

District 4

Kimberley Culbertson

OPB: Is Washington County currently striking the right balance between protecting rural areas and farm land and allowing development for economic growth and housing construction? Are there ways you think the county should adjust that balance?

Culbertson: I have been one of the voices against data centers for several years because of the problems seen in Eastern Oregon counties, which were early to accept the land use. The cancer diagnoses, miscarriages and deaths in the area of the Lower Umatilla Basin are a shameful result of the hasty adoption of data centers.

While our soils and water table are very different, it is counterproductive to despoil deep fertile soils which are best for varied crops, which allows for a variety of opportunities to supply fresh foods and products to the marketplace. Once a data center is placed, the possibility for farming it again is foreclosed until methods of restoring the soil are developed.

Hillsboro has brought additional land into Industrial zoning to abet data centers, deeming them “enterprise zones” and conferring total exemption from property taxes on new investments (buildings, structures, and heavy machinery/equipment), which can also be converted from a 3-year abatement to a 5-year abatement after the buildout is done. In a technological landscape which is changing rapidly, there is a possibility of the companies receiving these tax breaks leaving Washington County before they have to pay the abatements back. Unlike the SIP/Gainshare deferrals given to Intel and other companies, data centers produce very few ongoing jobs after the construction phase. This means that data centers don’t enrich the diversity of people in Washington county, but merely make money for the venture capitalists and large corporations funding data center construction.

OPB: Washington County was one of the counties hardest hit by the escalation in immigration enforcement last year. Is there anything more Washington County can do to protect its immigrant residents if we see another surge in ICE activity? In what ways, if any, should the county work with the federal government when it comes to immigration?

An early conversation that I had with Sheriff Caprice Massey suggested that the Supremacy Clause was a large consideration in how our county and cities were to deal with ICE, which is to say that there wasn’t much public input involved. Since then, many Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have diversified their offerings to fill the gap.

- Community Action of Washington County: The primary "safety net" aggregator, offering utility assistance and housing mediation. They host the Kaleidoscope community event to strengthen local support networks.

- Beaverton Resource Center: Acts as a hub for the Care To Share Food Pantry Network, which coordinates food resources across Beaverton and Aloha.
- Centro Cultural de Washington County: Located in Cornelius/Hillsboro, they provide culturally specific mutual support, including the recently opened Centro Mercado which offers a dignity-based food pantry and community marketplace.
- HomePlate Youth Services: Specifically focuses on mutual aid for street-involved youth (ages 12–24) in Hillsboro and Beaverton, providing meals, clothing, and peer-led resources.
- PIRC has lead many trainings about immigrant rights and how to respond to requests from ICE and the rights of individuals.

OPB: Last year the county tried to strike a balance with its DEI policies between upholding its values and not making a target of itself for the Trump administration. Was this the right approach? Why or why not? What would you do going forward?

When President Trump signed Executive Order 14151, "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing," it caught Washington County and many other jurisdictions flat-footed. While non-profit organizations and learning institutions quickly pivoted to changing verbiage within their grants, hiring and scholarships to "adversity-based" or "first-generation" programs, Washington County considerer capitulating to the Executive Order.

In my opinion, public input and concern prevented this. The public conversation suggested that the county confer with our recently elected Attorney General, Dan Rayfield, to determine the options available and the protections that the AG's office might render. The County Administrator, Tanya Ange, has shepherded the transition and has implemented a semi-annual "double-audit" system to make certain all department programs have no "identity-based preference" language that could trigger a False Claims Act investigation by the DOJ. Washington County is an exceptionally diverse county and continues to serve our families and institutions. This strikes the right note and ensures that inclusion is our policy.

OPB: How do you plan to approach the tightening budget that Washington County and jurisdictions across the state face? Would you consider incremental cuts county wide or larger cuts to a few specific departments? Would you consider new taxes or other means of raising funds to prevent cuts?

- Prioritize eliminating waste and expensive outsourcing over cutting staff or services.
- Use bonding and federal grants to bridge gaps for infrastructure and climate goals. Investing in resilience now to prevent catastrophic maintenance costs later.
- Focus on modernization of industrial incentives (SIP) rather than new household taxes.