

# Morgan Schmidt

Commissioner Seat # 5

[www.morganlovesoregon.com](http://www.morganlovesoregon.com)

## Top Priorities

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

1. Accessible, affordable housing for our workforce and our families, along with consistent, dignifying action to reduce the number of our neighbors experiencing homelessness.
2. Wildfire-resilient neighborhoods and forests - which includes sensible stewardship of the rural lands and waters that feed our communities - as well as protecting the open spaces we all love.
3. Robust public health and mental health services that are inclusive, equitable, and available to those who need them most.

## 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 the easiest place in Oregon to scale a business. As County Commissioner, I will work collaboratively with city and state elected officials,

COIC, EDCO, local Chambers of Commerce, and other key stakeholders to ensure our communities have the supply of shovel-ready and industrial land we need while tackling workforce barriers like affordable housing and childcare. I will support the Community Development Department in making sure permitting and local codes provide clear, consistent pathways for economic investment. My goal is to provide small local businesses and traded-sector companies with a steady County partner - there should be no surprises and reasonable timeframes so that when a business chooses Deschutes County, they spend their time growing their team - not navigating bureaucratic mazes.

## **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?

Workforce housing and accessible childcare are economic drivers in Deschutes County, and our limited supply of both are causing businesses to relocate, stagnate, or pass us by. I will leave no stone unturned and no tool untouched in our pursuit of workforce housing and affordable, accessible childcare.

The next Deschutes County Commission has an opportunity to be more proactive about partnering with city and state elected officials to advocate for the infrastructure funding that will enable us to build more housing for our workforce. I will be a determined, consistent, trusted presence in Salem to work on housing and infrastructure funding alongside our legislators. I will also leverage relationships with federal elected officials to solicit funds for the infrastructure that will allow Deschutes County to increase much-needed housing.

Since infrastructure related to the majority of housing in Deschutes County is under city jurisdictions, the Commission should see itself as a collaborative partner and advocate for mechanisms that will make more affordable housing available. I'd like to see the County use limited funding streams creatively to unlock development opportunities where they make sense in unincorporated areas.

The County has an opportunity to act as a financial catalyst, investing tax dollars in a way that unlocks massive economic benefits:

1. I support the donation of County-owned lands for deed-restricted affordable housing.
2. I will support essential partnerships with projects like Verde Pines, where county gap funding unlocked massive private and state investment.
3. I would like to explore deferring System Development Charges for deed-restricted workforce housing.
4. My understanding is that county permitting is relatively timely, but there is always room for improvement and I'm curious about ways we can help builders save money by expediting permits and inspections for needed housing.

Alongside housing, access to affordable childcare is a barrier to growing our workforce and local economy - I will treat it as essential economic infrastructure. My plan incorporates and expands on critical work that community partners have already begun:

1. Investing in space: County grants and soliciting state dollars for childcare facilities
2. Investing in people: Supporting NeighborImpact, Heart of Oregon Corps, COCC, and OSU-Cascades to recruit, train, and certify childcare professionals.
3. Reduce barriers: Streamlined permitting and lowered fees so that starting a childcare business is as affordable and predictable as possible.

By leveraging every tool at our disposal, we can lower the cost of doing business for childcare providers and make care more affordable for our workforce.

## **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 certainly a priority for Deschutes County's resilience, safety, and economic flourishing. I am in agreement with the tri-county effort to improve safety so that 97 will no longer be the second most dangerous road in the state. I will be a fierce advocate for ODOT improvements - not just in needed infrastructure like safety improvements and Redmond's East Side arterial project - but also for maintenance that ensures this critical lifeline stays open during inclement weather and potential disasters like Cascadia.

If elected, my term will align with the next phase of the Oregon Transportation Package. I will be a fierce advocate for large-scale capital and work with ODOT to make sure that transportation through Central Oregon keeps pace with our growth and offers the steady mobility our workforce and businesses rely on.

## **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?

A strong workforce pipeline is a collaborative venture, and I will be a leader in our County for connecting these resources and programs with the needs of local businesses. There should be myriad paths through our economic ecosystem for people to go from the classroom to family-wage careers that benefit our whole community. Specific strategies include:

1. Working with EDCO, COIC, COCC, OSU-Cascades, and other stakeholders to ensure that certificate programs align skills with industry-aligned emerging needs.
2. Serving as the fiscal sponsor for state and federal grants that fund training for essential trades.
3. Leading by example: the County should make Community Benefits Agreements a standing policy so that capital projects invest in apprenticeship programs, living-wages, and family benefits that uplift our local workforce.

## **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?

This is the great balancing act of a County Commission and there will be difficult decisions ahead. I believe in maintaining appropriate urban growth boundaries and encouraging our cities towards density and increased livability without sprawling and sacrificing vital farmland, forests, and high desert landscapes. Flexibility for rural landowners, as they seek to meet challenges of climate change, workforce availability, and economic viability over time, should come through advocacy and

legislation that applies to the whole land use system statewide, rather than piece by piece and landowner to landowner. Central Oregon's lands and water, along with the rest of our beautiful state, are irreplaceable, and the county's role is to align with the integrity and intent of our land use system so we can continue balancing the health of our people and our environment.

My guiding principles align to protect our lands, waters, and habitat while allowing for necessary investment in our local communities and economy:

1. Economic Pragmatism: our rural lands and wild places are part of Central Oregon's economic engine. If we lose our landscape and waters, we lose much of what attracts families, workers, tourists, and businesses to Deschutes County in the first place.

2. Development from the Inside-Out: working with our cities, I will make land use decisions that help us build the housing and commercial space we need with appropriate UGB expansions and identifying urban reserve areas so that we don't allow development to sprawl across resource lands.

3. Safety & Legacy: I will generally oppose residential and commercial expansion into our Wildland Urban Interface where wildfire risk is highest. Our lands and waters are our legacy, and I will make land use planning decisions that keep our communities safe, protect our water resources, and make Deschutes County a place where insurers and investors know their homes and livelihoods are safeguarded for generations to come.

4. Collaboration, not Chaos: I don't know everything there is to know about owning a local business or driving economic development. I am committed to learning and listening to experts and people with lived experience. I will make data-driven decisions when conflict arises, look for win-win scenarios, and include stakeholders

and experts in conversations to find a balance that benefits our ecosystems and social fabric.

## **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 am proud of my reputation for being a convener and collaborator. Deschutes County has the ability to be a force-multiplier for Central Oregon and serve as an important connector between our cities and state. I am endorsed by mayors and city councilors across the county, most of our state legislators, and Congresswoman Bynum. This is not just a vote of confidence for my leadership, but a reiteration of our working relationships and promise of what we can accomplish together. I look forward to collaboratively solidifying a regional economic agenda that allows us to speak with collective power on behalf of Central Oregon.

I'd like to see the County move beyond public comments and set the table for active partnerships with local employers and business organizations because economic health is intrinsically tied to our health as a thriving region. I will prioritize the county's commitment to the COIC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy by putting processes in place to actually achieve our goals. I will hold listening sessions and town halls with our business community so that I have a chance to listen and understand. Working together, I believe we can make Deschutes County THE preferred place to live, work, and do business in Oregon.