

Position 5

Morgan Schmidt

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?

Schmidt: I firmly believe Deschutes County can become a place where our workforce and families can afford to buy and rent in livable cities near the open spaces we love.

Our next County Commission needs to leave no stone unturned and no tool untouched in our pursuit of accessible, affordable housing; I will be a tenacious advocate for us to the state and leverage my existing and future relationships on behalf of our communities.

The county must increase our housing supply and lower rents so that everyone who lives here can afford to thrive here. As Commissioner, I will address our housing crisis by:

- Leveraging county land donations for deed-restricted affordable housing.
- Supporting thoughtful, strategic UGB expansions as well as Urban Reserve Areas so that our cities can move more quickly to produce affordable housing on UGB-adjacent, buildable, cost-effective lands.

- Cutting red tape and simplifying regulation for rural ADUs
- Advocate for infrastructure and incentive funding from state and federal partners.

I also believe Deschutes County can become a place where unsanctioned camping is largely a thing of the past because we have enough dignified shelter and permanent housing options for our neighbors experiencing homelessness.

We must treat homelessness like the public health crisis it is - we won't wander into good outcomes without a plan. I propose:

- Increased collaboration with service providers and the coordinated houseless response office.
- Working with partners to expand rent and utility relief programs that keep Deschutes County residents from losing their housing in the first place.
- Identifying and supporting more emergency safe camping and safe parking locations.
- Pursuing transitional housing and permanent supportive housing options alongside partners.
- Protecting and expanding support for mental health services and substance use disorder treatment.
- Building more housing, as outlined above.

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.

Schmidt: As the Chapter Executive Director for a national humanitarian nonprofit that responds

to natural disasters, I have a front row seat to the extreme impacts of our changing climate. I will lead with the experience and vision for community-wide preparedness and emergency response.

For wildfire:

- I will advocate for our county to diligently prepare by coordinating with local, state, and federal stakeholders to steward our forests and mitigate high-intensity wildfire risk. ● We must help our communities make their homes, businesses, and lands ready by practicing defensible space, home hardening, and personal preparedness through education and incentives.
- I will work alongside our emergency manager, first responders, and community partners to ensure that we have the resources we need to enact our plans for emergency communication, safe evacuation, shelter, and swift firefighter response when the need arises.

For winter storms and extreme heat:

- I will advocate for robust infrastructure and utilities that can continue serving our whole community regardless of extremes.
- Alongside our cities and community partners, I will make sure that everyone has a safe place to go when outside temperatures are unsafe.
- Working alongside public health and the state, I will work to make sure that our most vulnerable neighbors have the emergency resources they need to weather the storm.

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?

Schmidt: Oregon's land use laws must be implemented and enforced by Deschutes County in order to preserve our agricultural lands, forests, waters, wildlife, and open spaces. I will advocate for appropriate urban growth boundaries and encourage our cities towards density and increased livability without sprawling and sacrificing vital farmland, forests, and high desert landscapes.

If elected, I'll work with our conservation organizations, farming communities, and state elected officials to propose and pass a "High Desert Rule" into our state land use system. Many of the rezones that have allowed Deschutes County to become a patchwork of parcels relies on soil qualities that rank as basically worthless according to the current land use system. Just because our soil is different from the Willamette Valley doesn't mean that it's worthless and doomed to be paved and developed. I envision adding a "High Desert Rule" that closes the sad soil loophole that has carved up our communities and allows us to protect valuable agricultural lands, wilderness, and wildlife.

Central Oregon's lands and waters, along with the rest of our beautiful state, are irreplaceable, and the county's role is to align with the integrity and intent of our land use system so we can continue balancing the growth of our population and our environment.

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%?

Schmidt: The next County Commission should rely on local stakeholders and industry professionals to identify a location for our new solid waste facility; I would never point at a map and unilaterally decide without expert and public input. Our goal should be to choose a new landfill site that's a thoughtful location with minimal, mitigated impacts to the environment.

To help meet DEQ goals, I support mandatory composting, reducing construction/demolition waste, and implementing Oregon's Recycling Modernization Act. I'll work with experts and community partners to develop incentives and penalties that will encourage our whole community to work towards a more circular economy that diverts waste from our next - and hopefully last - landfill.

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?

Schmidt: I do not support the gerrymandered district map, nor should Deschutes County voters.

The map is flawed in substance and process:

- It was drawn using voter rolls rather than updated census data, disenfranchising residents who deserve to be counted.
- The map dilutes the power of Deschutes County voters by limiting them to vote for only one County Commissioner who lives in their district, rather than getting to vote for all five.
- Under this map, County Commissioners would be incentivized to cater to the needs of just one swath of the county, rather than balancing the needs of our whole community. ● Public participation in the mapping process was anemic and inaccessible at best, and a calculated disenfranchisement at worst.

I believe we deserve County Commissioners who are ready to serve with vision and care for our whole county. When this map fails, we will have the chance to create a structure built on good data that represents our communities equitably. Within a thoughtful public engagement process, I would like to see the next Commission consider districting that makes sense: perhaps the Missoula model - where Commissioners live in a particular district but are still elected by the whole county - perhaps with a "Rural Seat" alongside four districts so that at least one Commissioner is living in the unincorporated county, outside any city's limits.