

Watchmen Voter Guide for Bonner County Assessor

** Click on each candidate's name to see their completed questionnaire **

	Grant W. Dorman	Donna E. Gow	Jessi A. Webster
<p>1. What is your name, what office are you running for and why are you running for this position?</p>	<p>My name is Grant Dorman and I am running for Bonner County Assessor. I have been a land surveyor for 25 years and have had my own business for 20 years, where I have encouraged and advocated for land owners to preserve their property rights. After seeing the mismanagement of the Assessor's office with respect to fair assessments, trespass, and privacy concerns, I decided I could bring a fresh perspective from the private sector to help bring the office back to its rightful place in local government.</p>	<p>Donna Gow, Bonner County Assessor</p>	<p>Declined to Respond</p>
<p>2. What is your opinion of eminent domain? Under what circumstances do you believe it should be used?</p>	<p>While I am a firm believer in private property rights, I also am a firm believer in the constitution. The constitution doesn't speak directly about the right of the government to take property for public use, but the 5th amendment states that private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation. But what justifies the public to take from the individual? It would seem that it is in conflict with government protecting the rights of the individual, but let's consider the following example: After much debate between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, it was decided that the west would be not put into the hands of a few wealthy aristocrats as Hamilton desired, but instead, surveyed into 160 acre and smaller tracts so that the common man could own land, as Jefferson argued. The land needed to be sold to pay for war debt so they needed to find a way to monetize and populate the west. A parcel of land without access would be pretty worthless so there became a standard practice to create public rights of way along the perimeters of these tracts of land so folks could both have ingress and egress and also facilitate trade. Without that provision, landowners couldn't fully enjoy the benefits of owning land. So, in one sense, the "burden" of providing a right of way, when done property, actually yields greater enjoyment of one's property rights by allowing free and unfettered access, not only between owners and guests but also access to markets for whatever the owner produces on</p>	<p>Eminent domain should be used for the safety of the public such as widening a road. The property owner should be compensated at current market value.</p>	<p>Declined to Respond</p>

	<p>his or her property. So, I would say that eminent domain is most appropriate when it increases individuals rights, but even when it is used for the general welfare, it is a power that must be yielded with the utmost care and respect for the owners and of course provide just compensation as the 5th amendment speaks of. That being said, I would further say that private land should never be taken for the sake of transfer to another private individual as was done in the landmark case of Kelo vs. New London, Connecticut where the courts forced one private owner to sell to another to create an office park, parking lot, and a new park under the banner of public use, justifying it with increased tax revenue and the creation of jobs. In egregious cases like these which abuse the power as intended, I am 100% against using the doctrine of eminent domain.</p>		
<p>3. Do you support or oppose forced annexation? Why or why not?</p>	<p>Generally speaking, I oppose forced annexation. I would support legislation that would allow a small majority of property owners (say 60%) to be able to disallow an annexation to move forward. Additionally, care ought to be taken to allow for hold outs that do not wish to participate in the services proposed to be provided with the annexation. An example would be if a water district wants to expand its services into a new area, but certain land owners already have water wells, those folks should be able to opt out or at a minimum, the fee structure of the annexation should be to assess the costs of the water district to those using the service, and not to those in the district who opt not to use the service. Finally, annexation boundaries should be considered with a fair amount of granularity so that smaller neighborhoods can decide for themselves whether or not to be subject to annexation, and not be done in a broad brush or large-scale manner.</p>	<p>I oppose forced annexation. Annexation is generally used to increase services to an area. If a property owner does not want those services, they should not be forced to take them.</p>	<p>Declined to Respond</p>
<p>4. Our county is growing very rapidly, where do you see we need to improve infrastructure and</p>	<p>With growth comes impact on public facilities, usually facilities that have already been paid for. New development should pay a reasonable fee for the impact on those existing facilities that existing tax payers are already paying for and pay for upgrades that otherwise wouldn't be necessary if not for the growth. That being said, care must be taken when imposing impact fees in 3 ways: 1) Impact fees should be</p>	<p>We need to first improve infrastructure in the most populated areas. There are 2 cities and at least 1 rural area that need improved sewer systems. A very unpopular idea is regional systems. Tax payers don't want to pay for a system when they believe their system is working. It will take a long time to solve this</p>	<p>Declined to Respond</p>

<p>what are your suggestions?</p>	<p>calculated very carefully to be used only in close proximity and only in response to growth in those particularly affected neighborhoods, 2) should be put to use in a short timeframe, not sitting on the books for more than a reasonable time, and returned to the developer if not spent on affected infrastructure within a reasonable timeframe and 3) should only be used responsibly in response to growth, not a tool to control or steer growth, lest we become like those coastal communities where impact fees grow into an out of control monster used for all sorts of purposes other than their initial intent.</p>	<p>problem because no one wants a sewer system in their “back yard”</p>	
<p>5. Do you support or oppose Urban Renewal Districts? Why or why not?</p>	<p>I am opposed to Urban Renewal Districts. The idea of urban renewal districts sounds good on the surface, especially in areas where there is significant blight and poverty, but when put into actual practice, the unintended consequences become apparent. All too often, the URD tries to address the symptom without addressing the cause. Often the cause of blight is lack of economic opportunity and pride of ownership of the property owners of a community. But when the URD addresses the aesthetic or increases public facilities, these areas often become unaffordable for the folks who were the intended beneficiaries and wind up moving out of the area. Generally speaking, URD’s seem to address the symptom of the problem rather than seeking to truly address the underlying cause of the problem.</p>	<p>I support Urban Renewal Districts for the original intent which is for blighted areas. I don’t think the districts should be for such a long period of time.</p>	<p>Declined to Respond</p>

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6. In your opinion, if elected, who do you see yourself accountable to and why?	As assessor, I am first accountable to God. Proverbs 11:1 says, "Dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight" The assessor must uphold the duty of fair assessments in the light of public service. Second, I am accountable to the voters; if I don't do the job, they can and should replace me next election. Third, I am accountable to the State of Idaho. Each year, the State Tax Commission does an audit to make sure that the job is being done appropriately, and if it isn't done so, they can and will step in and do it themselves.	For the Assessor's position, I am accountable to the property owners of Bonner County and the State of Idaho by following state statutes and rules. In the Assessor's Office, I have always had the policy that this is just a job and that family comes first.	Declined to Respond
7. The county is rapidly growing as are housing prices. If elected, how will you assess property values in regards to keeping property taxes low?	It is important to understand that a community's property tax is primarily determined by the taxing districts (schools, libraries, highway districts, cities, etc.) Those elected officials determine their operating budget every year and decide how much of their budget will be funded with fees and how much with property taxes. The assessor's job is to provide to the clerk and the tax collector fair market values of each house, taking into account exemptions, so that those district's tax burdens are spread appropriately based on market values. <u>The assessor has no role in keeping taxes low or for raising taxes for that matter.</u> Their job is to simply provide valuations so that the overall tax burden, is distributed proportionately.	The only way the Assessor's Office has any influence on the taxes is to make sure all nonexempt properties are on the tax rolls, to audit exemptions to make sure they are doing what they should be, and put new construction on the rolls. This increases the base that the levies are based on. This is a little complicated, but, the bigger the pie and with more pieces cutting into the pie, the taxes should be less per slice.	Declined to Respond
8. Do you support or oppose requirements for developers to pay for community infrastructure?	Yes, see question number 4.	I support the requirement for developers to pay for community infrastructure as long as it is used for the intend purpose and does not become a tax revenue.	Declined to Respond
9. Do you believe the ARPA funds come with Federal requirements that might conflict with Idaho values? Why or why not? How will you advocate for the funds to be used locally?	Absolutely, ARPA funds come with conditions that conflict with Idaho values. The contract terms are one sided and give the US treasury more control oversight of local funds than what is appropriate. The stated objectives of racial equity and equality of outcomes are not aligned with Idaho's traditional values of providing equal opportunity and rewarding individual effort and reinforcing individual accountability. The ARPA plan seeks to grow local government and increase dependency upon it. It also	I have not read the requirements for the ARPA funds. Federal monies like ARPA or grants need to be studied and used for one time only projects.	Declined to Respond

	<p>contributes to inflation, by providing government with funds that have the net effect of reducing citizen's purchasing power, effectively creating an invisible tax on savings and earnings. I have participated as a guest speaker at a local townhall on ARPA and am scheduled this week to give a similar presentation. I plan to continue to advocate for sending the money back, we don't need it or want it.</p>		
<p>10. How would you utilize the budget that you manage while being fiscally responsible?</p>	<p>I will seek to find ways to increase employee efficiency and retention. The office currently has a turnover problem, which requires continual training of new staff, which wastes taxpayer funds. The key to managing the budget is to promote profession growth amongst the staff to increase commitment to the department and job performance. In my opinion, one of the best measures of success of the office is how many assessments are appealed. If folks aren't satisfied with their assessment, they can appeal it to the Board of Equalization (the County Commissioners). And then if they aren't satisfied, they can take it to the State Board of Tax Appeals (BTA). Over the last 3 years, the BTA heard 4 residential appeals from Kootenai County, 1 from Boundary County, but 28 were from Bonner County! In fact, in 2021, out of 44 counties in Idaho, Bonner County alone accounted for 11 of the 24 residential appeals to the state! Even Ada County, with over 7 times more property value than Bonner, only had 6 appeals. This represents a huge amount of money defending these assessments that is simply the result of the lack of leadership to get the job done right the first time.</p>	<p>I do maintain a very tight budget. The Assessor's Office has not purchased a new vehicle since 2018 and our office has not been remodeled since we moved into the Administration Building in 2008. I do not spend money on technology or other operating systems that do not work for us. I do a lot of research for any product or system that will work well for us while not spending taxpayer dollars.</p>	<p>Declined to Respond</p>
<p>11. Do you support or oppose the idea of a county manager? Why or why not?</p>	<p>I completely oppose the idea of a county manager. The Idaho constitution and statute define job of the commissioners, and we need THEM to do the job, not another intermediary between the people and government. In my opinion, any argument in favor of a county manager is simply an argument for why government should grow beyond its constitutional jurisdictional boundaries.</p>	<p>I do not support the idea of a county manager. My observations are that once a manager is appointed, they are not held accountable.</p>	<p>Declined to Respond</p>

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12. With the rapid growth of the County, do you think we need more commissioners?	No. We need the commissioners to do their job.	I don't think Bonner County could grow enough to require additional commissioners.	Declined to Respond
13. Do you believe the six Row Officers (assessor, sheriff, prosecuting attorney, treasurer, coroner, and clerk) should be appointed or stay elected? Why or why not?	They need to stay elected positions. This is how the people keep government in check. We don't need consolidation of power, we need division of power to provide healthy checks and balances. For more information, read Federalist #47 on the necessity of the division of powers.	Although these positions are not really political, I believe they should be elected. Several states have these positions as appointed and they seem to work well, but, I think if elected, they have more obligation to the voters.	Declined to Respond
14. In your opinion, does the office of Assessor provide any checks and balances amongst the other elected officials?	When done property, assessments provide an appropriate distribution of taxes to all property owners. When a community votes for elected officials, they are entrusting to them the power to burden their property with taxes, and the assessor keeps that distribution proportionate. Additionally, when the assessor maintains a certain healthy distance from the commissioner's office, the Board of Equalization appeal process can work properly, however, if the two departments coordinate their efforts too closely and don't maintain healthy boundaries, the appeal process can fall apart and we can see the results of higher appeals (see question #10 above.)	The Assessor's Office works with most of the other elected officials and different departments in the county, the only checks and balances is to make sure the audit report is correct.	Declined to Respond

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<p>15. What is your background and why do you believe it qualifies you for this position?</p>	<p>I have been married to my wife Michelle for 28 years and we have 4 beautiful children and one new grandbaby! Our oldest daughter and her husband are seniors at Hillsdale College in Michigan. Our oldest son is serving in the US Navy in Florida and is married also. We also have a son who is working locally in the construction industry and a daughter who is wrapping up high school.</p> <p>I grew up in a household where I assisted my father with residential construction and continued to do that after high school until I joined the US Navy where I served as an Air Traffic Controller. Afterwards, I continued to work in residential construction, while pursuing a bachelor's degree in Land Surveying. I have been a land surveyor for 25 years and had my own business for 20 of those, where early on, I focused on the residential and commercial real estate sectors.</p> <p>After the 2008 real estate crash, I returned to school and earned my Masters in Business Administration, which gave me the skills necessary to grow the business into other market sectors, including public utilities, transportation, and infrastructure to become more resilient to the boom and bust cycle of real estate. We went through a merger with an engineering firm and also acquired another land surveying firm and have managed as many as 30 employees and 5 field crews in multiple office locations. In 2015, we expanded into the timber industry in North Idaho and Eastern Washington. In 2020, I sold my surveying business and continued as a consultant until last year. Having completed that commitment, I am ready to bring to the office of Bonner County Assessor the entrepreneurial spirit that believes if you don't take care of your employees and customers, you don't have an much of an organization.</p>	<p>I have over 30 years in the Assessor's Office, over 500 hours of appraisal education and served under 5 different Assessors. The past 3 years I have served as the Bonner County Assessor. I was also a Realtor for 4 years, which gives me more insight into market value. The Assessor is an administrative position, but from my experience, it makes a difference if the Assessor is an appraiser. With me as the Assessor, there is no "on the job" training. I know all aspects of the position. Like people have said in the past, you wouldn't want an administrator with no law enforcement experience to be your Sheriff. The same can be said for the Assessor.</p> <p>Thank you for this opportunity.</p>	<p>Declined to Respond</p>