they "have no children in school".

Other questions in an "if you knew..." format were designed to gauge the positive or negative impact of certain pieces of information. For example, knowing that the "81 year old section of the middle school is abandoned and condemned due to safety issues such as asbestos and lead," changed voters' responses regarding the condition of the middle school from a 39% only fair/poor first response regarding the school's condition to an 81% only fair/poor rating of the school's condition.

Finally, respondents were asked a number of potentially prejudicial or controversial statements regarding SFSD and its future facility needs. This format serves as a crosscheck on some of the closed-ended questions. This kind of question is especially helpful in identifying any prejudices not apparent in the other types of survey questions.

**Survey results give some clear directions.** According to The Nelson Report survey results, two items are non-negotiable for SFSD voters:

- Rural schools must be maintained for the foreseeable future and this needs to be seen as a guarantee before voters will support construction of a new middle school and possibly other facility improvements. (See Table II, pages 10-12, for voters' responses to the four survey questions related to maintaining all of SFSD's rural K-8 schools.)
- Constructing a new athletic facility and artificial turf field west of Silverton High School needs to be eliminated from further facilities discussions. There is virtually no voter support (68% oppose) for this proposal and the opposition would only increase once the cost for constructing these facilities is known. (See Table II, page 20, for all demographic groups' negative responses to this question.)

**Cost will be a major concern for voters.** No estimated costs were attached to any of the questions in The Nelson Report survey. Once the Long-Range Facilities Planning Committee determines the cost of the actual facilities and program space improvements to recommend for a potential bond measure, voters will need to be surveyed again to find out if they are willing to pay for the improvements they said were priorities. Once the costs are known, support will drop. That drop may be significant enough (to less than 50% support) to require further discussion regarding what to include in a bond and at what cost.

Data for the two cities within SFSD boundaries (Silverton and Scotts Mills) show an area with a population growth rate since 2000 that is higher than the state average and much higher than the national average. As a result, both Silverton and Scotts Mills experienced surges in housing construction between 2000 and 2009. That surge, according to [www.point2homes.com](http://www.point2homes.com) seems to have slowed since 2009. In 2016, the median housing price in Silverton was \$268,020. The median housing price in Scotts Mills was \$276,858. Both values are slightly lower than the statewide median price of \$287,100. Prices in 2019 are most likely higher.

Silverton's median income growth since 2000 was higher than both state and national averages, while Scotts Mills was lower than both state and national averages. (Source: [www.usa.com](http://www.usa.com)) However, the data on [www.city-data.com](http://www.city-data.com) indicates that the average income per household (\$66,717 Silverton, \$68,495 Scotts Mills) is the result of two or more salaries per household. In 2016, Silverton's median household income per capita was \$30,563 and in Scotts Mills it was \$25,768.

The data from these websites lists median not average housing costs and income levels. This means half of the homes in Silverton and Scotts Mills have a value higher than the median and are paying more in taxes than homes below the median. It also means that half the residents in the two cities have salaries that are less than the median and may struggle to pay a higher tax rate that a bond might impose. The data on these websites also shows older residents, those over 65 years of age, have much lower annual incomes than younger residents. Since these older residents are the majority of the SFSD's frequent voters, any increase in the tax rate will be a concern for these residents.

Given these housing costs and income factors, the Long-Range Facilities Planning Committee must consider carefully any increase in the tax rate per \$1,000 of assessed property values as it determines the components of a potential bond measure and their costs.

**Priority projects to consider for a bond proposal.** As the Long-Range Facilities Planning Committee considers components to include in a bond proposal for, the committee should consider including only those items identified in the November 2019 survey with the highest community support.

Following are the projects, in priority order, that generally had the strongest support across all demographic groups:

1. Additional space for hands on learning such as science labs for 6-8 students (**81% high priority**)
2. Additional space for enhanced vocational programs for grades 6-8 such as agriculture, woodworking and metals (**76% high priority**)
3. Additional space for enhanced technology and computer science programs for K-8 district-wide (**76% high priority**)
4. Additional space for music programs district-wide (**74% high priority**)
5. Additional space for library space for K-8 district-wide (**60% high priority**)
6. Additional space for physical education and athletic programs for K-8 students (**58% high priority**)
7. Additional space for art programs district-wide (**56% high priority**)

Focus groups conducted in October 2018 included requests for additional space for some of the same educational programs as The Nelson Report survey tested. Once the costs are known for providing additional space for these programs, the order of this list may need to change.

**Deferred maintenance** was one area mentioned in the Focus Group report that was not tested in The Nelson Report survey. This is an area the Long-Range Facilities Planning Committee will need to address. The BBL Architects' facilities assessment will include recommendations related to energy efficiency improvements, earthquake retrofitting and other infrastructure improvements that need to be made and that the Committee will need to consider.

## **Recommendations**

As the Long-Range Facilities Planning Committee works to determine what facility and program improvements are most needed and that voters will support in a future bond measure, C&M Communication recommends the following:

**Make sure the Long-Range Facilities Planning Committee membership is representative** of the SFSD's population. Consider representation from all of the demographic groups that participated in the October 2018 focus groups. In addition, be sure to include individuals who are retired (over age 60) and well-known in their communities.

**Use the data** available from the December 2018 Focus Group Report, The Nelson Report Survey Executive Summary, and BBL Architects facilities assessment to guide Committee deliberations.

- The December 2018 Focus Group Report regarding the 13 focus groups conducted October 16 and 17, 2018, provides qualitative data about how well schools are performing and what issues SFSD should address in the next year and next five years. The 202 group participants and the many responses the district received to the same questions in a on-line survey, generally represent individuals who have a relationship with the schools, are school supporters, or, in the case of the on-line survey, self-selected. This qualitative data provides some valuable insights and group/online survey priorities for facility and program improvements. However, focus group data does not reflect a statistical valid cross-section of district voters who ultimately will determine the outcome of any future bond election.
- The Nelson Report Survey Research Report and C&M Communications' Extended Analysis of the survey results provide quantitative data that reflects the opinions of a statistically valid cross-section of district voters regarding SFSD's operation and performance; maintaining its rural schools; the condition of district facilities, especially the middle school; and providing additional space for certain educational programs. The 368 respondents who were interviewed almost exactly match the profile of district voters as shown in Table 1, pages 7-8. The survey's margin of error is +/-5.0% at the 95% level of confidence. Consequently, the priorities identified by the survey questions can be relied on to accurately reflect voters' priorities for school improvements
- BBL Architects was hired by the district to assess the condition of every district building and to identify facility improvements the district should consider. A comprehensive report of the architects' findings was delivered to SFSD at the end of October 2019. That report, along with improvement priorities identified by Focus Group participants and by The Nelson Report survey should guide the Facilities Planning Committee's deliberations and decisions about priority components of a future bond measure.

**Build a committee process that facilitates district-wide input** and support for the Committee's final recommendations. Consider establishing four- to five-member facilities subcommittees at each school. Members of the subcommittees should include the building principal, the SFEA representative or rep's designee, the school's custodian, a well-known parent and/or community member.

Ask each subcommittee to study its building's section of the BBL Architects' report to further analyze the most essential facility and program improvements. Each building subcommittee should then submit a prioritized list of improvements it would like the Facilities Planning Committee to consider including in a bond proposal.

In presenting their requests, subcommittee members may want to consider hosting a Long-Range Facilities Planning Committee meeting at their building, with a tour to emphasize the urgency of any improvement requests the committee is recommending.

**Consider a two-year timeline for the Committee's work.** Determining facility and program priorities, their costs, and how to structure a bond proposal with the lowest possible tax rate increase will take time, if the Committee wants voters to support a bond measure.

Any advocacy committee that forms to support a bond should have at least six months to organize and conduct a successful campaign.

Consequently, voting in 2020 is too soon. Also, it is very difficult to focus voters' attention on a local issues, especially a school issue, in a Presidential Election year. Voting in May or November 2021 are possibilities, if the Facilities Planning Committee is able to work through all of the information and issues by October 2020.

A more reasonable time frame may be to work toward a May 2022 election. That would require completing the committee's work, with recommendations to the School Board by June 2021. This would give the School Board time to conduct another random sample telephone survey to test the Committee's proposal with all component costs in August or September 2021. This also would give the district time to study refinancing the high school bond so that paying for a new bond could continue and not increase the current tax rate for schools.

**Make communication with staff, parents, students and the community a priority:**

- Create a section on the SFSD Website with the December 2019 Focus Group Report, The Nelson Report Survey Executive Summary, BBL Architects' facilities assessment report summary, Long-Range Facilities Planning Committee membership, meeting schedule, meeting agendas and minutes, etc.
- Give administrators talking points so that a consistent message about the district's facilities needs and any bond proposals is relayed to staff, students, parents and community members.
- If the budget permits, do regular district-wide informational mailings to all district households.
- Begin immediately to find ways to inform 60+ age voters and "frequent" voters about the efficiency of district operations, enrollment and the district's facility needs.
- Look for opportunities and vehicles to deliver key messages about the educational benefits of keeping district facilities up-to-date to any area service clubs and all key community constituent groups. Passing a bond requires many personal contacts by Silver Falls administrators, Board members, Long-Range Facility Planning Committee members in a coordinated year-round "speakers" effort.
- Even with the new "Motor Voter" law, make voter registration a priority, especially for parents and high school students who will be eligible to vote in either May or November 2020, 2021 and 2022. Reminding the school family about being registered and the importance of voting on a regular basis, is a good way to increase needed turnout from these groups, especially in an off-year election.

**TABLE I: Validity of Survey Data and Profile of SILVER FALLS Voters**

<b>Voters profile</b>	<b>Current SILVER FALLS voters</b>	<b>November 2019 Survey Respondents</b>
<b>Total voters</b>	14,114	368 likely voters were interviewed between Nov. 1 and Nov. 4, 2019. Margin of error for the survey was +/-5% at 95% confidence level. Consequently, survey results can be reliably used as the basis of a community discussion of the district's facility needs and components for a future bond levy.
<b>Voters by household</b>	7,726	N/A
<b>Available phone numbers</b>	Voters with land lines & cell phones: 8,843 in 4,353 households Voters with cell phones only: 3,744 in 1,872 households	Survey firm used both land lines and cell phone numbers to complete the required number of interviews.
<b>Gender</b>	6,846 or 48.5% Men 7,143 or 50.5% Women	43% Men 57% Women
<b>Age</b>		
<b>18-24</b>	1,452 or 10%	2% of survey sample
<b>25-34</b>	2,079 or 15%	5% of survey sample
<b>35-44</b>	2,358 or 17%	15% of survey sample
<b>45-59</b>	3,157 or 22%	28% of survey sample
<b>60+</b>	5,063 or 36% <b>Note:</b> 58% of all voters are over age 45 and 36% of all voters are over age 60.	51% of survey sample <b>Note:</b> Since older voters, those over age 45, are more frequent voters, the higher sample of voters over these age groups does not invalidate the survey sample.
<b>Voting frequency</b>	11,013 or 78% of Silver Falls 14,114 eligible registered voters voted in at least one of the following four elections: May 2016 and 2018, November 2016 and 2018	There is generally an under vote on local ballot measures in Primary and General Elections. 4/ 4 election voters generally vote their entire ballots. 2 /4 and 1/4 election voters generally do not. Consequently, the higher sample of voters over age 45 does not invalidate the survey sample.
<b>4 of 4 elections</b>	3,371 or 24% 87% are over age of 45 and 69% are over age 60	49% of survey sample
<b>3 of 4 elections</b>	5,814 or 41% 81% are over age 45 and 59% are over age 60	21% of survey sample
<b>2 of 4 elections</b>	8,882 or 63% 72% are over age 45 and 48% are over age 60	21% of survey sample
<b>1 of 4 elections</b>	11,013– 78% 66% are over age 45 and 42% are over age 60	5% of survey sample
<b>Registered since 11/9/16</b>	541 living in 491 households	N/A

<b>Voters profile</b>	<b>Current SILVER FALLS voters</b>	<b>November 2019 Survey Respondents</b>
<b>Children in School</b>	Approximately 34% of SFSD households have children in school*	Cross tabulation not included in survey
<b>No Children in School</b>	Approximately 66% of SFSD households do not have children in school*	Cross tabulation not included in survey
<b>Geographic location</b>	Precinct numbers were used to for these geographic areas. L2 Voter Data or other voter data sources can be sorted by precinct for mailings and other voter contacts.	23% – Silverton 35% – Rural East 13% – Rural West

\* **Source:** Silverton and Scotts Mills Demographic Information & Statistics, Point2Homes Website:  
<https://www.point2homes.com>

**Note:** City-Data.com and USA.com websites also provide excellent demographic and psychographic data about the Silver Falls area: <http://www.city-data.com>