

March 2018

# Jackson County Jail Funding Survey



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# Introduction & Methodology

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From March 22–26, 2018, DHM Research conducted a telephone survey of Jackson County registered voters. The purpose of the survey was to measure support for a potential bond measure and taxing district to support the construction, operations, and maintenance of a new county jail.

**Research Methodology:** The telephone survey consisted of 329 Jackson County voters and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. This is a sufficient sample size to assess voter opinions generally and to review findings by multiple subgroups, including age, gender, political party, and area of the county.

Respondents were contacted by a live interviewer from a list of registered voters, which included cell phones. In gathering responses, a variety of quality control measures were employed, including questionnaire pre-testing and validation. Quotas were set by age, gender, political party and area of the county to ensure a representative sample.

**Statement of Limitations:** Any sampling of opinions or attitudes is subject to a margin of error. The margin of error is a standard statistical calculation that represents differences between the sample and total population at a confidence interval, or probability, calculated to be 95%. This means that there is a 95% probability that the sample taken for this study would fall within the stated margin of error if compared with the results achieved from surveying the entire population. The margin of error for this survey is  $\pm 5.4\%$ .

**DHM Research Background:** 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.

# Summary & Observations

## 2

### **Crime and public safety issues are top of mind for Jackson County voters.**

Voters are likely to point to crime and public safety when asked, in an open-ended format, the biggest issue they would like their county elected officials to address. Voters mention crime generally, point specifically to drug crimes, express concerns about mental illness and addiction, and hope for increased police patrols. Overall, these concerns are mentioned by nearly one in four voters (22%).

Concerns about crime and public safety outpace the second most mentioned issue, housing and homelessness (15%) by seven percentage points. Voters from the Democratic and Republican parties express concerns about homelessness equally (11% each), while concerns about housing affordability are notably higher among Democrats and voters under 30 (11% and 13%).

Although there is much concern among Jackson County voters about crime-related issues, it is also important to note that 12% of voters mention cost issues, sharing that taxes are currently too high, expressing concern about the budget and spending, and noting that the cost of living is increasing. These concerns may be in direct opposition to the effort to raise money for a new jail and its ongoing operations and maintenance.

### **Fewer than half of voters in Jackson County initially support a construction bond to build a new jail, and fewer than one-third support a new taxing district to fund operations and maintenance.**

Jackson County voters express strong opposition to these potential ballot measures from the outset. Initially, 42% of voters support a bond to construct a new jail, but strong opposition outweighs strong support for this measure (41% to 30%). When voters are first presented with a new taxing district for ongoing costs, 26% support the measure.

Although some voters are strongly in favor of both the bond and the new taxing district (30% and 18%), many voters are strongly opposed, while few voters remain undecided. This leaves less room for changes in opinion if a campaign moves forward.

Key demographic groups that often support tax increases are notably absent in their support. Just less than half of Democrats (49.5%) support a construction bond, and women and voters under 30 are more opposed than supportive. Figures are tougher for a new taxing district; the strongest support comes from high-income voters (43%) and those ages 30–44 (37%).

However, support for a new taxing district grows ten percentage points (27% to 37%) when voters are provided with additional information about the existing jail and the need for a new one. Support for a construction bond with this additional information increased two percentage points (44% to 46%).

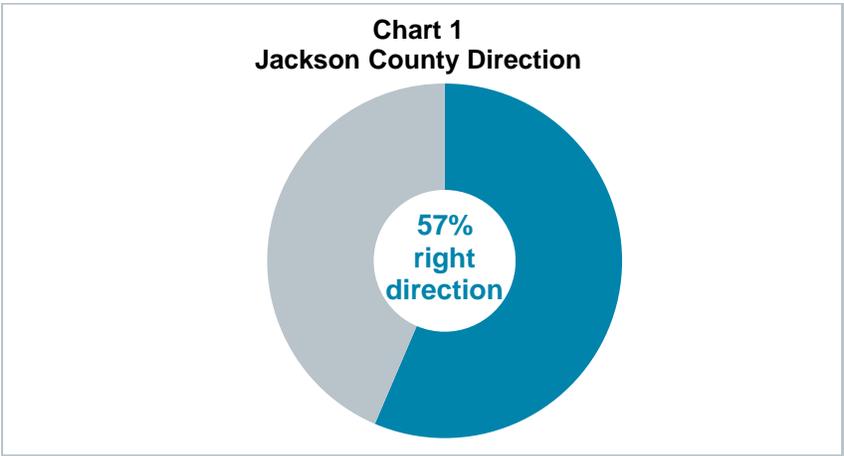
**Jackson County voters hope their leaders will weigh public safety considerations against existing tax rates.**

Voters leave little room for their elected leaders on the Commission to maneuver. Some are staunchly opposed to the project, others see the need for additional beds at the jail. Nearly one in ten voters hope the Commission would find a new revenue source for this project.

## 3.1 GENERAL MOOD AND PRIORITY ISSUES

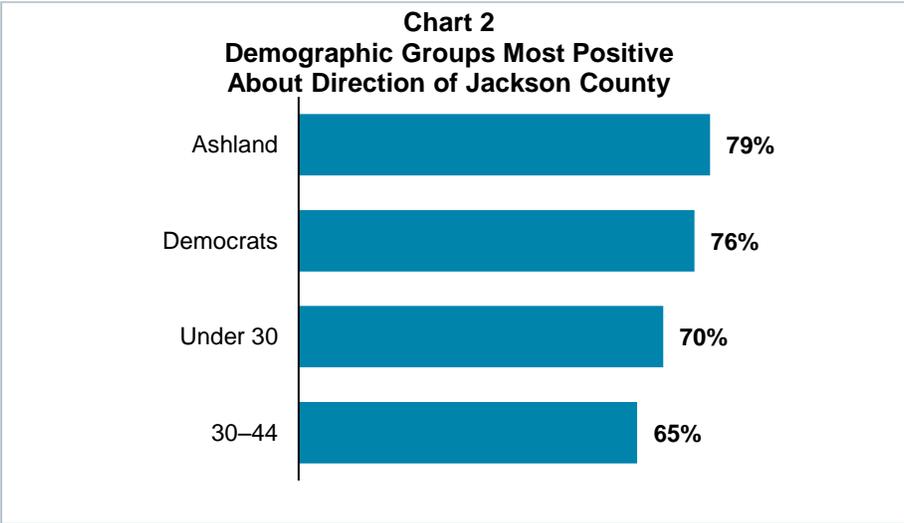
### Voters in Jackson County are positive about the direction their community is headed.

More than half of voters say that things in Jackson County are headed in the right direction (Q1). This figure is consistent with—if not slightly higher than—recent results from other counties in Oregon. It also represents a marked increase since 2013 when, during the lingering recession, 47% of residents said things were on the right track.



Source: DHM Research, March 2018

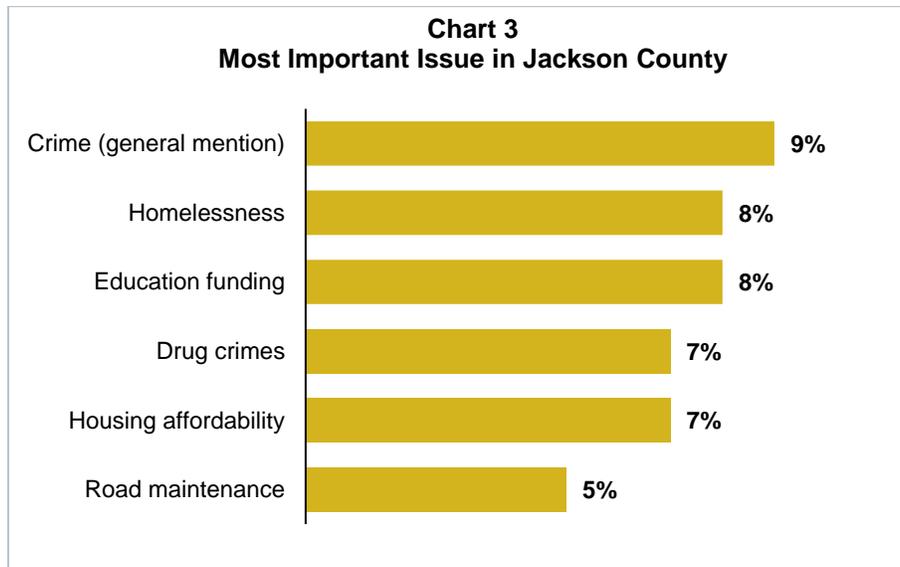
Some groups are especially positive about Jackson County’s direction. Voters in Ashland are the most positive of any group. This may be due to a higher proportion of Democrats and voters under 45 in the city, two groups who are also more likely to say things are headed in the right direction.



Source: DHM Research, March 2018

### Public safety issues are top of mind among Jackson County voters.

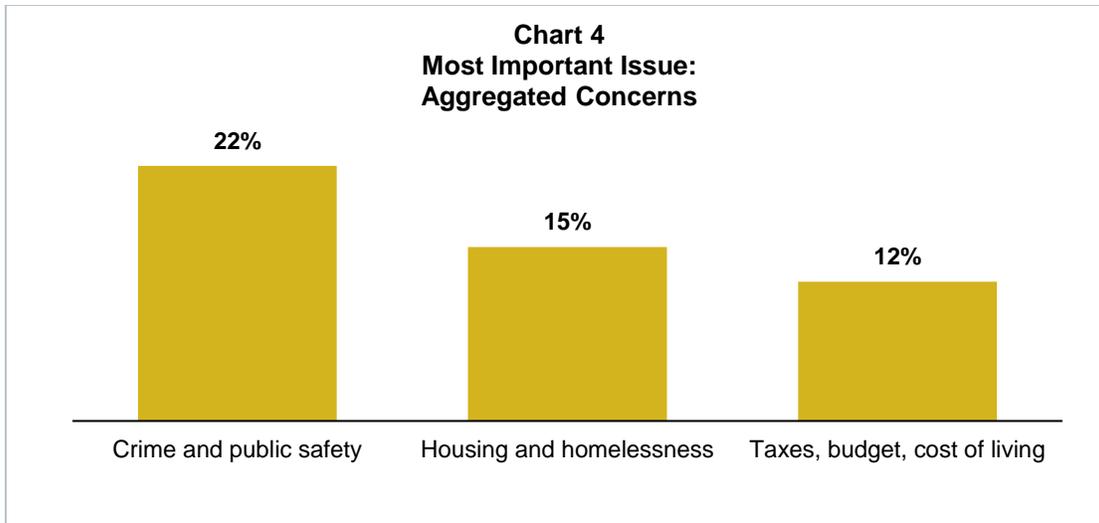
When asked the most important issue elected officials in Jackson County should address, voters mention a variety of issues in their own words (Q2).



Source: DHM Research, March 2018

When combining similar comments together, a few key areas of concern are more apparent. At the top of the list is crime and public safety. Voters voice concerns about *crime generally, drug crime, mental health and addiction, a new jail, and more police patrols*. Taken together, these concerns outpace concerns about any other issue. There is also a greater emphasis on these concerns than in 2013, when 14% of voters mentioned *crime and public safety, increasing law enforcement, jail space, and mental health issues*.

Aggregating other similar response categories shows that voters are also concerned about *housing affordability and homelessness*, and the general *cost of living* in the area, which includes concerns around *government spending and taxes*. Housing affordability and homeless were rarely as issues in 2013 (1%). The increase in concern is consistent with surveys that DHM Research as conducted throughout Oregon over the last few years.



Source: DHM Research, March 2018

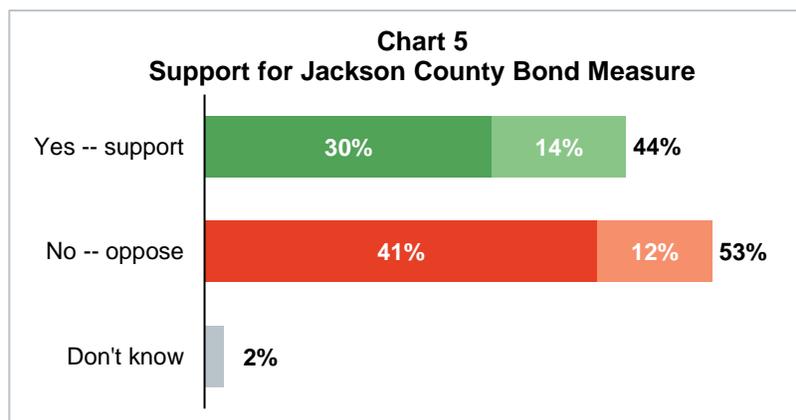
There are some partisan differences when it came to top issues. While Democrats and Republicans are equally likely to mention *homelessness* (11%), Democrats are more likely to focus on the related issue of *housing affordability* (11%). On the other hand, only 3% of Republicans mention *housing affordability*. Instead, they are more focused on the *budget and spending* (10%).

Consistent with other research across Oregon, voters under 30 are especially likely to express concern about *housing affordability* (13%).

### 3.2 INITIAL SUPPORT FOR BOND

#### Voters are initially opposed to a bond to fund construction of a new county jail.

When voters are first asked if they support or oppose a 20-year, \$100 million bond to construct a new jail, just over half are opposed (Q3/Q4).

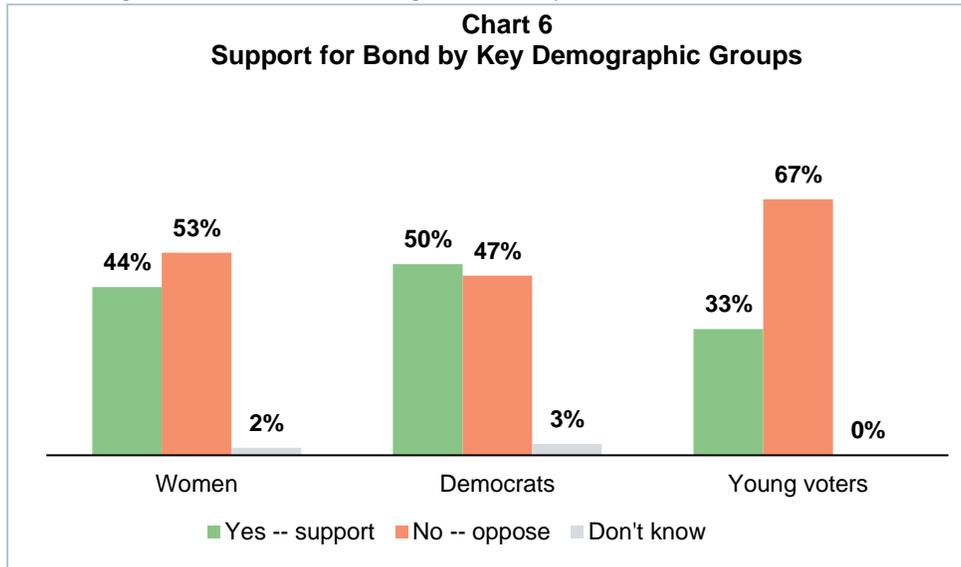


Source: DHM Research, March 2018

Notably, strong opposition outweighs strong support by 11 percentage points, which presents an uphill battle for a successful measure. Furthermore, more than seven in ten voters say they are firm in their position, leaving a relatively small portion of persuadable voters.

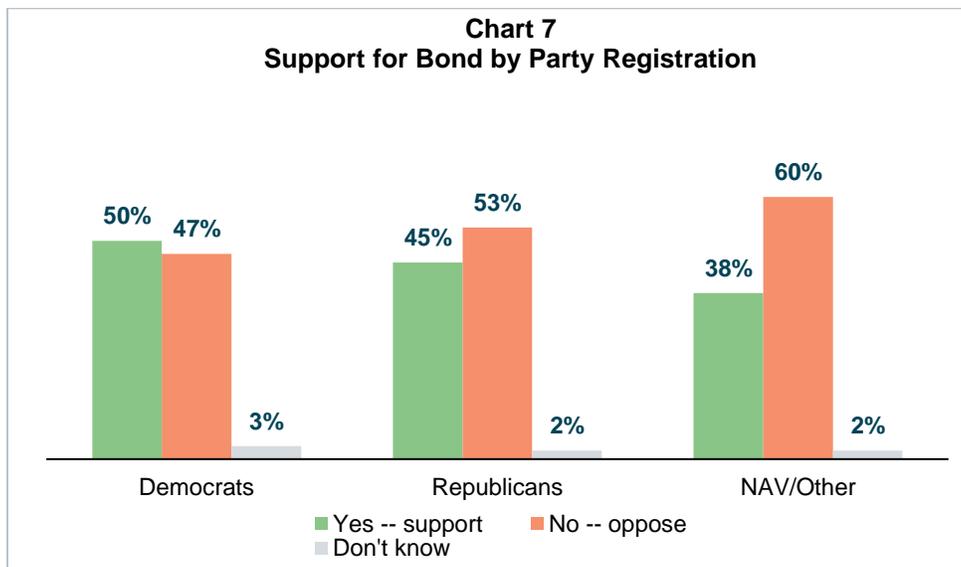
Typically, the demographic groups who are most supportive of tax increases that seek to improve community welfare are Democrats, voters under 30, and women. Measuring the support of these groups can provide insight into the strength of key campaign proponents.

Democrats are slightly more likely to say they would support a bond rather than oppose one, but women and voters under 30 are more likely to oppose such a measure. Young voters are very opposed, perhaps reflecting their existing concerns about housing affordability.



Source: DHM Research, March 2018

Support among Democrats is scant and rests at 49.5% (rounded here to 50%). However, when comparing voters of different party registrations, it is clear that Democrats are more supportive than registrants of any other party. Non-affiliated voters (NAV), registered Independents, and those registered with a minor party are the least supportive.

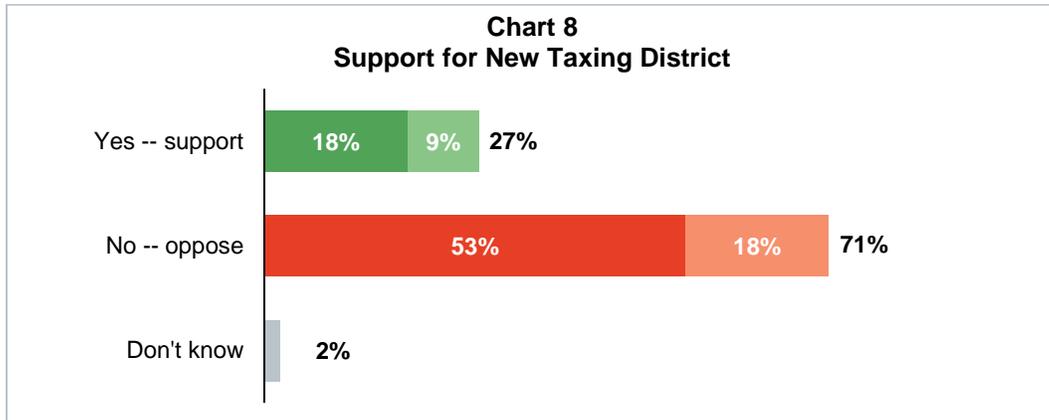


Source: DHM Research, March 2018

### 3.3 INITIAL SUPPORT FOR TAXING DISTRICT

**Voters initially oppose the creation of a new taxing district to fund jail operations and maintenance.**

When initially provided with a simple description of how a new taxing district in Jackson County would function to provide funding for jail operations and maintenance, more than seven in ten voters are opposed to this new district and property tax assessment (Q5/Q6).



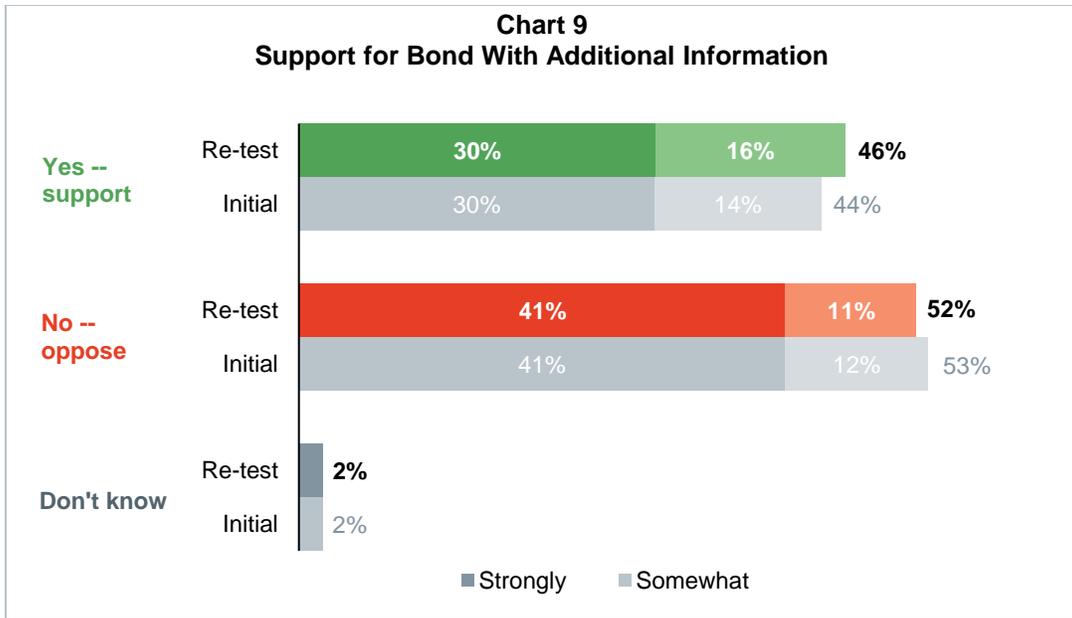
Source: DHM Research, March 2018

Initial support for this taxing district falls below 40% for most demographic groups. However, there are a few exceptions. In Central Point, 43% of voters support this new district, along with 43% of voters with incomes of \$100,000 per year or more. Voters ages 30–44 are also more likely to support this measure (40%).

### 3.4 SUPPORT FOR JAIL WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**With additional information about the bond, voter support grows slightly.**

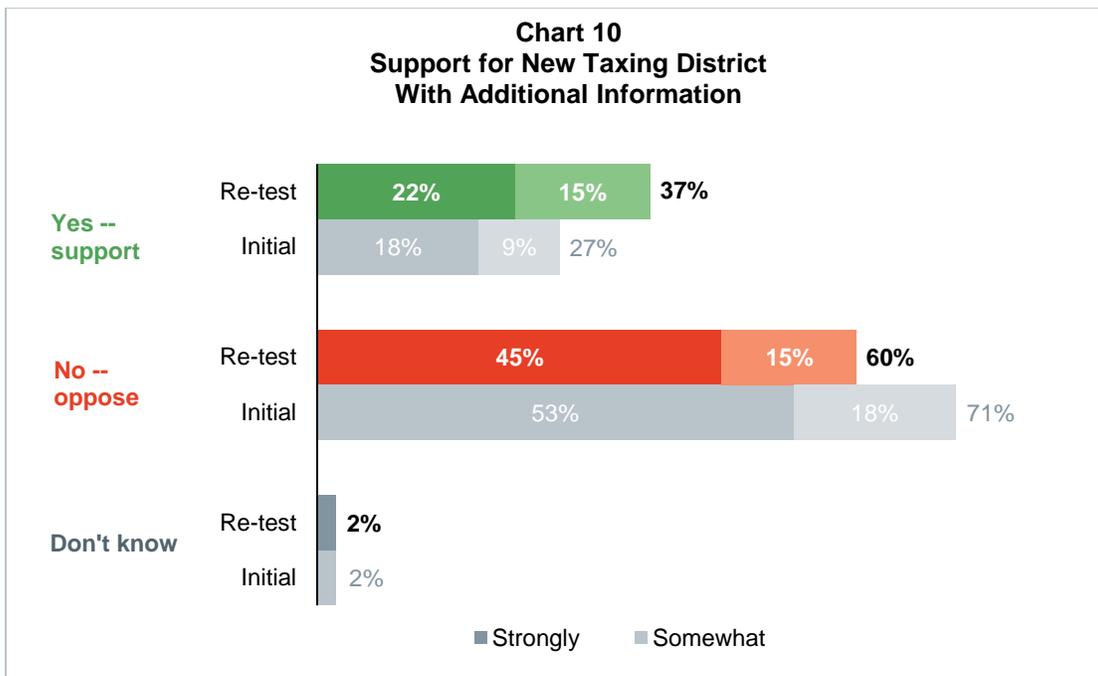
When read additional information about the existing jail, including that the current jail is too small and that some inmates and suspects are released early due to overcrowding, voter support grows three percentage points (Q7/Q8). However, strong opposition to the bond remains unchanged.



Source: DHM Research, March 2018

**Support for a new taxing district grows modestly with additional information about the existing jail.**

With the benefit of additional information, voter support for a new taxing district and property tax grows ten percentage points (Q9/Q10). Notably, strong opposition to the new taxing district drops eight percentage points.



Source: DHM Research, March 2018

Although opinions of a new taxing district warm with additional information, most demographic groups continue to oppose the measure. Although 57% of voters with incomes of \$100,000 or more per year support the measure in the re-test, they are the only group that expresses majority support. Voters 30–44 and those in Central Point come closer, at 49% and 48% support.

### 3.5 FINAL ADVICE

At the end of the survey, in an open-ended format, voters hope taxes would not increase and that the commissioners would weigh concerns about raising taxes against the need for the jail (Q11). Some specifically hoped a different revenue source would be identified.

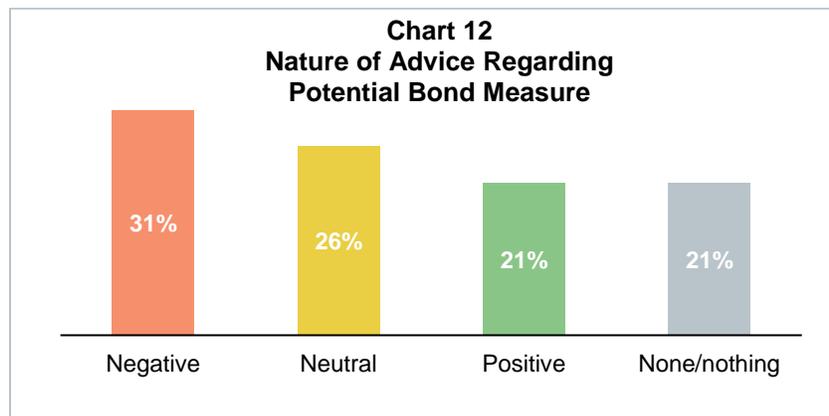
**Chart 11**  
**Advice to County Commissioners**



Source: DHM Research, March 2018

These open-ended responses are more likely to be negative than supportive. Some express simple *opposition to the project*, and *general negative comments*, alongside concerns about how the *project costs too much* or *needs a different revenue source*.

Many comments are neutral, such as interest in *additional information*, consideration of *existing property taxes*, and carefully considering the *location of the jail*. Finally, some remarks are positive and focused among issues like the *need for a new jail*, improved *mental health and addiction services*.



Source: DHM Research, March 2018

**Jackson County Jail Funding Survey**  
**March 22–26, 2018**  
**Registered Voters**  
**N=329; margin of error ±5.4%**  
**10 minutes**  
**DHM Research**  
**Project #00711**

## INTRODUCTION

Hello, I'm \_\_\_\_\_ from DHM Research, a nonpartisan and independent public opinion research company based in Oregon. I am not trying to sell you anything. We're conducting a survey about issues concerning Jackson County. May I speak to \_\_\_\_\_?

## WARM UP

1. All things considered, would you say that things in Jackson County are headed in the right direction, or are things pretty much off on the wrong track?

| Response Category              | n=329 |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Right direction                | 57%   |
| Wrong track                    | 24%   |
| <b>(DON'T READ)</b> Don't know | 20%   |

2. What is the most important issue that you would like your local elected officials in Jackson County to do something about? **(Open)**

| Response Category                 | n=329      |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Crime, general                    | 9%         |
| Homelessness                      | 8%         |
| Education funding                 | 8%         |
| Crime, drugs                      | 7%         |
| Housing affordability             | 7%         |
| Road maintenance, improvements    | 5%         |
| Budget, spending                  | 4%         |
| Healthcare, affordable            | 4%         |
| Taxes too high                    | 4%         |
| Economy, jobs                     | 3%         |
| Mental health, addiction services | 3%         |
| Gun safety, rights, control       | 3%         |
| Taxes, general mention            | 3%         |
| Marijuana issues                  | 3%         |
| All other responses               | 2% or less |
| None, nothing                     | 4%         |
| Don't know                        | 8%         |

## BALLOT TEST

Jackson County is considering placing a bond measure on the ballot for the November 2018 election to fund the construction of a new county jail. The 20-year bond measure would raise \$100,000,000 [**read: 100 million dollars**] and be paid for by a property tax assessment of 35 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. The typical homeowner would pay \$63 per year, which is about \$5 per month in additional property taxes.

3. If the vote for this bond to construct a new county jail were on the ballot today, would you vote “yes” to support the measure or “no” to oppose it? (**wait and ask certain/or lean**)

| Response Category              | n=329 |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Yes—certain                    | 30%   |
| Yes—lean                       | 13%   |
| No—lean                        | 10%   |
| No—certain                     | 41%   |
| <b>(DON'T READ)</b> Don't know | 7%    |

4. (**If “don't know” to Q3**) Well, as of today, would you lean towards a yes vote, or lean towards a no vote?

| Response Category              | n=22 |
|--------------------------------|------|
| Lean towards yes               | n=5  |
| Lean towards no                | n=9  |
| <b>(DON'T READ)</b> Don't know | n=8  |

Total Q3/Q4

| Response Category              | n=329 |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Yes—Total                      | 44%   |
| Yes—certain                    | 30%   |
| Yes—lean                       | 14%   |
| No—Total                       | 54%   |
| No—lean                        | 12%   |
| No—certain                     | 41%   |
| <b>(DON'T READ)</b> Don't know | 2%    |

Existing County revenue would not be sufficient to pay for the operations and maintenance of a new jail. To pay these additional costs, Jackson County is also considering placing a second measure on the ballot to create a new taxing district to fund the additional ongoing operations and maintenance cost.

The District would be governed by the Board of County Commissioners, and revenue from the new District will be strictly limited to funding jail operations and maintenance. The County will continue to dedicate some general fund revenue for the jail.

The District would be funded with a property tax assessment. The proposed maximum tax rate is 74 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. The typical homeowner would pay \$133 per year, which is about \$11 per month in additional property taxes.

5. If the vote to create a new taxing district to fund the ongoing operations and maintenance of a new jail were on the ballot today, would you vote “yes” to support the measure or “no” to oppose it? **(wait and ask certain/or lean)**

| Response Category              | n=329 |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Yes—certain                    | 18%   |
| Yes—lean                       | 8%    |
| No—lean                        | 16%   |
| No—certain                     | 53%   |
| <b>(DON'T READ)</b> Don't know | 5%    |

6. **(If “don't know” to Q5)** Well, as of today, would you lean towards a yes vote, or lean towards a no vote?

| Response Category              | n=17 |
|--------------------------------|------|
| Lean towards yes               | n=2  |
| Lean towards no                | n=7  |
| <b>(DON'T READ)</b> Don't know | n=8  |

Total Q5/Q6

| Response Category              | n=329 |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Yes—Total                      | 27%   |
| Yes—certain                    | 18%   |
| Yes—lean                       | 9%    |
| No—Total                       | 71%   |
| No—lean                        | 18%   |
| No—certain                     | 53%   |
| <b>(DON'T READ)</b> Don't know | 2%    |

Let me share with you some additional information about the current Jackson County jail.

The jail was built nearly 40 years ago when the population of Jackson County was about half of what it is today. Each year, the jail holds about 14,000 people, including suspected criminals booked into jail as they are awaiting trial, and convicted inmates serving short sentences.

Because of increased populations and current crime rates the jail has become too small. When the jail is full, the County is forced to release suspected criminals and inmates back into the community.

The new jail being proposed by Jackson County will protect the community by ensuring that all suspected criminals appear for trial and convicted criminals serve their full punishment. It will also mean that inmates get access to needed mental health and addiction treatment.

7. Now knowing this, if the vote for this bond to construct a new county jail were on the ballot today, would you vote “yes” to support the measure or “no” to oppose it? **(wait and ask certain/or lean)**

| Response Category              | n=329 |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Yes—certain                    | 30%   |
| Yes—lean                       | 15%   |
| No—lean                        | 9%    |
| No—certain                     | 41%   |
| <b>(DON'T READ)</b> Don't know | 4%    |

8. **(If “don't know” to Q7)** Well, as of today, would you lean towards a yes vote, or lean towards a no vote?

| Response Category              | n=14 |
|--------------------------------|------|
| Lean towards yes               | n=3  |
| Lean towards no                | n=4  |
| <b>(DON'T READ)</b> Don't know | n=7  |

Total Q7/Q8

| Response Category              | n=329 |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Yes—Total                      | 46%   |
| Yes—certain                    | 30%   |
| Yes—lean                       | 16%   |
| No—Total                       | 52%   |
| No—lean                        | 11%   |
| No—certain                     | 41%   |
| <b>(DON'T READ)</b> Don't know | 2%    |

9. And once again, if the vote to create a new taxing district to fund the ongoing operations and maintenance of a new jail were on the ballot today, would you vote “yes” to support the measure or “no” to oppose it? **(wait and ask certain/or lean)**

| Response Category              | n=329 |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Yes—certain                    | 22%   |
| Yes—lean                       | 13%   |
| No—lean                        | 14%   |
| No—certain                     | 45%   |
| <b>(DON'T READ)</b> Don't know | 5%    |

10. **(If “don't know” to Q9)** Well, as of today, would you lean towards a yes vote, or lean towards a no vote?

| Response Category              | n=17 |
|--------------------------------|------|
| Lean towards yes               | n=5  |
| Lean towards no                | n=4  |
| <b>(DON'T READ)</b> Don't know | n=8  |

Total Q9/Q10

| Response Category              | n=329 |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Yes—Total                      | 37%   |
| Yes—certain                    | 22%   |
| Yes—lean                       | 15%   |
| No—Total                       | 60%   |
| No—lean                        | 15%   |
| No—certain                     | 45%   |
| <b>(DON'T READ)</b> Don't know | 2%    |

11. The Jackson County Commissioners will make a decision about placing these measures on the ballot in the coming months. In order to go into effect, they will need the support of a majority of voters in the county. What is the one most important thing you would like County Commissioners to consider when deciding whether or not to place these measures on the ballot? **(Open)**

| Response Category               | n=329      |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| Don't raise taxes               | 13%        |
| Need for jail                   | 10%        |
| Mental health                   | 9%         |
| Find a different revenue source | 9%         |
| Fiscal responsibility           | 7%         |
| Cost of existing property taxes | 6%         |
| Cost too much                   | 5%         |
| Need more information           | 4%         |
| General negative                | 3%         |
| Opposed to project              | 2%         |
| General positive                | 2%         |
| All other responses             | 1% or less |
| None, nothing                   | 5%         |
| Don't know                      | 16%        |

## DEMOGRAPHICS

These last questions are for statistical purposes to ensure that we talk to a representative group of Jackson County residents.

12. Gender **(record from observation)**

| Response Category | n=329 |
|-------------------|-------|
| Male              | 48%   |
| Female            | 52%   |

13. Age **(record from sample)**

| Response Category | n=329 |
|-------------------|-------|
| 18–29             | 17%   |
| 30–44             | 22%   |
| 45–64             | 31%   |
| 65+               | 30%   |

14. Area of the county **(record from sample)**

| Response Category     | n=329 |
|-----------------------|-------|
| City of Ashland       | 11%   |
| City of Central Point | 8%    |
| City of Medford       | 35%   |
| Other area of county  | 46%   |

15. Political party **(record from sample)**

| Response Category | n=329 |
|-------------------|-------|
| Democrat          | 30%   |
| Republican        | 32%   |
| NAV/other         | 38%   |

16. Vote frequency **(record from sample)**

| Response Category | n=329 |
|-------------------|-------|
| 0–1 of 4          | 33%   |
| 2–3 of 4          | 25%   |
| 4 of 4            | 43%   |

17. Do you own your home, rent or something else?

| Response Category | n=329 |
|-------------------|-------|
| Own               | 75%   |
| Rent              | 20%   |
| Something else    | 5%    |
| Refused           | 1%    |

18. What was your total household income in 2017? Your best estimate is fine.

| Response Category                | n=329 |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| Less than \$25,000               | 16%   |
| \$25,000 to less than \$50,000   | 25%   |
| \$50,000 to less than \$75,000   | 16%   |
| \$75,000 to less than \$100,000  | 14%   |
| \$100,000 to less than \$150,000 | 8%    |
| \$150,000 or more                | 4%    |
| Don't know                       | 17%   |

19. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

| Response Category          | n=329 |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Less than high school      | 3%    |
| High school diploma/GED    | 21%   |
| Some college/2-year degree | 35%   |
| 4-year degree              | 23%   |
| Graduate degree            | 15%   |
| Refused                    | 2%    |