

Position 1

Jamie Collins

OPB: How can the county address housing shortages and rents that are out of reach for many residents? What is your proposal for a long-term solution to the management of shelters and sanctioned camps?

Collins: Our County Commission makes dozens of annual land use decisions that determine what gets built where, and when. Together, these decisions represent the single most important lever on housing policy in central Oregon — and right now, the Commission's direction does not prioritize the people who actually live and work here.

Housing supply: I am committed to using proven tools like deed restrictions to make sure enough housing is set aside for working-class families as our communities grow. Our construction workers, teachers, firefighters, law enforcement personnel, restaurant workers, and public servants need places to live in the communities they serve. The County should be helping our cities grow in ways that create that housing, not approving luxury destination resorts like Thornburgh that suck up our water and enrich luxury developers.

On shelters and camps: I approach this as a veteran with friends and fellow service members who are homeless because of PTSD and addiction, and as a disaster response leader and scientist who has spent a career following the data to make the best decisions available. We have more than a dozen government entities and more than 40 private organizations with some piece of this problem. All of them are doing important work, but we need to ask whether we are spending our limited resources effectively, especially with federal budget cuts starting to hit social services. I have been studying the [North Star](#) initiative in Skagit County, Washington, where the community there pooled overlapping resources, found stable funding for a stabilization center, and reduced the burden on law enforcement responding to mental health calls. That kind of coordination is what Deschutes County needs. The organization that got North Star up and running has already presented a similar vision for Deschutes County to the Central Oregon Regional Housing Council — we just need a County Commission with the will to lead our community in seizing the opportunity.

The county also needs to stop extending the Juniper Ridge Temporary Safe Stay Area in six and nine-month increments and start being a real partner to our cities on a mid-term solution. If that site closes without a stable alternative, most of those residents will end up back in our communities and in the woods, putting themselves and the rest of us at risk from wildfire.

OPB: What measures would you champion to address resident concerns about natural hazards like winter storms, wildfire and extreme heat? Please address each type of disaster in your response.

Collins: As a nationally-credentialed Type 1 Incident Commander and climate scientist, I have helped communities here in central Oregon and across the country prepare for and respond to more than 350 emergencies like wildfires and oil spills. I have the firsthand experience to make sure Deschutes County is ready when it comes to natural disasters — to tackle challenges head-on, even when tough decisions must be made, so we emerge stronger together on the other side.

I spent five years helping build our regional Cascadia Subduction Zone response plan. As

Oregon DEQ's State On-Scene Coordinator, I worked in close partnership with 13 federal and state agencies and eight federally-recognized tribes on emergency cleanups across 18 counties east of the Cascades. The county's emergency management responsibilities fall to both the brave men and women of our Sheriff's Office, and to the talented staff of the many county departments that report directly to the Commission. I will empower these professionals to do what they do best: plan for, educate and respond to all types of hazards.

Wildfire: Here in central Oregon, wildfires have a deep impact on our quality of life, our health, our economy — and the affordability of housing insurance. And we know these challenges will get worse as our winters become less snowy and our summers get hotter. I will:

- empower our County staff to develop a new, county-wide wildfire preparedness plan that coordinates fuels reduction, defensible space programs, and a renewed focus on evacuation education under one framework.
- step up to the plate on our growing homeowners' insurance crisis. Over the past several months, I've met with dozens of insurers and reinsurers who are taking a harder look at Deschutes County. Their concerns are straightforward: the County hasn't done enough to address wildfire exposure, water reliability, and development patterns that increase long-term risk. If a community cannot demonstrate a credible strategy for managing risk, carriers reduce coverage or stop writing policies altogether. We will stand up a new insurance task force with a simple mandate: Unify the incredible work our county, cities, fire districts, HOAs, private organizations and Firewise communities are already doing — and tell our story clearly and effectively to keep insurers writing policies.

Extreme heat: Our summers are already getting hotter and smokier, and these conditions will become more extreme over next 50 years — putting the livability and safety of our community in jeopardy. In the short term, that means standing up cooling shelters for people and animals, housed and unhoused. In the long term, it means working with our school districts and county departments to adapt how we operate during heat waves, the way we already do for snow days and smoke days.

Winter storms: Our region's growth means more people are living here who have never experienced a serious Central Oregon winter. I will work with our emergency management professionals to expand public education and early-warning outreach, particularly in newer developments and rural areas. And I will work with our roads department to deliver the high level of service we currently receive on county roads in the winter — all the more important as ODOT faces a series of cuts that may result in less safe conditions on our state highways.

Cascadia Subduction Zone: I spent five years helping building our regional Cascadia response plan, and I can tell you this: While central Oregon may not directly experience the devastating effects of a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake or the accompanying tsunami, our economy and infrastructure will be deeply affected for decades. As commissioner, I will work with our cities, our school districts, our state and federal partners, and our private businesses and organizations, to ensure we:

- are fully prepared to host our state government when it is relocated here from Salem, • have a plan to feed and house the hundreds of thousands of Oregonians who will be displaced from their homes in the Valley, and
- fully fund Redmond's new CORE3 preparedness facility.

OPB: How would you approach applications to rezone parts of the county for denser development? How do you propose the county grows to accommodate a growing population?

Collins: Growth is coming to Deschutes County whether we plan for it or not, and the county's land use decisions determine who benefits, who thrives, and who gets left behind.

I support helping our cities grow through urban growth boundary expansions when they are paired with real commitments to workforce housing. The county should be prioritizing housing that working families can afford, not high-end resorts in fire-prone rural areas that benefit a narrow set of interests. As I [explained last year in our local newspaper](#), 90% of the zoning exceptions approved by the current Commission have allowed new development in our wildfire hazard zone.

On rezoning applications, I will evaluate each one against a clear set of questions: does it serve the long-term needs of the community? Does it protect our water, our farmland, and our natural areas? Does it create housing that people who work here can actually afford? I will also look at whether the roads, water, and sewer capacity are there to support what's being proposed, because approving development without infrastructure just shifts the cost to existing residents.

One of my early priorities will be revisiting the County's comprehensive plan to explore the creation of an urban reserve. The County's goal should not be to constrain housing supply, but to expand it deliberately — identifying new land for our cities well in advance so growth happens where infrastructure, water certainty, fire protection, and transportation access already exist.

Our decisions on rural land use directly affect housing and homelessness in our cities. When we approve low-density luxury development on former farm and forest land, we are choosing who benefits from growth. I believe those benefits should go to the people who are building this community every day.

OPB: Where would you propose the county build a new solid waste facility and how do you propose helping the county reach the state's Department of Environmental Quality goal of reducing waste disposals in landfills to 45%?

Collins: We must site a new landfill here in Deschutes County, and the current commission has underestimated how serious and how urgent this priority is.

No major landfill has been sited anywhere in Oregon in more than 30 years. Due to the current Commission's failure to site a landfill on schedule, there will likely be a gap between the closing of the current landfill on Knott Road and the opening of a new one — during which a net revenue source for the county becomes a net cost. If we fail to site a landfill at all, which is a real possibility, that cost burden becomes permanent and we will be shipping our trash to private landfills up to five hours away.

This county has long had a policy, supported by our residents, of taking care of our own waste locally. Failing to do that would be a dereliction of our responsibility to future generations, both financially and from a climate standpoint.

I managed large volumes of solid and hazardous waste during my time at Oregon DEQ, overseeing disposal from hundreds of emergency cleanup projects at landfills across the state. I understand this process and I know what it takes to get it done. The County's Solid Waste

Advisory Committee is evaluating two possible sites and will make a recommendation later this year. As Commissioner, I will weigh that recommendation with a focus on protecting our environment and wildlife, respecting recreational uses, and ensuring long-term financial viability for county taxpayers.

On the 45 percent diversion goal: I will prioritize partnership with DEQ and the Circular Action Alliance on implementing the Recycling Modernization Act, and push to get curbside recycling into the unserved parts of the county this year. We also need more investment in recycling infrastructure and education to close the gap.

OPB: Do you support the district map going before voters in November? Why or why not? If not, how do you think commission seats should be apportioned? Why?

Collins: I do not support the current district map proposal — my concern is with the process, not the substance of any particular map.

I grew up as a 4-H kid in a small rural community that was often overshadowed by decisions made in urban areas, so I take the question of fair representation very seriously. Our county is roughly half urban and half rural, and we have a real divide to bridge. There are many good ways to do that.

The District Mapping Advisory Committee was never given the chance to explore those options. When members asked to broaden their mandate, they were specifically instructed to focus only on producing five geographic maps. That is not an open or thoughtful process. Voters should have confidence that any proposal put before them was developed through a genuine process that considered the full range of options for representing both our urban and rural communities fairly. That did not happen here.