

Watchmen Voter Guide for Kootenai County Assessor

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

	Béla Kovacs	Bob Scott
<p>1. What is your name, what office are you running for and why are you running for this position?</p>	<p>Name: Béla Kovacs – first name pronounced as “Bay-Lah”. Both first and last names are Hungarian. There is no translation of the first name, but the last name translates to “Smith”. I am first-generation American.</p> <p>Marital Status: Married to my wonderful wife, Monica, for 37 Years</p> <p>Family: 12 Children – All ours – seven boys; five girls; 16 grandchildren; Three generations of my family live in Kootenai County – I’m invested in the community with deep roots here and have “<i>a lot of skin in the game</i>” to keep this an economically viable place to work and a great place to live and play. I would like to see Kootenai County be an affordable place where my children and grandchildren will be able to buy homes.</p> <p>What Office? I am the current Kootenai County Assessor. In May of 2020, I was nominated as one of three people who were presented by the Kootenai County Republican Central Committee (KCRCC) to the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC). This process was in accordance with § 59-906, Idaho Code, for an appointment to be made by the BoCC to fill the remaining term of then Assessor, Rich Houser who had unfortunately passed away. After public interview, the BoCC unanimously appointed me based on my experience and qualifications.</p> <p>Why Running? I have lived in Kootenai County for 24 years and have seen a lot of growth bringing change. I am concerned of the changes and wish to get involved to help preserve the attractiveness of this county. In raising a large family as the sole breadwinner, I know what it means to be frugal, and I think that our public servants should do the same. My core values include fiscal responsibility, good stewardship of public dollars to save on budgets and in that way reduce taxes, which match those required to serve as Assessor so I know that I can make a positive difference. There are many issues that</p>	<p>My name is Robert “Bob” Scott and I’m running for the office of Kootenai County Assessor.</p> <p>Why Am I running?</p> <p>I see a need for change and want to provide the greatest service possible to our taxpayers.</p> <p>With the tragic loss of our Assessor, Rich Houser in 2020, the Assessor’s Office has struggled. Historically, the Assessor came up through the ranks in the office to Chief Deputy Assessor then moved into the Assessor’s position through an election. In our current situation, the County Commissioners appointed the Assessor. The taxpayers deserve a choice, and, in this case, they did not get one.</p> <p>To be effective, the Assessor must have a working knowledge of the appraisal practices, be familiar with statutes and regulations governing the assessment process and possess strong leadership skills. I am running for this office because the current Assessor lacks experience in Property Assessment and his leadership skills are resulting in a loss of confidence and support of his staff.</p> <p>DMV appointments and waiting times are too long. Efforts have been made to improve things, however, there still seem to be issues within the office and systems that continue to cause lengthy delays.</p>

	<p>our community faces with the recent and unprecedented growth into our County, and I have the background, knowledge, experience, and education and willingness to serve. By the end of 2022, I will have served in the capacity of Assessor for 2.66 years, I have prepared a 5-year plan and I desire to complete the work I began.</p>	
<p>2. What is your opinion of eminent domain? Under what circumstances do you believe it should be used?</p>	<p>RESPONSE: Whether local governments should adopt, and make use of, eminent domain is not a topic that is within the scope and purview of the Assessor’s Office. The Assessor’s Office does not encounter situations, and is not actively involved in projects, for which it has a need to apply the power of eminent domain and, therefore, any decision concerning eminent domain is not a decision made by the Assessor.</p> <p>This issue of eminent domain by local governments, including using it to assist with private development, is not simply a “Yes” or “No” topic.</p> <p>Preliminary Consideration: Before responding directly to this question, it is important to first establish the purpose and role of government to frame my response and next to ensure that that we have a common understanding of what is meant by eminent domain. The governmental power of eminent domain is not a power that falls within the purview of the Assessor.</p> <p>(The Remainder of Mr. Kovacs’ Answer can be seen in his Questionnaire)</p>	<p>I dislike the concept of Eminent Domain. However, I can see its usefulness when it comes to government projects that benefit the public. It should only be used for large infrastructure projects such as roads, public buildings, and sanitation facilities. Using Eminent Domain to facilitate private development is something I oppose. Private development is a business. Developers should not have any unfair advantage when planning for a new project. If a property gets in the way of a proposed project, that developer will have to work through the process of obtaining the property via traditional methods. In other words, they must find a way to encourage the property owner to sell with terms that benefit all parties.</p>
<p>3. Do you support or oppose forced annexation? Why or why not?</p>	<p>RESPONSE: In my work experience I have not been involved in any projects that involved forced annexation. Whether government should have the ability to forcibly annex property, it seems that it should be subject to specifically defined criteria where it can objectively and reasonably be demonstrated to be “in the public’s need and interest” and according to established criteria.</p> <p>In preparing to respond to this question, I have reviewed the following: (1) § 50-222, Idaho Code (Annexation By Cities); (2) § 31-212, Idaho Code; (3) § 31-1411, Idaho Code.</p> <p>The matter of forced annexation is not a topic that is within the scope and purview of the Assessor’s Office.</p>	<p>I would support efforts by the legislature to eliminate forced annexation all over Idaho. This has been accomplished on a limited basis for farmers in Southern Idaho. We are fortunate that our local Cities have not exercised the option to force property owners into an annexation situation. However, I feel that decision should be taken out of the city leadership’s hands.</p>

	<p>The Assessor’s Office does not encounter situations, and is not actively involved in projects, for which it has a need for forced annexation, therefore, any decision concerning forced annexation is not a decision that is made by the Assessor.</p> <p>Similar to the issue of eminent domain by local governments, this issue of forced annexation is not simply a “Yes” or “No” topic.</p> <p>My response to this question is similar to the response to eminent domain except that the Idaho State Legislature has established criteria for forced annexation as set forth in statute.</p> <p>The people of the community should work together toward the public good. Like eminent domain, there can be considerable debate between property owners and public policy makers as to what constitutes the public good in any given situation of forced annexation.</p> <p>Forced annexation is a power like any other, that potentially can be abused or miss-used.</p> <p>(The Remainder of Mr. Kovacs’ Answer can be seen in his Questionnaire)</p>	
<p>4. Our county is growing very rapidly, where do you see we need to improve infrastructure and what are your suggestions?</p>	<p>RESPONSE: Regarding growth and the need for improvements to infrastructure, there is no question that the recent increases in the population of Kootenai County have driven a need for increasing and expanding the infrastructure necessary to support the larger population. This applies to roads and highways, aquifer protection, waste-water systems and storm sewers collection and treatment systems, solid waste facilities and so forth to support the development of new subdivisions and other facilities. As an example, Clean healthy water and preserving it, is not an option – it is an absolute requirement.</p> <p>Whether local jurisdictions need to make improvements to infrastructure, is not a topic that is within the scope and purview of the Assessor’s Office. The Assessor’s Office does not encounter situations, and is not actively involved in projects, for which there is a need to make recommendations for improvements to infrastructure.</p>	<p>Like most citizens of the County, I’ve been impacted by increased traffic. We need to improve our roads and traffic flow to reduce congestion. We also need to look closely at our water and sanitation systems with emphasis on handling continued population growth.</p>

	<p>Any decision concerning the need for improvements to infrastructure is not a decision to be made by the Assessor.</p> <p>(The Remainder of Mr. Kovacs' Answer can be seen in his Questionnaire)</p>	
<p>5. Do you support or oppose Urban Renewal Districts? Why or why not?</p>	<p>RESPONSE: The Idaho State Legislature has enacted Idaho State laws that make provision allowing for local jurisdictions to create urban renewal districts URD. Specifically, these laws are: (1) Title 50, Chapter 20, Idaho Code; (2) Title 50, Chapter 29, Idaho Code; (3) Relevant sections of Title 63, Revenue and Taxation, Idaho Code; (4) Relevant sections of IDAPA 35.01.03 – Property Tax Administrative Rules (i.e., Rules 225 and 804).</p> <p>According to training provided by the State of Idaho, the intended purpose of a URD is to essentially renew to revitalize and improve an area, subject to the definitions under the law. The theory is that through revitalization, the area will bring in businesses and consumers. The training provided by the State of Idaho indicates various locations where a URD has achieved such a purpose (e.g., a URD in Twin Falls Idaho which the state points to as creating jobs and revitalizing the local economy there). This is not mentioned here to suggest support for URDs, but it is mentioned here because the State considers this to be a case example where the state suggests that the URD laws worked. The State of Idaho has also suggested that there are also examples where the use of URD as implemented has not meet the spirit and intent of the law.</p> <p>The legislation concerning URDs is not artfully written and can offer potentially a wide degree of interpretation.</p> <p>(The Remainder of Mr. Kovacs' Answer can be seen in his Questionnaire)</p>	<p>I support the use of Urban Renewal Districts. They do help fund redevelopment of blighted areas of our cities. In the past, I was opposed to URD's being used to fund private development. I felt that URD's should only be used for projects in run-down areas of our cities. A recent discussion with a URD specialist changed my mind. There are areas that need a "kick-start" from cities to get some kinds of projects off the ground. We need to continue to attract private, commercial development to supply good paying jobs. URD's can do just that.</p>

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6. In your opinion, if elected, who do you see yourself accountable to and why?	RESPONSE: By definition, the Assessor is directly accountable to the electorate and according to the statutes the Assessor also serves the various customers (internal and external) as is defined in the Idaho State Laws that set forth the role, duties, responsibilities and obligations of the Office of Assessor. These duties and responsibilities are enumerated by the following: (1) The Idaho State Constitution, Article VII, and Article XVIII, Section 11; (2) § 30-2501, Idaho Code and (3) Throughout Title 63, Revenue and Taxation, of the Idaho Code.; and (4) Relevant sections of IDAPA 35.01.03 – Property Tax Administrative Rules. The Assessor is responsible to the people because our Nation and State have a Republican form of government with duly elected representatives of the people.	I will be accountable to the citizens that I serve in our County. They elected me to serve their interests and that is what I will do.
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?	RESPONSE: State law requires property values be set in a fair and uniform manner and at market value. Our job is to make sure everyone is treated fairly, no “special deals”. Would you like it if your property was valued \$100,000 more than your next-door neighbor who had the exact same model but “knew the right people”? We strive to make it fair for everyone. As for property taxes, there are two considerations: (1) The market value which we provide based on our analysis of property values countywide; and (2) The levy rate (or “tax rate”) and this is determined by budgets adopted by the city, highway district, school district, county, etc. (i.e., by the “taxing districts”). (The Remainder of Mr. Kovacs’ Answer can be seen in his Questionnaire)	It is the Assessor’s responsibility to provide fair and equitable values on all taxable property in the County. While I’m sensitive to the concerns of our citizens regarding property taxes, the Assessor’s Office has little, if any, control over them. Taxes are created by budgets, not assessments. Tax increases for the most part come from budget increases, not higher property values. For example, your property value could double but if the budgets for the entities that receive your taxes stayed the same, you wouldn’t see a tax increase. The multiplier or levy rate would be reduced to compensate for the increased values. In the real world it’s not quite that simple but this is the basic concept. As your assessor, I will ensure that our office does all it can to set fair values and control the Office’s budget, which in the end, will help to minimize taxes.
8. Do you support or oppose requirements for developers to pay for community infrastructure?	RESPONSE: Again, like the preceding responses in this questionnaire, most of the principles of appraisal, if not all, are taken from the field of economics and mathematics. As with the preceding responses, the same considerations apply here also in terms of the principles of economics, market forces of supply and demand and	While I dislike anything that increases the cost of home ownership, impact fees are a positive thing. They ensure proper funding of infrastructure for developments. Unfortunately, the new homeowners are saddled with this burden in the form of higher home prices. History has shown that impact fees are more efficient in raising revenue for

	<p>how those are affected by the laws and policies made by governmental policies.</p> <p>Many people are saying that growth should pay for itself, and on it's the face value of that statement, such statements sound attractive. The devil is in the detail, however, as the saying goes.</p> <p>Home affordability and cost of living in the community are also concerns and impact fees can be passed along to the home buyers. Construction of a new big box large retailer or a new manufacturing facility will obviously impact traffic and infrastructure in the area where they would be built. These considerations have an impact on value with affect assessed values.</p> <p>Ultimately impact fees translate into costs and to value – which not only means the market value (and therefore assessed value) but also it means “value” to the property owner and the community in terms of the benefit of what is received for the money spent and the effects on the area (sustainability).</p> <p>(The Remainder of Mr. Kovacs’ Answer can be seen in his Questionnaire)</p>	<p>infrastructure as compared to property taxes, which often fail to provide sufficient funding for municipal requirements.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>RESPONSE: As the famed Economist, Milton Freidman said, “There is no free lunch.” There are always “strings” tied to monies, especially federal monies. The question is whether, or not, the strings are strong enough (i.e., whether underlying laws and rules associated with accepting the federal funds have enough “teeth” to obligate the local jurisdiction to acquiesce to the federal requirements). The “soft” costs (or indirect costs) that can be associated with the local jurisdiction accepting federal funds and causing the local government to perform all of the various underlying recipient and subrecipient monitoring, could significantly impact operations. The costs of compliance could be so onerous to the extent any benefit could be outweighed by the added of performing the federal funding requirements. However, given that this question presumes that the federal funding conditions have been satisfied and vetted, then, and this Questionnaire asks how the ARPA</p>	<p>This is a subject that has been well debated. From what I understand, taking the ARPA funds will not create obligations to the Federal Government now, or in the future. The only conditions are that expenditures must fit the rules of the program. Not taking the money is not an option. The money comes from our citizens and should be spent here for their benefit. Giving it to other Counties or States would be unfair.</p>

	<p>funding should be used, then my response is that they should be directed and specifically for the purpose for which the funds were intended in the ARPA language and requirements.</p> <p>(The Remainder of Mr. Kovacs' Answer can be seen in his Questionnaire)</p>	
<p>10. How would you utilize the budget that you manage while being fiscally responsible?</p>	<p>RESPONSE: As I responded to the KCRCC Questionnaire, I do describe myself as fiscally conservative. Being the sole breadwinner for most of the years in raising a large family of 12 children, I have had no choice but to be frugal. This necessitated that I be fiscally conservative and have a high degree of frugality to live within our means. In this area also I attribute much of our success to my wife, Monica, for her spirit of discipline and kind tenacity that have served as fine examples to me, our children and to friends, family and the many people we come into contact with. I feel strongly that the government must exercise the same degree of frugality and I reject the idea that the role of government is to grow and become more intrusive in the lives of the people.</p> <p>I know and understand, all too well, how hard it is to work to maintain one's station in life, to say nothing of trying to get ahead. All too often, government bureaucrats and politicians lose sight of frugality when it comes to public spending and instead operate with a mindset that the citizens serve them, and those taxpayers are an endless source of revenue.</p> <p>To the extent that it falls within the purview of my authority, I will work hard to advocate for sensible policies and statutes that are balanced, reasonable, fair, and equitable and which will alleviate excessive burdens on taxpayers and property owners.</p>	<p>My plan would be to continue running on our existing budget and reduce spending where possible. Developing systems and adding technology that reduces labor needs and increases productivity will be priorities.</p>

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11. Do you support or oppose the idea of a county manager? Why or why not?	<p>RESPONSE: In the way that it was considered here for Kootenai County, according to the statutes considered by the Study Commission to consider alternative forms of County government, I oppose the idea of a County Manager. Not once did anyone, as far as I can see, present any substantive reasons for a change in the form of County government or for a need to have a County Manager as defined by Title 31, Chapter 52, or Title 31, Chapter 53.</p> <p>Part of the reason that government is bureaucratic, slow, is because of the checks and balances. The reason for having a government with a system of checks and balances (i.e., “due process”) is that it was designed to make it difficult for any single special interest group to easily take control to the disadvantage of the others. Most government processes are deliberative in nature. If voter wish to elect candidates to office, then then you first there is a campaign, and the candidates are asked questions and then the voters research and cast votes for to elect the candidate to office – that is a slow and deliberative process.</p> <p>(The Remainder of Mr. Kovacs’ Answer can be seen in his Questionnaire)</p>	<p>Commission-Manager governments have become popular in the United States. About 48% of Counties are using this system. The reason for this is that they work. It’s a very complex subject but can be summed up. A County Manager takes care of the day-to-day operations of the County. They deal with the multitude of issues that are a part of running the County. County Commissioners are freer to work on public policy and can focus more completely on serving the citizens that elected them. Since coming to work for Kootenai County, I’ve seen the inefficiencies and inconsistencies of our current system. It’s very frustrating to see the employees of the County not be supported by the Commissioners. A County Manager would help by supplying a better link to the employees which could lead to reduced turnover.</p>
12. With the rapid growth of the County, do you think we need more commissioners?	<p>RESPONSE: No, not in my opinion. There are many counties much larger that Kootenai County that have functioned quite well that have had only a Board of County Commissioners that have only three county commissioners. Up until the end of 2023, Spokane County is a much larger county that has operated quite well with a Board of County Commissioners consisting of only three county commissioners. I see no need to increase expenses of the County, nor do I see any acceptable reason to dilute the power of the voters by increasing the number commissioners to more than three.</p>	<p>As the County population grows, it seems sensible to increase the number of Commissioners in order to have fair representation of the citizens. The Optional Forms of Government study is complete, and the Commission’s report has been submitted to the Kootenai County Commissioners for their review. A year was spent on research. I will wait to hear the results of this extensive research before I form my final opinion.</p>
13. Do you believe the six Row Officers (assessor, sheriff,	<p>RESPONSE: The six Row Officers (assessor, sheriff, prosecuting attorney, treasurer, coroner, and clerk)</p>	<p>I believe all the current Elected Officials should remain as they are. They must be accountable to the citizens.</p>

<p>prosecuting attorney, treasurer, coroner, and clerk) should be appointed or stay elected? Why or why not?</p>	<p>should remain elected. The nation founded a government of the people, by the people and for the people – a Constitutional Republic, one that has elected representatives who are directly accountable to the people as their good stewards of the powers held in trust.</p> <p>(The Remainder of Mr. Kovacs' Answer can be seen in his Questionnaire)</p>	
<p>14. In your opinion, does the office of Assessor provide any checks and balances amongst the other elected officials?</p>	<p>RESPONSE: Yes. The Assessor takes an oath to perform their role, duties, responsibilities, mission and statutory mandate to ensure that the assessed values are uniform, fair and equitable as set forth in statutes.</p> <p>Primarily, the Assessor serves as a check on the power of the Commissioners when they sit as a quasi-judicial body as the Board of Equalization to hear appeals by property owners against the assessed values of their property.</p> <p>The law separates the process of setting values apart from setting levies, apart from setting budgets, apart from billing and collecting of property taxes. Some do not have a direct or indirect impact on others, yet each elected official performs their duties with a focus on their unique mission and statutory mandate and in that way, they serve as checks on the authority of one another.</p>	<p>The Assessor adds to the checks and balances of the County Government. The position provides an additional voice that can help to keep power in balance. There is no group or individual within the County Government that should carry more control than any other. All the Elected Officials ultimately answer to the voters. This also helps to keep the government in balance.</p>
<p>15. What is your background and why do you believe it qualifies you for this position?</p>	<p>RESPONSE: I am the incumbent Kootenai County Assessor and I have served in this role since I was appointed unanimously by the Board of County Commissioners on May 20, 2020. It is a privilege to have been appointed and serve in the capacity as Assessor and I am honored to have been given the opportunity to serve my County and the community where I live.</p> <p>Since my appointment, I have diligently worked to learn the unique way that the Kootenai County Assessor's Office performs its public service for the community and the various jurisdictions that the Office serves. I have now served as Kootenai County's Assessor for 20 months and by the end of 2022, I will have served in that capacity for 2.5 years.</p>	<p>I have lived in the Inland Northwest for over 32 years and have resided in Kootenai County for 27 of those years. I share a home in Post Falls with my partner of 7 years, Mary Bidwell. In my leisure time, I enjoy building and flying radio-controlled model airplanes, 3-D printing and working on our home and yard.</p> <p>I've been blessed with two beautiful children. Lily, 21, is about to graduate from college in Arizona and Ryan, 18, lives in Coeur d'Alene.</p> <p>My working career began at the age of 14. I've owned two small businesses and was self-employed for 16 years. Eight of those years were running a small auto parts store and garage and working as a manufacturer's representative</p>

	<p>Prior to that, I bring approximately 20 years of experience at the county leadership / administration level. My career in public service began in 1999, as the Purchasing Director of Spokane County and I served in that capacity for 19 years as the County administrative head of Purchasing responsible for all procurements and contracting by the county. The annual procurement volume under my direct authority and supervision was approximately \$70M to \$120M, annually.</p> <p>As further transferrable experience, I hold a Bachelor Science degree in Economics from Arizona State University where I studied political science, economics, monetary policy, econometrics, mathematics and statistics. My Bachelor of Science degree in Economics has suitably prepared me for the role of County Assessor because many of the theories, concepts and principles of economics, mathematics and statistics are applied in the work of property appraisal for the assessment of property.</p> <p>Over 20 years of experience in real estate has also provided me with the knowledge and skill sets that are readily transferrable to the role of Assessor.</p> <p>As further information I am including a copy of my resume for of my work history prior to becoming the current Assessor. The resume does not list, but my experience includes 9 years of experience as a Realtor in Denver, Colorado.</p>	<p>selling and servicing high technology equipment to companies like Intel and Hewlett Packard.</p> <p>As a top producing Realtor for Coldwell Banker Schneidmiller, I worked in both Idaho and Washington for 8 years.</p> <p>In 2013, I went to work for the Kootenai County Assessor's Office as a Residential Appraiser. In my 9 years with the office, I have progressed through the various appraisal positions and recently was promoted to Lead Appraiser for the Post Falls/Hauser area.</p> <p>As an Idaho Certified Ad Valorem Appraiser, I have assessed thousands of properties in Kootenai County which has led me to build many relationships and the trust of the taxpayers I meet out in the field. I hear their concerns and with my extensive background, I can explain how the appraisal process works.</p> <p>With my Real Estate, Appraisal, and business experience, I am confident that I am well qualified to perform the role of Assessor.</p> <p>I have received the endorsement of Mike McDowell, our past Kootenai County Assessor as well as the endorsement of Joe Johns, past Chief Deputy Assessor. This speaks volumes about the environment in the Assessor's Office right now. These men know the job and believe I'm the right person to get it done.</p> <p>I look forward to engaging with other Assessors, while working hard for the betterment and common good of our counties.</p>
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