

## Watchmen Voter Guide for Kootenai County Clerk

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

<a href="#">Jennifer Locke</a>	
<p><b>1.</b> What is your name, what office are you running for and why are you running for this position?</p>	<p>My name is Jennifer Locke and I am running for the office of County Clerk, Clerk of the District Court. 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. 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><b>2.</b> Election integrity has become a serious concern for voters. How will you preserve election integrity to the highest level?</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>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&amp;S (Election Systems &amp; Software) will speak on election security.</p>
<p><b>3.</b> Our county is growing very rapidly, where do you see we need to improve infrastructure and what are your suggestions?</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>

[Jennifer Locke](#)

<p><b>4.</b> 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>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 for any proposed uses of ARPA funds because the ultimate decision rests with the BOCC.</p>
<p><b>5.</b> Do you support or oppose Urban Renewal Districts? Why or why not?</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: <a href="https://www.kcgov.us/214/Urban-Renewal-Funding">https://www.kcgov.us/214/Urban-Renewal-Funding</a>.</p>
<p><b>6.</b> Do you support or oppose requirements for developers to pay for community infrastructure?</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p><b>7.</b> In your opinion, what does the Clerk provide in terms of checks and balances in regards to the other elected officials?</p>	<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.</p>

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<p><b>8.</b> Do you support or oppose the idea of a county manager? Why or why not?</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 31-5303. POWERS AND DUTIES. The manager shall:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Have general supervision of the administrative functions of the county;</li> <li>(2) See that the ordinances, resolutions and contracts of the board of county commissioners are complied with and faithfully executed;</li> <li>(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;</li> <li>(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.</li> <li>(5) Keep the board fully advised of the financial condition and needs of the county;</li> <li>(6) Attend meetings of the board of county commissioners, take part in the discussions, but not vote, and recommend measures for adoption;</li> <li>(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;</li> <li>(8) Perform such other duties as the board may establish by ordinance or resolution.</li> </ol>
<p><b>9.</b> With the rapid growth of the County, do you think we need more commissioners?</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><b>10.</b> What is your view of moving the budget from the Clerk's Office to a commission manager under the BOCC?</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>
<p><b>11.</b> How would you utilize the budget that you manage while being fiscally responsible?</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>

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<b>12.</b> What is your view on eliminating the property tax in favor of a higher sales tax?	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.
<b>13.</b> 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?	I believe all elected officials should remain elected. This allows direct accountability to the voters.
<b>14.</b> What is your background and why do you believe it qualifies you for this position?	<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> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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. 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: <a href="http://www.jenniferforclerk.com">www.jenniferforclerk.com</a>.</li> </ul>