

# Lowes throws hat in ring for commission post

By Jim Cornelius  
Editor in Chief

Amy Lowes feels that she knows Deschutes County.

As a Hospice nursing administrator, she crisscrossed the county and, she says, “I learned so much about the different cultures of our different cities and our rural areas.”

As the one-time co-owner of the Kokanee Café in Camp Sherman, she has ties to the Sisters area.

“Most of our customers were from Sisters,” she said. “I feel like I really know Sisters.”

That kind of understanding is important to the candidate for the Deschutes County Board of Commissioners Position 1 because she believes it is important for the commissioners to advocate for policies to promote “economic diversity” and to manage growth that fits the cultures of each of the distinct areas of the county.

“It’s all about collaboration,” she said.

Lowes has a particular interest in how the county manages mental health and addiction services. She advocates for expansion of those

services, including funding the county’s crisis and sobering center for 24-hour operation. She believes that the costs of around-the-clock service would be offset by reducing the burden on the sheriff’s office and St. Charles Medical Center emergency room, since people in crisis are often taken to the hospital where deputies must “babysit” them.

“I think we could better allocate those funds,” she told *The Nugget*. “If we’re going to have a stabilization center, we need to have a place to stabilize them around the clock.”

Lowes has her eye on the approximately 10-year lifespan remaining in Knott Landfill. She advocates for exploring means to extend the lifespan as long as possible through waste reduction — including the possible introduction of a curbside composting program. She also told *The Nugget* that she would be willing to advocate for a plastic bag ban and encourage businesses to find ways to reduce waste. Education of the public on ways to reduce impact is also important, she indicated.

“It’s a big-picture issue,”

she said.

Lowes sees a role for the county in supporting public transit between Sisters and Redmond and Bend — but she notes that it has to be functional and there have to be viable transportation options when riders reach their urban destination.

“You can’t expect people to use public transportation if it’s going to take them twice as long to get where they’re going,” he said.

Lowes was originally drawn into involvement in county politics through an interest in how the county proposed to manage the legalization of cannabis production and distribution. She is satisfied with where the county is currently with its regulation of the industry, including recently enhanced enforcement capabilities.

“I would like to see us stick with what we have for another 12 to 18 months,” she said.

That, she says, is a sufficient timeframe to offer a realistic test of the regulations. She is concerned that if the county tampers significantly with its regulations — among the strictest in Oregon — that it could create

blowback and state intervention that could actually strip away strict protections and/or drive the legal industry out of the county.

Lowes acknowledges that there is an issue with illegal growing operations and black market sales, and thinks the county is on the right track in cracking down in that area.

“I think a lot of the complaints the commissioners are hearing are actually illegal grows,” she said. “It’s not the people who are following the rules.”

**“The rural lifestyle is very precious to people who’ve been here a long time.”**  
— Amy Lowes

Coping with the demand for housing in a growing area — while protecting the values and quality of life that make the region attractive — is a complex thicket of policy choices. Lowes favors encouraging density in urban development to prevent sprawl, and taking a slow, methodical and studious look at EFU zoning in rural areas.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Amy Lowes is running as the Democrat candidate for Deschutes County Commission Position 1.

“The rural lifestyle is very precious to people who’ve been here a long time,” she said.

She cautions that significant changes in how statewide land-use planning is applied at the county level should be undertaken very carefully.

“I think it would be a slippery slope, and I think it’s something that we have to be careful with,” she said.

Particularly in the west county, where county administration and land use has limited direct impact, Lowes sees the role of commissioners as advocacy for community goals — and simply hearing their constituents.

“Overall,” she said, “I feel the job of a commissioner is to listen.”

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