

Position 4 Rick Russell

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?

Russell: Housing affordability is the defining issue of our time in Central Oregon — and it's not just a crisis for poor folks. Teachers, nurses, and service workers can't afford to live where they work.

My approach focuses on supply and choice: supporting ADUs, duplexes, triplexes, cottage clusters, and permanent supportive housing. I'll work to ensure we're not leaving state and federal resources on the table — including LIFT, PSH funding, and Federal Home Loan Bank grants. Our commissioners should be advocating with our legislators for infrastructure funding. I'll also push for a county-wide task force that brings together our housing authority, cities, churches and faith institutions with land assets, and developers to unlock land inside urban growth boundaries that is zoned residential but sitting idle.

Regarding shelters and sanctioned camps, I've lived this work. I founded the region's largest Safe Parking program, which has provided safe, legal, sanitary shelter for hundreds of neighbors and helped over 100 people transition into permanent housing. I'm now developing Redmond's first permanent supportive housing community — 75 truly affordable homes.

My long-term vision is a comprehensive county strategy that addresses every point of the housing continuum: safe parking, congregate shelter, permanent supportive housing, and workforce housing. The county must stop outsourcing this responsibility and lead with a coordinated, fully resourced approach that includes case management, navigation services, and a clear scoreboard of outcomes.

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.

Russell: Central Oregon faces growing threats from all three and they demand serious, coordinated leadership.

Wildfire: We wryly say that we no longer have four seasons; we have five. We have fall, winter, spring, summer and smoke season. The threat is real and growing. I will champion expanded defensible space programs, county support for residential brush clearing, and work with ODF and the State Fire Marshal to grow Firewise community certifications across the county.

I'll also work with the state legislature and insurance industry to ensure that homeowners who take action — creating defensible space, hardening their homes — will receive discounts on

insurance premiums. The conversations happening now between the Legislature and the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS) are critical, but we're missing a key partner: homebuilders. We can make significant progress by pulling the partners together.

Winter Storms: I'll ensure the county's emergency management systems are adequately funded and staffed, with particular attention to rural communities like La Pine and outlying areas that can be cut off during severe weather. Vulnerable populations — seniors, people experiencing homelessness, those without heat — need specific outreach and warming center protocols.

Extreme Heat: With my wife serving as a public health director in a neighboring county, I understand the health risks of extreme heat firsthand. I'll prioritize coordination between the county's public health department and community organizations to establish cooling center networks, proactive outreach to at-risk populations, and integration of heat response into our emergency management plans. I have personal experience at operating emergency shelter during winter storms and smoke events. Pre-planning and clear communication channels are essential.

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?

Russell: You should be able to afford to live where you work. That means we need to grow thoughtfully — building density where infrastructure exists, protecting resource lands and open space, and avoiding spot zoning that impedes our ability to plan for smart growth.

I support rezoning for denser development within urban growth boundaries where infrastructure can support it. Communities like Terrebonne and Tumalo have readiness that can be better utilized. I'll push for the county to work with cities on Urban Area Reserve planning, and encourage middle housing, duplexes, triplexes, and courtyard housing, as a practical path to affordability without sprawl.

I oppose irresponsible rural development like large destination resorts and 10-acre parcels for million dollar second homes. Thornburgh does not solve our housing crisis. We need smarter, denser development where nearby infrastructure already exists.

We know that infrastructure costs are limiting growth inside of our UGB's, and the county should be a consistent, clear voice in Salem advocating for resources to expand infrastructure. Placing the full burden of infrastructure on the backs of homebuilders only leads to more expensive housing.

One of the unexplored opportunities is partnering with our faith communities. We have dozens of churches that own residential zoned acreage inside of our UGB's. I know these pastors as colleagues, and they're interested in developing housing on their vacant land and unused parking areas. But churches are often land rich and cash poor. They need help with pre-development costs. In 2024 the legislature approved pre-development funding for faith

institution owned property. It's time for the county to play a convening role in pulling the partners together to see more housing built on church owned property.

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%?

Russell: The current Knott Landfill in Bend is expected to reach capacity by 2031. I support the county's decision to site and permit a new landfill within Deschutes County rather than transport waste out of the area.

The Solid Waste Advisory Committee has narrowed the search to two sites: the Roth East site near Pine Mountain Observatory, and the Horse Ridge site about 20 miles east of Bend, south of the Oregon Badlands Wilderness. The Horse Ridge site would require less wildlife mitigation work, and appears to be a better option. It is important to have options while going into a negotiation with property owners.

On reaching the DEQ's goal of reducing landfill disposal to 45%: this requires a multi-pronged approach. I offer two ideas:

- 1) Construction waste accounts for 38-40% of material going into the landfill. I will lead the county to research and implement construction debris diversion initiatives.
- 2) The county needs to develop greater capacity for composting plant material. Current operations are routing brush, tree limbs, and other materials to the landfill that could be composted. I'll champion education and community engagement. People want to do the right thing when given the tools and information to do so. I'll also look at what peer counties in Oregon are doing successfully and bring those models here.

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?

Russell: The current map going to voters in November was designed with one purpose: to create an advantage for the current majority of commissioners. I do not support it, and will encourage voters to vote against the proposed map. Rigged, gerrymandering, thumb-on-the-scales... choose your language, but Deschutes County voters deserve fair representation.

I would support geographic districting with county-wide voting. This has locally been referred to as the "Missoula model." As a rural Redmond resident, I believe the communities of Redmond, La Pine, Sisters, and rural Deschutes have distinct needs that deserve direct, dedicated representation. However, having all commissioners voted on by the entire county should help ensure that a commissioner from one part of the county isn't making decisions that primarily serve their own community at the expense of others.

