

Position 4

RW Smith

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?

Affordability does not come down to one decision... It is the result of a pattern of decisions over time.

As a commissioner, my role is to slow that pattern down and make sure we are not stacking costs on residents without looking at the full picture. That means reviewing fees, contracts, and long term obligations together instead of in isolation.

I will push for clearer public accounting of where costs are coming from, including utility increases, service contracts, and capital projects. People should be able to see how decisions made at the County level show up in their monthly bills.

It also means discipline. If we take on long term financial commitments, we need to be honest about how those decisions affect flexibility later. Affordability starts with telling the truth about tradeoffs before they hit people all at once.

At the same time, affordability is not only about cutting costs. It is also about building local resilience. In rural parts of Clackamas County, there is an opportunity to support small scale food production through targeted tax incentives. Landowners who choose to grow fresh produce that can support local food banks and community supply could receive relief that helps offset their own costs.

That kind of approach does two things at once. It strengthens food access for vulnerable residents and it gives rural landowners a way to stay financially stable without giving up the character of their land.

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?

Response times matter. When someone calls for help, minutes count. But affordability matters too, especially when people are already stretched.

The current situation shows what happens when oversight falls behind. If response times are not being met and costs are going up, the County needs to step in and reset expectations.

We have already seen how structural decisions can affect response times. When areas like Damascus shifted to an unincorporated model, service coverage became more stretched. That means longer travel distances, more pressure on existing crews, and real impacts on how quickly help arrives.

That did not happen overnight. It reflects a failure to fully plan for what service delivery would look like after those changes. When governance shifts, emergency response cannot be an afterthought. It has to be part of the plan from the beginning.

I would support stronger performance requirements tied directly to the contract, along with clear financial transparency so we understand exactly what residents are paying for. If a provider cannot meet those standards, we need to be willing to revisit the structure of the contract.

This is not about choosing between response time and cost. It is about making sure leadership is actually delivering both, and making sure the same leadership is anticipating these impacts instead of reacting to them after the fact as County Commissioner.

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?

“Fully funding” only works if people trust how the funding is being used.

The Sheriff’s Office has received significant public resources, but concerns about financial management make it clear that funding alone is not the issue. Oversight is. If taxpayers are being asked to support public safety, they deserve confidence that existing resources are being managed responsibly first.

I support public safety, but support has to come with accountability. That means transparent budgeting, regular reporting, and independent review when problems appear.

With a public safety levy being discussed to maintain service levels, we also need to be honest about sustainability. A five-year levy can stabilize services, but it should not be treated as a complete solution. Without a long-term plan, we risk returning to the same funding pressure again.

My approach is simple. Fund essential services, demand clear stewardship, and make sure the public can see where the money is going and why. Trust is built when leadership pairs short-term support with a clear path forward instead of leaving the same questions for the next cycle.

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?

Housing costs are hurting people, and this is not abstract for me. About 15 years ago, my wife and I were paying around \$650 for a two bedroom apartment and trying to build a family. Today, that same apartment is around \$1,500, with no meaningful changes or improvements. That is the reality people are living with.

Simply saying “build more” is not enough. The real question is what kind of housing, where it goes, and whether it actually helps the people who already live and work here.

We need smarter growth inside areas that already have infrastructure, transportation access, and services. That means focusing development where it makes sense instead of pushing outward and creating more long term costs for roads, utilities, and emergency services.

Rural Clackamas is not vacant inventory. It is farmland, natural resource land, open space, and part of the county’s identity and economic stability. Protecting it is not separate from affordability. It is part of it.

We also need to be honest about what is driving costs. Too often the system asks what the market will bear instead of what families can realistically afford. Fees, infrastructure burdens, and speculation all play a role, and those pressures need to be addressed directly.

At the same time, affordability is about resilience. In rural areas, there is an opportunity to support small scale food production through targeted incentives that help landowners stay viable while strengthening local food access.

Ending unsheltered homelessness requires more than one tool. It means shelter capacity, behavioral health services, addiction treatment, and clear pathways back into stable housing. The County cannot treat this as a permanent emergency. It has to move people out of crisis and into stability.

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?

Clarity matters, both for the public and for the people doing the work on the ground.

I believe Clackamas County should be clear that local agencies do not participate in federal immigration enforcement without a judicial warrant. That sets a clean legal standard and keeps local government focused on its core responsibilities.

Public safety depends on trust. When people are afraid to report crimes, seek medical help, or cooperate with local services because they fear immigration consequences, the entire community is less safe. A clear warrant requirement helps maintain that trust.

This is also about roles. County government is responsible for local services like public safety, health, and infrastructure. Federal immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility. Keeping those lines clear protects both accountability and effectiveness.

Any policy the County adopts should be transparent, consistent, and easy for the public to understand. People should know what their local government will and will not do, and why.