

District 2

Felicita Monteblanco

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?

Monteblanco: At its core, that balance between protecting rural areas and allowing development should reflect the voices of residents and the needs of the broader community.

I appreciate the state's efforts to support economic growth, as Washington County cannot meet these demands alone. At the same time, the strong community response to recent proposals underscores how deeply residents value farmland, our agricultural economy, and the current approach to managing the urban growth boundary.

We need continued, collaborative dialogue among our cities, the County, and the state to identify solutions that create family-wage jobs and additional housing while protecting critical natural and agricultural resources.

Washington County residents clearly value the character and economic importance of our rural areas—from farms and farmers markets to wineries and open spaces. Protecting this vital part of our community while planning for growth requires thoughtful, flexible policymaking and a commitment to long-term stewardship.

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?

Washington County can and should do more to protect immigrant residents, especially in the face of aggressive federal enforcement activity.

Oregonians have made their values clear. In 2018, voters overwhelmingly rejected Measure 105 and reaffirmed our state's decades-old bipartisan sanctuary law. I saw this firsthand while working on that campaign at Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center—talking directly with neighbors about what it takes to keep families safe and communities strong.

Everyone deserves to feel safe in their daily lives: going to work, attending school, accessing healthcare, or simply moving through their community without fear. When immigrant communities are targeted and when anyone is racially profiled, it erodes trust, undermines public safety, and makes it harder for local governments to serve all residents effectively.

Washington County should use every tool available within its authority to protect residents and uphold Oregon law. That can include:

- Providing funding and support to community-based organizations assisting families impacted by immigration enforcement
- Exploring legal avenues to hold federal agencies accountable when actions violate rights or overstep authority
- Ensuring full compliance with Oregon's sanctuary law across all county departments, including examining oversight mechanisms
- Partnering with state legislators to strengthen protections at the state level
- Reviewing county contracts and investments to avoid supporting entities that directly facilitate harmful enforcement practices
- Convening cities, special districts, and community partners to coordinate responses, share best practices, and ensure consistency across the county

The County's role is not to enforce federal immigration law. Any interaction with the federal government should be limited, lawful, and consistent with Oregon's sanctuary protections and Oregonians' constitutional rights. The priority must remain the safety, dignity, and well-being of everyone who calls Washington County home.

This issue is also deeply personal to me. Members of my own family are immigrants, including my father, and I've seen the fear and uncertainty that enforcement actions can create—even for those who have legal status. No family should have to live with that kind of anxiety.

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?

As an elected leader during COVID and during the first Trump administration, I work to give grace to those navigating an ever-changing administration that looks to cause harm and chaos. However, I would have voted differently.

I believe our County government should uphold our community's values and protect families in the face of the Trump administration's threats.

Where the county significantly faulted was its limited engagement with community members. A decision this impactful should not have been made so swiftly or without adequate opportunity for public input.

What I am concerned about is a pattern of decision-making that seems to be happening behind closed doors, including the Clean Water Services debacle. My approach on the Commission will be to prioritize public input and transparency, ensuring our local government is accountable to the people it serves.

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?

We must start with transparency and stronger community engagement—residents need clear, accessible ways to understand and shape the budget. At the same time, we must define and prioritize the County's core functions—public safety, infrastructure, and human services—guided by community input. We cannot rely solely on levies and bonds; we need long-term, sustainable funding strategies. Right now, the only option is for the county to introduce new taxes via the ballot but based on my hundreds of conversations at people's doors while canvassing, this will not be received well.

The County has a great area of improvement when it comes to communications; most residents only hear from them when they receive their property taxes. I would also bring a stronger equity lens, ensuring investments are evaluated for their impact on underserved communities.

I would consider incremental cuts, mindful of the impact on some of the most pressing issues facing the community: housing and homelessness, climate change and safety.