

Jamie Collins

Commissioner Seat # 1

www.collins4deschutes.com

Top Priorities

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

Workforce housing. Central Oregon employers cannot recruit and retain the people they need when a median home in Bend costs \$832,000. I will prioritize deed-restricted workforce housing, urban reserve creation, and partnerships within builder willing to commit to housing that working families can actually afford.

Wildfire preparedness and community resilience. As a nationally credentialed Type 1 Incident Commander with more than 300 emergency responses, I know what it takes to protect communities before disaster strikes. I will deliver a county-wide wildfire preparedness plan, work to keep insurers writing policies here, and ensure Deschutes County is ready for the threats ahead, from wildfire smoke to extreme heat to a Cascadia earthquake.

Protecting our environment and water. Eighteen thousand South County residents rely on a contaminated shallow aquifer, and Upper Deschutes snowpack is at 8% of the 30-year median as of late March. Every land-use decision the county makes should account for water availability. Without reliable water, there is no growth. Our beautiful natural

landscape is a huge part of what brings tourism dollars to Deschutes County and we need to treat it like the resource it is.

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?

The county's job is to provide a clear, predictable regulatory environment so businesses — like the consulting business I run right here in Bend — can plan and invest with confidence. Right now, permitting timelines are too long and too uncertain. I support streamlining the permitting process, creating pre-approved plan sets for common housing types, and reducing unnecessary friction for builders who are meeting community needs.

At the same time, the county needs to be realistic about what growth requires. Our electrical grid is near capacity. Deschutes County is the sixth-largest data center cluster in the country, and new generation projects face interconnection delays because the grid cannot absorb additional capacity. I will push for grid modernization and geothermal development at Newberry Caldera, a 200 to 300 megawatt resource that would give Central Oregon a long-term competitive advantage in energy-intensive industries.

Economic development should also mean accountability. When the county offers incentives, those incentives should come with measurable commitments: workforce housing set-asides, local hiring, family-wage jobs. Public investments should deliver public benefit, and the county should track whether they do.

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?

Housing is the single biggest barrier to workforce recruitment in Central Oregon, and the county has tools it is not using. I will prioritize creating an urban reserve, identifying land adjacent to cities that is ready for annexation and development, so builders have a clear pipeline of developable parcels rather than chasing one-off zone changes in rural areas.

I support expedited permitting for affordable projects and pre-approved accessory dwelling unit (ADU) and middle housing plan sets modeled on what Eugene has done successfully. I will also work with cities to reduce barriers to construction, including system development charges (SDCs) that discourage the housing our region needs.

On childcare, the county should be an active partner in identifying surplus public land and underused facilities that could be made available for childcare providers, and in working with the state delegation to pursue funding that helps Central Oregon employers offer childcare support to their workers.

Healthcare workforce retention ties directly back to housing. If nurses, teachers, paramedics, and tradespeople cannot afford to live here, every employer and every resident feels the impact.

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 Central Oregon's economy, and the county needs to be a more aggressive advocate with ODOT and the legislature for safety and capacity improvements. The corridor between Bend and Redmond carries commercial, commuter, and tourist traffic that will only increase. Intersection improvements, access management, and long-range planning for additional capacity should be top priorities in the county's state advocacy.

Beyond highways, I will push for expanded regional transit connections. Workers commuting between Bend, Redmond, and La Pine need reliable options. Cascades East Transit is a start, but the county should be partnering with cities and employers to expand service and make transit a realistic choice for more workers.

But grid infrastructure is probably more urgent. Central Oregon faces rolling blackout risk within three to five years if we do not invest in grid modernization, transmission capacity, and new generation, including the geothermal resource at Newberry. Reliable power is an economic development issue. Businesses will not invest where they cannot count on the lights staying 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?

The county should be a convener and a partner. I will work with COCC, OSU-Cascades, local school districts, and employers to align training programs with the jobs our economy actually needs, particularly in the building trades, healthcare, and wildfire mitigation.

Apprenticeship programs are one of the most effective workforce pipelines available, and the county can support them by incorporating apprenticeship utilization into county-funded projects and connecting employers with training resources. I will also prioritize expanding access for veterans, women, and workers who have been underrepresented in skilled trades.

Central Oregon is well positioned to become a hub for wildfire mitigation and clean energy work. The county should be actively connecting young workers to those career paths through partnerships with fire districts, utilities, and the emerging geothermal industry. These are not hypothetical jobs. They are the workforce needs we already have.

I also support stronger connections between K-12 career and technical education (CTE) programs and local employers, so students can see a clear path from high school to a family-wage career without leaving Central Oregon.

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?

I start from the principle that economic growth and environmental stewardship work together when growth is directed to the right places. Housing should be built inside and adjacent to cities where infrastructure already exists, not scattered across rural resource lands in ways that increase wildfire risk, strain water supplies, and degrade the landscapes that make Central Oregon attractive to employers and workers in the first place.

When conflicts arise, I rely on data. As a scientist who has spent a career working at the intersection of environmental systems and practical problem-solving, I believe decisions should be grounded in the best available evidence (hydrologic modeling, wildfire hazard assessments, infrastructure capacity analysis), not ideology or political convenience.

Specific principles: tie land-use decisions to water availability. Prioritize infill and urban reserves over rural exceptions. Protect working agricultural lands and forest health. Invest in wildfire fuels reduction as both a safety and an economic strategy. Central Oregon's natural environment is a core economic asset, and protecting it is a precondition for long-term economic vitality.

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?

County government touches every jurisdiction in Central Oregon, and the commissioner's job is to be at the table with cities, special districts, tribes, and the state, not waiting to react. I will prioritize direct relationships with city managers, mayors, school superintendents, and economic development leaders across the region.

I want to be clear here: Commissioner Tony DeBone — on the record, during an interview I sat for across the table from him just last Friday — said he has given up on partnership with our cities and the state because he hasn't been able to get anything done.

I bring experience coordinating across agencies to solve tough problems. I haven't had the luxury of being able to give up. As Oregon's regional on-scene coordinator at DEQ, I worked with private industry, 13 federal and state agencies and 8 federally recognized tribes on emergency response. As a senior Coast Guard officer, I managed multi-agency operations under pressure. That experience translates directly to the collaborative work the county government requires.

For employers and business organizations, I commit to regular, structured engagement, not just public comment periods at the end of a long agenda. The Chamber, EDCO, industry associations, and individual employers should have a clear channel to the Commission on workforce, permitting, and infrastructure issues before decisions are made. Transparency and early engagement build better policy and reduce the surprises that create uncertainty for businesses planning their next investment.