

# Rob Imhoff

Commissioner Seat # 5

<https://robimhoff.com/>

## Top Priorities

What are your three top priorities if elected to the Board of County Commissioners?

1. Smart Growth: We need more workforce housing and a process that allows it to be built. That means reducing delays, limiting costly appeals, and ensuring growth happens where infrastructure can support it.
2. Real Solutions for Infrastructure: Central Oregon is growing fast. We need long-term planning now, including a highway 97 bypass and coordinated regional transportation improvements that support safety and economic activity.
3. Big ideas that deliver results: That includes pursuing local partnership opportunities to bring Mt. Bachelor under stronger regional influence, implementing a clear and enforceable 6-mile no camping zone around urban areas, and prioritizing local contractors so more county dollars stay in Deschutes County.

## Business Competitiveness & Regulatory Predictability

County governments play a key role in land use planning, permitting, and regional economic development. What role should Deschutes County government play in supporting economic development and maintaining Central Oregon's competitiveness as a place for businesses to invest and create jobs?

Deschutes County is the economic engine of Oregon, driving job growth across key industries like healthcare, technology, manufacturing, and tourism. Protecting that role requires a business climate built on consistency and trust.

The county should provide clear rules, predictable timelines, and a permitting process that allows projects to move forward without unnecessary delays. When businesses and developers understand the process, they are more likely to invest and expand.

Smart growth also means ensuring there is enough land and housing to support a growing workforce. Without that, businesses cannot recruit or retain employees. We should also prioritize local contractors for county projects when feasible, helping public dollars support local jobs and businesses.

Maintaining our position as an economic leader means focusing on the fundamentals: reliable infrastructure, workforce housing, and a regulatory environment that allows businesses to plan, invest, and succeed with confidence.

## **Workforce Availability**

Employers across Central Oregon report difficulty recruiting and retaining workers due to housing affordability, childcare access, and other cost-of-living pressures.

What actions should Deschutes County take to help increase the supply of workforce housing as well as access to childcare in the region?

The most important step the county can take is increasing housing supply. That means reducing delays, limiting appeals that stall projects, and ensuring land is available for workforce housing in areas where infrastructure already exists. When supply increases, affordability follows.

Childcare access is another major barrier for working families. The county should support providers by allowing more flexibility in zoning, streamlining approvals, and removing barriers that limit expansion or new facilities.

We should also work with employers, healthcare providers, and regional partners to identify workforce gaps and support practical solutions, especially in rural parts of the county where access is more limited.

Smart growth means aligning housing, childcare, and services so people who work in Central Oregon can live here. That is essential to maintaining a stable workforce and supporting long-term economic growth.

## **Infrastructure That Enables Regional Growth**

Rapid population growth in Central Oregon is increasing demand for infrastructure to support housing, job creation, and economic activity. What transportation investments or state highway priorities should Deschutes County advance, particularly related to Highway 97, to improve safety, reduce congestion, and support regional mobility?

Central Oregon's growth depends on infrastructure that keeps pace with demand. Highway 97 is the backbone of regional mobility and economic activity, and it is already under strain. Deschutes County should prioritize long-term solutions, including advancing a Highway 97 bypass connecting Redmond to Sunriver to reduce congestion through Bend, improve safety, and support freight movement.

We also need targeted improvements along the existing corridor, including intersection upgrades, access management, and safety enhancements that reduce delays and accidents.

Regional coordination is essential. The county should work closely with cities,

ODOT, and regional partners to align transportation planning with where housing and job growth are actually occurring.

Investments should focus on safety, reliability, and supporting economic activity. Planning ahead will ensure our transportation system supports continued growth rather than becoming a barrier to it.

## **Education & Workforce Readiness**

Strengthening the regional workforce pipeline requires collaboration between employers, education providers, and public agencies. How should Deschutes County support partnerships with schools, colleges, and workforce training programs to strengthen the regional talent pipeline?

Strengthening the workforce pipeline starts with better alignment between education and local job opportunities.

Deschutes County should support partnerships between employers, school districts, and institutions like Central Oregon Community College to ensure training programs reflect real workforce needs. That includes expanding career and technical education, apprenticeships, and job training in high-demand fields such as trades, healthcare, and technology.

The county can play a convening role by bringing together business leaders and education providers to identify gaps and coordinate solutions. Employers should have a seat at the table to help shape programs that lead directly to jobs.

We should also support ways that keep local talent in Central Oregon by connecting students to internships, mentorships, and career opportunities within the county. A strong workforce pipeline is essential to economic growth. When education and

industry are aligned, businesses can find the talent they need and residents have clear pathways to good-paying jobs.

## **Balanced Environmental Stewardship & Economic Vitality**

Deschutes County must balance competing priorities including housing availability, protection of agricultural lands, water use, rural open space, wildfire preparedness, and habitat preservation. How would you approach these tradeoffs, and what principles would guide your decisions when conflicts arise between increasing housing supply and preserving resource lands?

Smart growth means directing housing and development to areas where infrastructure and services already exist, while protecting productive agricultural land, water resources, and open space that are essential to the region's long-term sustainability.

When conflicts arise, decisions should be guided by practicality and long-term impact. Not all land carries the same value or constraints, and planning should reflect that by focusing growth where it makes sense and preserving land that is truly resource-critical.

We also need real solutions for wildfire risk and water use. That includes proactive land management such as juniper abatement, fuel reduction, and defensible space strategies that improve watershed health while protecting communities.

Balanced decision-making requires transparency and consistency. With the right approach, Deschutes County can support economic growth while preserving the natural environment that defines Central Oregon.

## **Regional Representation**

If elected, how would you work with cities, regional organizations, and the state to advance Central Oregon's economic and infrastructure priorities? How will you ensure local employers and business organizations remain engaged in county decision-making?

Deschutes County should work closely with cities, regional organizations, and state partners to align priorities on housing, transportation, and economic development. That includes advocating for shared priorities like Highway 97 improvements and ensuring state investments reflect the region's growth and economic importance. Effective representation also means being proactive, not reactive. The county should be at the table early, helping shape regional solutions rather than responding after decisions are made.

Just as important is maintaining consistent engagement with the business community. I will ensure local employers and organizations like the Bend Chamber have a regular seat at the table through ongoing communication, feedback opportunities, and early input on policy decisions.

Strong relationships lead to better outcomes. By working collaboratively and staying engaged with those driving the local economy, the county can deliver practical solutions that support long-term growth and regional success.