

Rick Russell

Commissioner Seat # 4

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Top Priorities

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

Housing Affordability & Homelessness: We need to expand housing options so families and workers can afford to live here. I'll work with cities, nonprofits, and builders to increase supply and continue my career work to provide stable, supportive housing for our unhoused neighbors.

Wildfire Preparedness & Resilience: With longer, drier fire seasons, we need urgent action. I'll partner with forest agencies, emergency responders, and communities to reduce risk through forest management, defensible space, and ensuring a swift, coordinated response to protect our homes and livelihoods.

Collaborative Government: We need leaders focused on real solutions, not political distractions. I have a record of bringing people together across sectors and perspectives to deliver results on our toughest challenges, restoring a culture of integrity and pragmatic problem-solving to county government.

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 should be a reliable partner that makes it easier for businesses to invest and create jobs, not a source of uncertainty. The County's primary roles are in land use planning and permitting. We need to ensure these processes are predictable and transparent.

Multiple parts of our county have insufficient electrical capacity. That is limiting our ability for industrial development. The county can play a convening role in making sure our grid system is expanding to adequately meet our economic needs.

At the same time, we must recognize that our economic competitiveness is tied to quality of life. Businesses succeed when their workers can find housing, childcare, and a safe place to call home. The County can support this by convening stakeholders, fostering regional collaboration, particularly on middle income housing. A predictable regulatory environment paired with strategic investments in workforce housing makes Central Oregon a place where businesses - and the people who run them - can thrive.

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?

We can't expect employers to recruit and retain workers if those workers can't afford to live here. The County needs to take a proactive convening role to increase housing supply. I'll work collaboratively with every city to adopt a menu of

development options—such as allowing multiple ADUs, second kitchens, detached townhomes, single-stair apartments, and development on faith institution owned property. We also need a regional strategy around shelter types and capacity.

For childcare, the County made significant investments with American Rescue Plan dollars, funding workforce development, new childcare spots, and a business accelerator program to help new childcare operators launch. As that funding source has expired, the County can partner with COCC and OSU-Cascade to develop new child care facilities and provide workforce training, facilitate business start-up loans for day care providers and target support to underserved, rural areas.

We must treat housing as the foundation for stability. I've worked to build housing solutions because I know that when people have a safe, affordable place to live, they can put down roots, and strengthen our community.

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?

Highway 97 is the backbone of our region, but it's also a safety and congestion challenge. My family travels on it everyday to commute to work and school. The County must advocate forcefully for state and federal investments to complete planned improvements, including grade separations in Bend and Redmond, and ensure that safety and mobility keep pace with growth. I'll work with ODOT, our cities, and regional partners to prioritize projects that reduce fatal and serious injury crashes and improve the flow of goods and people.

But infrastructure isn't just highways. We also need to invest in transit, biking, and walking options - particularly safe routes to schools. These alternatives reduce congestion and make our community more livable. As Commissioner, I'll bring my experience in building partnerships to leverage all available funding, ensuring our infrastructure investments support both economic growth and the safety of everyone who travels through Deschutes County.

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?

The County plays a critical role as a convenor and partner. Our schools, community college, and workforce programs are training the people who will fill the jobs our businesses are creating. The County can help by supporting career and technical education programs, such as those provided by COCC, COIC and the Bend-La Pine and Redmond School Districts, connecting employers with training providers, and ensuring that workforce development efforts align with regional economic needs.

I've spent my career building relationships across sectors—with schools, nonprofits, and local government. As Commissioner, I'll use those relationships to strengthen the pipeline from classrooms to careers. That means supporting programs like apprenticeships, advocating for resources for COCC, OSU-Cascades, and local school districts, and making sure that the path to a family-wage job is accessible to everyone in our community, especially those who have been historically left out or left behind.

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?

My guiding principle is simple: we need to increase housing supply. Land costs drive housing prices, so we need to look creatively at building for density. We still have significant space within our urban growth boundaries to create the housing our community needs—especially middle-income and multifamily housing, which are inherently more efficient in their use of land and infrastructure. That’s where our focus should be.

When conflicts arise, I’ll prioritize solutions that meet housing needs while protecting the natural beauty and working lands that define Central Oregon. I’m particularly interested in creative approaches like partnering with faith institutions to develop underutilized land within cities. This preserves rural and resource lands while increasing housing supply where infrastructure already exists. We don’t have to choose between housing and the environment. With smart, intentional planning, we can do both. I’ll bring the collaborative spirit needed to find those win-win solutions.

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?

I've spent 20 years building relationships across Central Oregon—with local governments, business leaders, nonprofits, and community advocates. I know how to bring people together to solve tough problems. As Commissioner, I'll make those relationships a cornerstone of my work, ensuring that our cities, regional organizations like COIC, and state partners are at the table.

To keep employers and business organizations engaged, I'll prioritize open communication and active outreach. That means regular meetings with business groups, listening sessions, and ensuring that the County's decision-making process is accessible and transparent. I don't believe in making policy in a vacuum. When we include the people who will be impacted—whether they're business owners, workers, or residents—we get better outcomes. I'll be a Commissioner who listens first and collaborates always.