

Suzanne Schmidt | County Commissioner, District 4



Professional licenses or experience: Washington State House Representative 4th LD, Former President/CEO of Associated Builders and Contractors Inland Pacific Chapter, Member of the State Building Code Council, Member of the Greater Spokane Valley Chamber of Commerce, Member of the GSVCC Executive Committee, Member of the Washington State Institute of Public Policy.

Campaign Website: vote4suzane.com

Help us get to know you, what is your favorite event or small business downtown?

My favorite downtown event is the Trees of Elegance, my favorite small business is Wonders of the World in the Flour Mill.

Cultivate Commercial Activity: Downtown depends on attracting investment, supporting businesses, and creating a place where people want to live, work, shop, and visit. What policies or investments would you prioritize to strengthen downtown's economic vitality?

A strong downtown starts with the basics: it needs to be safe, clean, accessible, and welcoming to businesses, residents, and visitors. My first priority is public safety. We can offer every economic development incentive imaginable, but businesses will not invest and families will not spend time downtown if they do not feel safe. We need to support law enforcement, address repeat criminal behavior, and work collaboratively on homelessness, addiction, and behavioral health issues that are affecting downtown.

Second, we need to make it easier to invest here. Government should be a partner, not another obstacle. That means predictable permitting, reasonable regulations, reliable infrastructure, and working with property owners and employers to bring vacant buildings and storefronts back into productive use. I also believe we need to protect the businesses that are already here. Small businesses are dealing with rising costs across the board. The last thing they need is higher taxes, utility costs, or additional regulatory burdens that make it even harder to keep their doors open.

I spent decades working with businesses and employers in our region before serving in the Legislature. I understand that economic development isn't created by government alone. Our job is to create the conditions where private investment can succeed. Downtown Spokane should be a place where people want to invest, open a business, go to dinner, attend an event, and eventually decide they want to live or work there. If we get public safety, affordability, infrastructure, and the business climate right, the investment will follow.





Enhance a Vibrant Experience: Maintaining public spaces, investing in infrastructure, and enhancing accessibility contribute to downtown's long-term success. What role will your office play in maintaining and enhancing the public spaces and infrastructure that support a vibrant downtown?

A vibrant downtown requires us to take care of the basics. Public spaces need to be safe, clean, accessible, and well maintained if we expect people to spend time downtown and businesses to continue investing there. As a County Commissioner, I would focus on the areas where the county can make a meaningful difference while working collaboratively with the City of Spokane, local businesses, property owners, and community organizations. Downtown doesn't benefit when different levels of government operate in silos.

That includes maintaining county-owned facilities and infrastructure, improving accessibility, supporting transportation connections, and ensuring public investments are made responsibly and with a clear benefit to the community. Public safety also has to be part of this conversation. A beautiful park or improved streetscape doesn't accomplish much if families don't feel comfortable using it or employees don't feel safe walking to their cars after work. We need public spaces that are both inviting and secure. Ultimately, government's role should be to get the fundamentals right and create an environment where the private sector and community can build on them. If we maintain our infrastructure, keep our public spaces safe and welcoming, and make smart investments with taxpayer dollars, we can help create a downtown where people want to live, work, visit, and invest.

Build and Expand Housing Options: A growing downtown population supports economic vitality and community resilience. Achieving our goal of 3,000 new housing units over the next 10 years will require reducing barriers to development and expanding housing options. What policies or actions would you support to build more housing downtown?

If we want more housing, we have to make it easier to build housing. Government cannot mandate its way to affordability. We need to address the costs, delays, and regulatory barriers that make projects more difficult to finance and ultimately more expensive for the people who live in them. That means looking at permitting timelines, unnecessary regulatory burdens, infrastructure needs, and opportunities to encourage private investment.

As a County Commissioner, I would also look for opportunities to better coordinate with the City of Spokane and other partners. Developers shouldn't have to navigate conflicting or unnecessarily complicated processes between different levels of government. I also believe we need a variety of housing options. Downtown should have opportunities for young professionals, working families, seniors, and people at different income levels. Adding more residents downtown also strengthens the businesses, restaurants, and services that depend on a vibrant customer base.

Ultimately, the private sector is going to build the vast majority of these 3,000 new homes. Our responsibility is to create an environment where those investments make sense. If we can reduce barriers, provide regulatory certainty, address infrastructure needs, and keep the cost of doing business competitive, we can bring more housing downtown while strengthening the broader community.





Improve Public Safety: Improving public safety requires balancing enforcement, prevention, and long-term community investment. How would you approach those priorities in supporting a safe and welcoming downtown?

Public safety is the foundation of a vibrant downtown. People need to feel safe going to work, opening a business, attending an event, or simply walking down the street. If they don't, everything else we want to accomplish downtown becomes more difficult. My approach starts with supporting law enforcement and holding people accountable when they break the law, particularly repeat offenders who continually victimize businesses, employees, and residents. We need consequences for criminal behavior, and we need to make sure our law enforcement and criminal justice systems have the resources necessary to do their jobs effectively.

At the same time, enforcement alone will not solve every problem. We need to address the underlying challenges of homelessness, addiction, and behavioral health. The county has an important role to play in connecting people with treatment and services while also recognizing that compassion and accountability can, and should, exist together. As a County Commissioner, I would work closely with the City of Spokane, law enforcement, prosecutors, service providers, and the downtown business community. Jurisdictional lines shouldn't prevent us from addressing problems that affect the entire region. Ultimately, our goal should be straightforward: help people who genuinely need help, hold people accountable when they victimize others, and make downtown a place where families, workers, businesses, and visitors feel safe and welcome.

Support Funding, Facilities, and Services for People to Get the Help They Need: Addressing homelessness, behavioral health, and substance use requires coordination across multiple levels of government. Recently, the Safe & Healthy Spokane Task Force released a set of recommendations to improve public safety, behavioral health, housing, and system coordination. If additional public resources become available, what investments related to the Safe & Healthy Spokane Task Force recommendations would you prioritize?

If additional resources become available, my priority would be investments that move people toward treatment, stability, and ultimately self-sufficiency, while also improving public safety for the broader community. Spokane County has a particularly important role when it comes to behavioral health, substance use treatment, and our criminal justice system. We need sufficient treatment capacity and facilities so that when someone is ready for help, or when intervention is necessary, there is somewhere for them to go. Too often, law enforcement, emergency rooms, and our jail become the default response because appropriate alternatives simply aren't available.

But we also have to acknowledge a reality that Spokane County has put off for too long: we need a new jail facility. Our current facility is outdated and inadequate for the needs of a growing county. A modern facility isn't simply about adding jail beds. It is an opportunity to create a safer environment for corrections staff and inmates while providing appropriate space for behavioral health services, substance use treatment, and programs that can help reduce recidivism.





I believe accountability and treatment have to work together. People who commit crimes need to be held accountable, particularly repeat and violent offenders. At the same time, when addiction or behavioral health issues are contributing to someone's repeated involvement with the criminal justice system, we should have the capacity to intervene and connect that individual with treatment. I would prioritize investments that expand behavioral health and substance use treatment capacity, improve coordination between law enforcement and service providers, and create clearer pathways from crisis to treatment and recovery. A new jail facility should be part of that broader conversation about how we build a criminal justice and behavioral health system that actually works. Additional funding also needs to come with accountability. We should establish clear expectations, measure outcomes, and invest in programs that demonstrate they are actually helping people achieve greater stability and reducing their likelihood of returning to the criminal justice system. The goal should be both compassionate and practical: get people the help they need, hold offenders accountable, give law enforcement and corrections professionals the facilities and resources they need to do their jobs, and make our downtown and surrounding communities safer in the process.

Setting the Foundation: Public resources are limited, and elected officials are often required to balance competing priorities when making investment decisions. How do you evaluate competing funding priorities, and what principles would guide your decisions when investments affect downtown Spokane?

Every dollar government spends ultimately comes from the taxpayers, and I believe we have a responsibility to treat those dollars accordingly. We cannot fund everything, so we have to be disciplined about identifying what government needs to do, what will have the greatest impact, and where taxpayers will see real value from their investment. My priorities start with the core responsibilities of county government: public safety, our criminal justice system, infrastructure, and essential services. From there, I would evaluate investments based on a few straightforward questions. Does it address a demonstrated need? Does it improve public safety or quality of life? Does it help create the conditions for private investment and economic growth? And most importantly, can we demonstrate results to the taxpayers who are paying for it? When it comes to downtown Spokane, I also believe strongly in collaboration. The county should work with the City of Spokane, the business community, nonprofits, and other partners rather than duplicating efforts or asking taxpayers to continually fund programs without clear outcomes. I spent much of my career working with businesses and managing organizations where you have to make difficult decisions about limited resources. You prioritize what is necessary, measure results, and understand that sometimes saying yes to one thing means saying no to another. That's the same approach I would bring to county government. Protect the core responsibilities of government first, demand accountability for taxpayer dollars, work collaboratively where we can, and make investments that create long-term value for Spokane County.





DOWNTOWN SPOKANE PARTNERSHIP

Is there any additional information you would like to share about your candidacy that you were unable to provide in the above responses?

I would simply add that my approach to public service is shaped by a lifetime of living, working, and raising my family in this community. Before serving in the Legislature, I spent decades working with businesses, employers, and working families throughout our region. That experience taught me that government works best when it listens first, focuses on the fundamentals, and remembers who ultimately pays the bills. I'm running for County Commissioner because I believe Spokane County is at an important point in its future. We are growing, and with that growth come both opportunities and challenges. We need to protect public safety, keep our community affordable, invest responsibly in infrastructure, support a strong business climate, and make sure growth improves the quality of life of the people who already call this place home. I also believe relationships matter. Whether we're talking about downtown Spokane, public safety, behavioral health, housing, or economic development, many of our biggest challenges cross jurisdictional lines. I will work with anyone who is serious about finding practical solutions and delivering results for the people we represent. I love this community. I raised my family here, my grandchildren are growing up here, and I want them to have every opportunity to build their futures here. That's ultimately why I'm running, and what will guide me as a County Commissioner.



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