Hancock College students and district taxpayers are still patiently waiting for the college's campuses to take shape under the Measure I Bond they approved six years ago.

The college's board of trustees have kept Hancock on a slow, steady path of project priorities. Officials created in 2006 when northern Santa Barbara County residents bought into the $180 million general facilities bond to upgrade decades-old facilities, modernize technology and build new teaching and learning spaces.

Half a dozen years later, just two of 12 projects on Hancock's Five-Year Construction Plan Project Order of Priority list are complete — the science and community education buildings — both of which were in progress when voters approved the bond.

Those buildings were completed five years ago.

Although state funding reductions have forced Hancock to cut courses and enrollment, bond funds cannot be used to bring them back.

Despite the economic downturn, officials are preparing campuses for the students who remain and those who will attend in the future.

Most construction and maintenance projects are on track and on budget, according to officials and the Measure I Citizens' Oversight Committee charged with meeting quarterly to monitor bond spending.

Other projects, however, have been stalled without enough funding or delayed indefinitely.

The bond oversight committee's report for the 2011 calendar year shows three maintenance projects awaiting Division of the State Architect (DSA) approval and one project that won't move forward without more state funds.

"All the dollars that get spent are based on priority," said Felix Hernandez Jr., vice president of facilities and operations. "We couldn't get to everything. It takes a while to build."

All projects fall into those outlined in bond ballot language, which allows some wiggle room to delay or not complete certain projects "in the event of unexpected slowdown in enrollment" to ensure essential projects come first.

About $82 million of the $180 million bond hasn't been issued, according to the oversight committee report, and total expenditures for 2011 were $57.7 million.

The bond has funded $11 million in scheduled maintenance so far, Hernandez said, and savings from lower-than-expected construction bids has allowed the board to get to more projects.
Construction of a $7.5 million Childcare Center addition on the Santa Maria campus is slated for completion this year, while employees should move into the $37.9 million high-tech Public Safety Training Complex at Hancock’s Lompoc Valley Center by the end of 2013.

Remodeling of the physical education/athletics building (N) is on hold until state funds are available, and no classrooms were built in Lompoc because the project is not a top priority.

Two other construction projects — a $39 million Fine Arts Complex and $16 million Theatre Arts Complex — likely won’t be up for bid until fall of 2014 because of a bond issuance constraint.

The project with the most setbacks, Hernandez said, is the $36.4 million One Stop Student Services Center, touted as the face of the Santa Maria campus Bradley Road entrance.

A July-turned-October completion date is now expected to be done in spring 2013.

“They hit some hiccups,” Hernandez said, referring to two months last summer when work was halted while Hancock found a steel-framing contractor to replace the original that filed for bankruptcy.

Construction delays mean bad news for students already frustrated with a lack of parking caused by construction on the southeast corner of campus where much of the parking used to be.

“The primary concern has been parking,” said Ulises Serrano, Associated Student Body Government president. “A lot of these projects are long-term. They’ve been extending the time, though, which has made it more difficult.”

Hernandez said plans are being made for more parking near that part of campus.

Hugh Rafferty, outgoing chair of the oversight committee, said it’s natural for larger projects to take time to complete. He also commended Hancock’s board and staff for spending so diligently.

“I think the taxpayers are getting more than they voted for, just in the way of judiciary responsibilities,” Rafferty said. “There’s an awful lot of work that goes into these things.”

Most students are looking forward to using the new facilities, Serrano said.

But with the enrollment and course cuts Hancock has endured because of reduced state funding, Serrano hopes enough students will be around to enjoy the bond’s benefits.

“Even with all the pretty buildings, how are we going to fill them up?” Serrano said. “Long term, it will have a really positive effect on the college. It would really suck if we have brand new buildings but don’t have students.”

Group one projects — completed
1. Science building, completed 2007
2. Community education building, completed 2007

Group two projects — funded
3. One Stop Student Services Center, scheduled completion spring 2013
4. Public Safety Complex, scheduled completion fall 2013
5. Childcare Center addition, scheduled completion fall 2012
6. Fine Arts Complex, bid in fall 2014

Group three projects — preliminary funding allocated
7. Theatre Arts Complex, bid in fall 2014
8. Industrial Technology, scheduled completion spring 2014
9. Physical Education/Athletic fields
10. Physical Education/Athletics, remodel Building N

Group four projects — remain not funded
11. Lompoc Valley Center site development/classroom building
12. Technology Center

— Source: Bond Measure I Capital Construction Program Executive Report

Printed in Santa Maria Times, Lompoc Record and Adobe Press