

Position 4

Diana Helm

OPB: One priority I'm seeing from most of the county commission candidates is to lower costs or increase affordability. Given that there are so many outside factors that influence the economy and cost of living, what will you as a commissioner do to keep costs down for Clackamas County residents?

Helm: Many of the factors driving affordability are beyond our direct control. But as commissioners, we can choose not to add new taxes or fees. Instead, we can focus on streamlining the permitting process to lower construction costs and work collaboratively with service providers to rein in SDCs and permit expenses. We can also support workforce affordability by encouraging job growth in higher-wage sectors, investing in job training programs, and partnering with local employers and community colleges.

OPB: In addition to affordability, several of you have listed public safety and "fully funding CCSO" among your priorities. The county's ambulance service provider, AMR, has historically failed to meet response time goals. The contract the county signed with AMR last summer also included a huge price increase for patients. How do you balance improved response times while also prioritizing affordability?

When I came on board last year, I was told that AMR had not had an increase in rates for a number of years. By the time it was reviewed, costs had gone up substantially, especially during and after COVID, and in order to "right size" the costs, the new rates were a shock to many, including me. Incremental rate increases, along with metrics to determine outcomes, is essential for maintaining the expected level of service. We are keeping close tabs on response times, and they have improved greatly.

OPB: As for CCSO, the county discovered some questionable financial management within the sheriff's office last year. For those that say they want to "fully fund CCSO" can you clarify, is CCSO not currently fully funded or has that been the case previously? How would you fund the office while ensuring sound financial management and fiscal responsibility?

I'm part of a work group formed to better understand the complexity of the CCSO budget. We've only met twice, so I'm not ready to offer a firm conclusion until we've worked through the details. I fully support our Sheriff's Office, our deputies, and our jail. At the

same time, costs have grown faster than our revenue, creating a gap that needs to be addressed.

OPB: Some candidates are saying the county needs to build more homes to lower housing costs and help end unsheltered homelessness. What are your strategies for achieving this? In what ways does protection of rural parts of the county factor into this goal? If you feel building more homes is the wrong solution, what do you propose for lowering housing costs and ending unsheltered homelessness?

If you ask any developer or builder, it comes down to this: supply and demand. The more homes available, the more prices will flatten. On the regulatory side, simplifying codes and making requirements more predictable can significantly reduce costs. Builders often say uncertainty is as expensive as fees, so clear timelines, consistent standards, and **faster approvals** all help. We must also address the fact that many senior citizens are on the brink of homelessness due to rising costs. Getting ahead of it, potentially by freezing property taxes for those 65 and over within a certain income range, and partnering with senior services to ensure those fearing homelessness have the resources to stay in their homes is essential. Our rural lands are generally protected already with state laws.

OPB: In the past year some Oregon counties have firmly stated their status as a sanctuary jurisdiction and stated their agencies will not cooperate with federal immigration enforcement without a judicial warrant. Is this a stance you think Clackamas County should take? Why or why not?

We are following state law and I would defer to County Counsel to answer this.