

Watchmen Voter Guide for Kootenai County Clerk

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

	Mike Bauer	Jennifer Locke
<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 Mike Bauer, Republican, and I am running in the Republican Primary to be the next Clerk for Kootenai County because I want to ensure that the voters in Kootenai County have a voice.</p> <p>Over the last decade living in Kootenai County, I have heard time and again that the people of this county want a transparent, efficient and effective limited government. Absent a grand jury system to examine government efficiency and effectiveness, Idaho relies in large part on its County Clerk-Auditors to provide this service.</p> <p>I offer my experience as a trained, qualified and ethical law enforcement manager who believes in personal values over personal gain. The residents of Kootenai County deserve a choice for Clerk who is intent on holding our county agencies and districts to the highest standards</p>	<p>My name is Jennifer Locke and I am running for the office of County Clerk, Clerk of the District Court.</p> <p>Appointed by Clerk, Jim Brannon, I have been serving as the Chief Deputy Clerk of Kootenai County for over five years. The Clerk's office manages five departments: Elections, District Court, Recorder, Auditor, and County Assistance, comprised of 105 employees and a budget of just under \$8 million.</p> <p>I was encouraged to seek the office of Kootenai County Clerk by the current Clerk, many of my county co-workers, and my family. They have witnessed my dedication, growth, and perseverance to perform my duties and learn the responsibilities of the Clerk's office for the service of the citizens of Kootenai County. I chose to run for this office because the County Clerk works with all citizens, employees, and other elected officials to provide an effective government. The purpose of government is to serve the people with minimal impact on citizens' daily lives and their wallets. I believe in limited government that serves its constituents in the most cost-effective way.</p> <p>During the last five years, I have taken pride in my ability to be available and listen to all constituents of Kootenai County. I have resolved issues within the areas of my responsibilities and discussed citizens' concerns with the Clerk and other Elected Officials. I also took on the complete responsibilities of running the Clerk's Office during the hospitalization and recovery of the current Clerk. This offered me a deeper understanding and ability to execute the responsibilities of the County Clerk. My time as Chief Deputy Clerk has equipped me with the knowledge and experience to serve the people of Kootenai County and perform the important duties and responsibilities of County Clerk.</p>
<p>2. Election integrity has become a serious concern for voters. How will you preserve election integrity to the highest level?</p>	<p>While election integrity is one of many critical functions of the Clerk's Office, I rate our election integrity as Good, but not transparent, with room for improvement. I am running partly because election integrity would benefit from a management change.</p> <p>Many local citizens have studied and questioned the integrity of the 2020 National Presidential Election, but have not thought it necessary to inspect Kootenai County elections. I believe this is short sighted. The 2020 General Election in our county saw historic rapid increases in late voter registration, presenting a massive time-of-residency verification workload for a limited election staff at the busiest time of year, under Covid restrictions. Thereafter my opponent implemented the use of electronic poll books in the pace of the traditional paper poll books and</p>	<p>As the basis of our constitutional republic, election security and integrity will continue to remain one of the highest priorities of the Clerk's Office. Current candidates for Secretary of State have pointed to the Kootenai County Elections Department as a model of efficiency and security in the State of Idaho.</p> <p>In 2020, I spearheaded the effort to have the Elections building equipped with live stream cameras that can be viewed on our county website. This allows the public to view where ballots are secured and stored, absentee ballots are opened, and voted ballots are tabulated. I have also led the implementation of many other election security measures. In 2020, the Kootenai County Clerk's Office did not apply for or receive money from any privately offered funds.</p>

	<p>began using scanners to record identification documents. It is difficult to argue against improved technology except that <i>auditing the electronic data is impossible for lay persons who are not IT experts</i>. Thus election integrity in our future may depend largely on trusted IT personnel. This is problematic. Election integrity is also a function <i>preemptory system security design, and redundant ethical management</i>. Although Idaho Secretary of State approves election hardware and software, I have reason for concerns about our equipment selection, our vender consultant vetting, our questioned ballot adjudication process, and voter roll accuracy. Above all, I have serious concerns about several unusual and unethical Election Manager dismissals in 2018 and 2019 by my opponent, leaving election management and integrity to fill-ins and lesser experienced personnel, as discussed on my website Mikebauerforclerk.com.</p>	<p>In December 2021, our Elections Department completed a recount of a race from the November 2021 Election. The recount yielded exactly the same results as reported to the public.</p> <p>With the increased population of Kootenai County, our voter registration has increased to nearly 104,000. This is an approximately 27% growth in voter registration since 2017. Each election has increased in complexity with more races and higher voter turnout. We continue to take measures to educate voters on the election process within Kootenai County. As an example of this on April 12 at the Elections Department, a representative from the Idaho Secretary of State's Office and the Chief Infrastructure Security Officer from ES&S (Election Systems & Software) will speak on election security.</p>
<p>3. Our county is growing very rapidly, where do you see we need to improve infrastructure and what are your suggestions?</p>	<p>Per the US Census, as of July 2021, we have 179,789 residents, and we are growing at just under 5% per year. This growth is likely as fast as available housing can accommodate it. The free market currently limits our growth by limiting housing availability, notwithstanding non-resident second homeowners who cannot vote here but pay substantial property taxes.</p> <p>I believe there is no benefit for leaders in Kootenai County to replace a positive North Idaho attitude of "Home of Western Hospitality", with growth fear mongering I have heard from political candidates, including a few in law enforcement. Growth must be managed with the least coercive strategies, in our local political environment where "central planning" is held in disdain and "property rights, free market and personal freedom" are the more commonly preferred majority concepts. For its land mass, I believe the growth of Kootenai County is very manageable with professional traffic planning and courteous law enforcement who endeavor to reward drive courtesy in a positive way. My election as Kootenai County Clerk is one way to help "quiet the noise and hysteria" of the growth alarmists in our County.</p>	<p>With the notable exception of schools, the increase in tax revenue generated by new construction generally can pay for the increased needs for infrastructure. It's important that citizens look at how taxing districts are spending their funds and study new projects taxing districts are proposing and how they will meet the infrastructure needs of our community.</p>
<p>4. 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?</p>	<p>Any Federal handout comes with strings. Most we can live with, but we cannot in my opinion supplant normal funding for essential services with windfall funding that is temporary and irresponsibly adds to the National Debt and inflation.</p> <p>It would be foolish to reject funding from ARPA but it must be used wisely on one time projects that we acknowledge in advance could be put at risk if a future audit by the Federal Government results in a call back of the funds. I believe this funding should be channeled to solve growth related issues such as traffic and density concerns and one-time initial community infrastructure development that would have been needed anyhow.</p>	<p>The Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) set up a task force, headed by our County Treasurer Steve Matheson last year to review the ARPA grant requirements and research and rank submitted projects. After the task force submits its project rankings to the BOCC, the Board will make the final decision on if and where they will spend the money.</p> <p>At the County Elected Officials meeting in February, I heard the concerns about APRA from many citizens. I have spent time talking to members of the community, the Task Force, and the Board of County Commissioners regarding ARPA funds. I will continue to listen to the concerns of citizens and encourage them to submit comments to the Board. I will not advocate</p>

	<p>For the second year in a row, Governor Little intends to refund State income tax to Idaho taxpayers, based on a massive surplus, while the Federal authorities pump more cash into our communities. What could possibly go wrong. Inflation notwithstanding, the County Clerk's Auditor responsibilities appear to be a focal point in identifying any waste, fraud or abuse in the expenditure of Federal ARPA funds under this windfall program, to head off any future audit-driven callbacks by the Federal Government.</p>	<p>for any proposed uses of ARPA funds because the ultimate decision rests with the BOCC.</p>
<p>5. Do you support or oppose Urban Renewal Districts? Why or why not?</p>	<p>Urban Renewal Districts are intended to encourage private development in urban renewal areas by adjusting property tax requirements downward for a period of time. Because the Local Development Act is Idaho law, the Clerk's personal opinion on the Urban Renewal District process appears to be irrelevant until legislation is proposed to change or eliminate the process. However, since a local governing body is not required to place the proposed urban renewal district before the voters, I personally do not support a process that bypasses the very property taxpayers whose mill levy calculations are affected by it.</p> <p>In Idaho and Kootenai County, this is complicated by the lack of a standing grand jury accountability process designed to examine and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of government operations and decisions such as the administration of Urban Renewal Districts. Thus the Clerk's Auditor responsibilities are at play here.</p>	<p>Oppose. Urban renewal districts divert increment value increases from taxing districts within their district area to the urban renewal district. This ultimately leads to higher taxes. You can go to our county website to see what impact urban renewal districts have on taxing districts within Kootenai County, a total of \$12,256,900 for FY 2020: https://www.kcgov.us/214/Urban-Renewal-Funding.</p>

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6. Do you support or oppose requirements for developers to pay for community infrastructure?	I support that requirement without exception where density of the development is clearly beyond the sensibilities of congestion as understood by "Idaho Values". In less dense developments I would support a lesser requirement, but in all case I feel school costs should be borne only by the property taxes of all the County residents. This topic is very appropriate for a candidate for County Commissioner.	In a rapidly developing area such as Kootenai County, having the developer pay costs of new infrastructure caused by their development is preferable to taxing those already living here. However, the developers ultimately pass these costs to the purchaser of the developed property which drives up prices. Growth could pay for itself, but only if the taxing districts use the increased funds wisely.
7. In your opinion, what does the Clerk provide in terms of checks and balances in regards to the other elected officials?	<p>The Clerk of the District Court, or County Clerk as the position is commonly called, wears many hats that affect the other elected officials. In addition to having County Budget and Auditor responsibility for other Departments, the Clerk has the following duties in the County: Chief Elections Officer of the County, Clerk of the Board of County Commissioners, Clerk of the District Court, and County Recorder.</p> <p>If the current recommendations of the Kootenai County Optional Forms of Government Commission are placed on the November ballot by the BOCC and pass voter scrutiny, the next Clerk will shift budget oversight to a new County Executive who reports to a five person Board of County Commissioners. Under the current recommendation, the initial proposal to appoint all currently elected County officials except Commissioners has been withdrawn.</p> <p>Where the current elected officials most rely on the Clerk is the role of Chief Elections Officer, and it is essential that this election function avoid hyper-partisanship. The conduct of free and fair elections, along with a non-political Judiciary and Criminal Justice-Law Enforcement system, ensure the continuity of our Representative Republic.</p> <p>A most important job of Clerk is protecting the integrity of County functions. To the extent permitted by law and with the cooperation of the BOCC, the Clerk should function as de facto "Inspector General" of the County system, in the absence of any other such function in Idaho. That is why law enforcement management experience is important for a Clerk, as it has been in times past.</p>	The checks and balances under the current system work well. The Treasurer performs the duties of the banker, the Clerk is the bookkeeper and the Board is the final approver of expenses. As the budget officer of the county, the Clerk's duties are to compile and present a budget to the Board of County Commissioners for approval. Once approved, we enter, amend and track all Elected Officials' budgets and create reports for the Board, Elected Officials, and the community to review.
8. Do you support or oppose the idea of a county manager? Why or why not?	<p>I am most familiar with the position of county Chief Administrative Officer, which is a requirement of a county with millions of citizens who have little or no access to their elected County Supervisors (Commissioners). Kootenai County, though growing at a pace that makes some very uncomfortable, does not need such a position.</p> <p>In my opinion, what this County needs in the place of a County Manager are three high energy, engaged and enthusiastic Commissioners who are not handicapped by hyper-partisan interference in their work.</p> <p>If the voters decide to approve such a new position, I will work closely with the new officeholder to transfer budget responsibilities, and that person will receive my full cooperation and support.</p>	<p>I oppose a county commission manager, as laid out in Idaho Code 31-5303. This form of government has never been implemented in any of the 44 counties in the State of Idaho. The Board has the power, if they feel the need, to hire an administrator or a chief operating officer like Ada County has done without changing the form of government. There has been no real study done on the financial impact to change to this form of government. Ultimately if the Board chooses to put this on the ballot, the citizens will have the final say on whether to switch to a commission manager form of government. I have included the statute of the commission manager in my answer for citizens to understand the power of this position.</p> <p>COMMISSION-MANAGER</p>

		<p>31-5303. POWERS AND DUTIES. The manager shall:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Have general supervision of the administrative functions of the county; (2) See that the ordinances, resolutions and contracts of the board of county commissioners are complied with and faithfully executed; (3) Furnish the board with information concerning the operations of county departments, boards or commissions, as necessary for the board to exercise its powers or as requested by the board and submit any other reports requested by the board or as he deems necessary; (4) Prepare and submit an annual budget for the county to the board of county commissioners. The manager shall be the county budget officer and shall be responsible for the performance of the duties of the county budget officer as provided in chapter 16, title 31, Idaho Code, and any other provisions of law imposing duties upon the county budget officer. (5) Keep the board fully advised of the financial condition and needs of the county; (6) Attend meetings of the board of county commissioners, take part in the discussions, but not vote, and recommend measures for adoption; (7) Exercise the executive authority of the county to appoint, supervise, suspend and remove county personnel and make nominations and appointments to advisory boards and committees; (8) Perform such other duties as the board may establish by ordinance or resolution.
<p>9. With the rapid growth of the County, do you think we need more commissioners?</p>	<p>As I explained in the previous question, #8, NO. President Ronald Reagan explained that the solution to problems is not more government, government IS the problem. We need more energy and more opposition to hyper-partisan interference.</p>	<p>No, I believe to be an effective commissioner it needs to be a full-time job that requires each commissioner to diligently do their own research on decisions that will impact our community. The Board has the power to hire staff or a chief operating officer to help with the administrative day-to-day tasks, who also could help be a liaison to the Board's departments. There are no other counties in Idaho with more than three commissioners, including the two largest counties, Ada and Canyon.</p>
<p>10. What is your view of moving the budget from the Clerk's Office to a commission manager under the BOCC?</p>	<p>Assuming such a manager position exists next January 2023, I recommend that the Clerk retain budget review responsibility and present the findings of audits and inspections regarding budget problems to the new manager for executive action by the BOCC. This creates the redundancy necessary to prevent the hiding of fiscal mischief by having too few witnesses to the discoveries. Of course, I am thinking like an auditor with integrity.</p> <p>However, if the current recommendations of the Kootenai County Optional Forms of Government Commission are placed on the November ballot by the BOCC and pass voter scrutiny, the next Clerk will shift budget oversight to this new manager and I would cooperate fully in that transition.</p>	<p>Financial Systems access is specifically designed to promote best internal control practices, which are maintained and monitored daily. The Clerk would still be responsible for reporting, accounting, and annual audit responsibilities in accordance with state law. Moving the budget officer under the BOCC would cause duplication of efforts and present many unclear delineations of duties. Having the budget officer report to the BOCC will require additional training and staff. All of these costs will be paid for by the taxpayers.</p>

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11. How would you utilize the budget that you manage while being fiscally responsible?	<p>The Clerk budget generally will be monitored by my Chief Deputy who will be instructed to provide regular progress reports. Projected budget shortfalls will be discussed with the BOCC where they will involve critical functions such as elections or District Court and Recorder personnel vacancies requiring overtime. The overall County Budget is a different issue requiring close coordination with Department heads.</p> <p>It is the practice of the current BOCC to draw back salary savings from vacant budgeted personnel positions (commonly called <i>salary savings</i>) and not let Department heads reallocate the funds. I will work cooperatively with the BOCC to loosen up that policy when appropriate. At the same time, all Departments are expected to keep within their budgets, assuming the new Optional Forms proposal does not pass and that monitoring of budget shifts to that new manager position.</p>	<p>Since being Chief Deputy Clerk, I review budget performance reports to see how the five Clerk's departments are operating within their budget. Overall, since Clerk Brannon has been Clerk and I have been Chief Deputy Clerk, the Clerk's office has always returned money back to the various county funds. As a conservative, I am always looking at how the Clerk's Office can save money and be more efficient. Once those funds are returned, how they are allocated and spent is beyond the purview of the Clerk's Office.</p>
12. What is your view on eliminating the property tax in favor of a higher sales tax?	<p>I doubt such a proposal would be placed on the ballot in Idaho. If it were, I would oppose it, based on the likely disruption of County revenue and the certainty that non-resident second-homeowners would not be appropriately contributing to the Kootenai County budget and our infrastructure via Special Districts. For property tax relief I would support a significant increase in the Homeowner's Exemption amount, with additional measures to ensure it is not abused through fraud.</p>	<p>Our state had a surplus this year of \$1.9 billion. I am in favor of reducing the property tax burden whenever possible. A higher sales tax would bring in additional funds from non-residents, that would assist in funding the county's budget. There will likely be another bill introduced next legislative session for property tax relief for taxpayers with a homeowner exemption through an increase in sales tax. I also would like to see our legislators reduce or eliminate the grocery tax.</p>
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?	<p>They should stay elected. This appointment proposal was one of the most outrageous suggestions I have heard in my decade in Kootenai. Representative government requires voters have a direct say in selecting the people making decisions affecting their lives.</p> <p>I agree that the political environment in this county can become toxic at times, however that failed proposal would have effectively thrown out the baby with the bathwater. Non-partisan elected offices deserve a separate vote or a State Constitutional Amendment.</p>	<p>I believe all elected officials should remain elected. This allows direct accountability to the voters.</p>
14. What is your background and why do you believe it qualifies you for this position?	<p>I have lived in Montana and Idaho for the past 20 years, and I bring 33+ years of law enforcement experience. During my career I became very familiar with administrative civil and criminal law, and risk management. As a former Sheriff Captain of an Organized Crime Unit, I now see election fraud as organized crime, and it should be severely punished as such. I have been Chairman of the LA County Emergency Medical Services Commission, regulating policy for paramedic first responders. I am a private pilot, an experimental aircraft builder, Life Member EAA, and Life Member NRA. My wife Joey and I live above Carlin Bay with our German Shepherd dogs and Quarter Horses.</p> <p>My experience running for Kootenai County Sheriff in 2020 exposed me to election law, campaign finance law, and the responsibilities of running a political campaign for office in Idaho. I am experienced in filing</p>	<p>I have a BA in Economics from the University of Southern Maine. Before serving as Chief Deputy Clerk, I established and ran an online business for eight years that sold a USA manufactured product to individual and corporate customers with customized orders of 100 up to 1,300 units. My current role at Kootenai County is that of chief operating officer for the Clerk's Office and I fully understand the complex responsibilities of the office. All departments of the Clerk's Office are mandated by state law. These important departments are Elections, District Court, Recorder, Auditor, and County Assistance. As Chief Deputy Clerk, I have developed exceptional working relationships with our departments and departments throughout the county and have earned the respect of the other Elected Officials.</p>

	<p>campaign finance reports and complaints with the Idaho Secretary of State. Since 2020 I have been an avid student of election fraud theory. As your Clerk, I will ensure election equipment cannot be compromised, ensure election staff cannot be compromised, clean up the voter rolls, and set up a voter fraud hotline. I support voter ID, paper ballots, paper poll books, and I oppose unsolicited mail-in ballots.</p> <p>As your Clerk, I will support the District Court, the Board of County Commissioners, the Treasurer, and the Business Community. I will audit the County Indigent Program.</p> <p>My personal and professional accomplishments speak for themselves, and my candidacy for Kootenai County Clerk is an opportunity for you to make a change in County Government that is long overdue. This is an opportunity to reduce the noise and restore balance to our County government as the new Clerk enters office and begins a transparent examination of the operation. I trust that the overall work of outgoing Clerk Jim Brannon will be found to be sound. He deserves our thanks for his service.</p> <p>You should elect Mike Bauer because you care about the future of Kootenai County.</p> <p>For more information, go to Mikebauerforclerk.com</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My in-depth knowledge of election law, technical skills, and my relationship with the Secretary of State's Office will allow me to continue to administer successful elections. • District Court is the largest department of the Clerk's Office. Our district court clerks operate in the civil, criminal, judicial, and compliance departments to ensure a smooth-running court. • Recorder's Office is a self-supporting department and requires no funding from the taxpayers. The Recorder's Office will continue to provide exemplary customer service and last year generated nearly \$2 million in revenue through the issuance of marriage licenses, passports, liquor licenses, and recording of real property titles. • The Auditor's Office is responsible for providing financial services to the County. These services include financial accounting and reporting, budgeting, accounts payable, accounts receivable, payroll, grants accounting, taxing district accounting, and cash receipts. One of my priorities is to continue to refine the county budget process, including better projecting revenues to give the county commissioners options to not raise taxes. Last year I was able to help project an increase of \$2 million in revenue for the county's fiscal year 2022 budget. • The County Assistance program in Kootenai County is considered one of the most successful models in the state. By law, the County is the payor of last resort for citizens without any other resources. The County Assistance program provides interest-free loans to pay medical costs for those in need. The goal of this program is to make it as cost neutral as practical for the taxpayers of Kootenai County. The collection of these loans has generated a \$3.7 million fund balance and these collections have allowed us to not levy for the indigent program for four out of the last five years. <p>With the retirement of the current Clerk, I would appreciate the opportunity to continue to serve the citizens of Kootenai County and ask for your support. To learn even more about why I am running for Clerk, please visit my website: www.jenniferforclerk.com.</p>
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