

Watchmen Voter Guide for Post Falls City Council Seat #5

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

	Joe Bodman	Cherilyn K Towne	Randy Westlund
<p>1. What is your name, what office are you running for and why are you running for this position?</p>	No Response Received	No Response Received	<p>I'm Randy Westlund, running for Post Falls City Council, seat 5. I grew up in North Carolina and moved here 5 years ago to be near my wife's family, which has roots in Post Falls going back generations. Her great-grandparents built the old stone house on McGuire road in 1905!</p> <p>I immediately fell in love with North Idaho—it truly is the gem of the gem state. It feels like home to me more than anywhere I've ever lived. I want my grandkids to be baptized at the church I attend, and to have the same quality of life that we enjoy today. I'm running for city council because I believe we need good Christian stewardship to preserve our way of life for the next generations.</p>
<p>2. How could our city be improved? Please provide your top 2-3 ideas.</p>	No Response Received	No Response Received	<p>The first thing Post Falls needs is more small businesses and local jobs. The jobs to housing ratio in Post Falls is 1.0, which means one job per housing unit. This is lower than surrounding cities, and given the number of two-income families and roommate arrangements, it's clearly not enough. Many Post Falls residents commute to Coeur d'Alene or Spokane, but few commute to Post Falls.</p> <p>A city that is primarily a bedroom community is not fiscally sustainable because property taxes on residential neighborhoods are generally insufficient to cover the maintenance on infrastructure like roads and sewers. A city needs a vibrant economic nexus in order to generate sufficient property tax revenue to maintain quality of life. There's a lot we can do to lower the barriers to entry and encourage small businesses entrepreneurship.</p> <p>The second thing we can do is cultivate greater local resilience. During the COVID lockdowns, we saw the fragility of global supply chains and the drawbacks of offshoring American jobs to China have become even more clear. We need to produce as much as we can locally, especially with regards to food. Local farmers, ranchers, and homesteaders are valuable resources which we should support by buying local whenever possible.</p> <p>There will be another emergency. Whether it's COVID lockdowns again or World War 3, we need to think about how Post Falls can come together, build the kind of community where people take care of each other, revive the productive household, and weather whatever comes next.</p>
<p>3. What are your views on the rapid growth of North Idaho?</p>	No Response Received	No Response Received	<p>North Idaho's incredible growth is simultaneously a testament to the attractiveness of our region and also a heavy burden for existing residents to bear, as the character of the area changes. It's left us with overburdened infrastructure, traffic, and concerns about over taxing our aquifer—our most precious natural resource.</p> <p>An often-overlooked side of rapid growth is that it substantially increases the city's maintenance liabilities. New infrastructure looks great initially, but eventually the maintenance bill comes due, and if we aren't planning 20 years ahead then we risk setting ourselves up for a budgetary crisis and substantial property tax increases in the future.</p> <p>Given the infrastructure concerns, we should slow growth substantially and take a very close look at what the city is already committed to over the next 10 or 20 years. The comprehensive plan should be continually updated to ensure it reflects the will of the people and the economic reality. New development should both pay for itself and be a clear benefit to the existing residents of the city; especially young families.</p>

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4. In your opinion what best serves the public, elected officials, or appointed officials?	No Response Received	No Response Received	<p>Elected officials best serve the public interest because they are directly accountable to the electorate. City governments in particular are unique in that they simultaneously have the greatest impact on the day-to-day life of each citizen and are most directly accountable for their actions. This is a good thing, and a big reason why political power should be kept as local as possible.</p> <p>However, I also recognize that it's not practical to elect everyone. Appointed officials have their place and can be a good help to elected officials in an advisory capacity, so long as final authority always rests with the elected members of the government.</p> <p>I believe our Republican form of government strikes the correct balance, in which we elect trustworthy individuals to represent our interests, and rely on them to make good decisions on our behalf.</p>
5. What improvements should be made to the city councils' role in the design and authorization of new developments?	No Response Received	No Response Received	<p>City Council members should feel more bold in representing the public interest as opposed to feeling obligated to go along with city staff, the comprehensive plan, and developer interest groups. They are there first and foremost to represent the will of the people and it is the role of city staff to carry out the decisions made by the council. It is unfortunately very common for city council members to feel the need to "trust the experts" rather than the will of the people. This doesn't mean the city council should be micromanaging, rather they should determine the high level vision and provide the oversight to make sure developments are within those parameters.</p> <p>There should also be more transparency about how decisions to authorize or deny new developments are made. I've spoken to developers and citizens about this, and both groups find the unpredictability of city council decision making to be frustrating. The comprehensive plan should be updated to make sure it is in line with the will of the people via the city council's input so that it lines up with the actual decisions being made as much as possible. Decision making within a government should never be arbitrary or unpredictable.</p>
6. In your opinion, should any services currently provided by the city be cut, eliminated, or privatized?	No Response Received	No Response Received	<p>The city council currently outsources several functions to non-profit organizations. This can be a very beneficial arrangement which leverages expertise and resources without the need to expand the city government by hiring more staff. On the other hand, it can also become a waste of taxpayer dollars spent by opaque and unaccountable groups. These should be regularly reviewed to ensure that there's adequate oversight and that each arrangement is still providing worthwhile benefits to taxpayers. It's also important that these organizations funded by taxpayer dollars are value-aligned with the community.</p>
7. Do you believe access to city managed water and sewer should be increased to rural communities and why?	No Response Received	No Response Received	<p>No. Infrastructure is expensive, and the city has an obligation to maintain infrastructure in perpetuity once built. Extending it to rural areas requires either absurdly high user fees for those residents or puts an unfair burden on other property owners to subsidize underutilized infrastructure. Rural living is different from city living and that variety is good. We should be very careful about where we draw the boundaries of city limits and I think it would be a loss for the character of the area if city limits and infrastructure were to expand to gobble up the whole prairie.</p>

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8. How do you plan on keeping a healthy reserve fund without increase taxes?	No Response Received	No Response Received	<p>We have to first recognize that this was made a near impossible task by the irresponsible monetary policy of the Federal Reserve and the overseas spending of our federal Congress, which has driven inflation through the roof. We've all seen dramatically higher prices at the grocery store, and recognize that even if a man gets a 3% annual raise from his job, his effective wage in real terms is still less than it was last year.</p> <p>The city's budget is in the same predicament, as everything the city does to provide basic services is also affected by inflation. Every year we don't raise taxes is effectively a budget cut, and if the federal government continues to destroy the value of the US dollar, we will soon face a situation where we either raise taxes or go bankrupt.</p> <p>I hope to avoid this as long as possible. As a small business owner, I'm accustomed to working with a shoestring budget and finding ways to get things done even with limited resources. I will apply this expertise to the city government to ensure that all taxpayer funds are managed responsibly.</p>
9. What is your opinion of the increased push for affordable housing?	No Response Received	No Response Received	<p>It's obvious we're in a severe housing crisis. The median home in Kootenai County costs more than half a million dollars and with interest rates at almost 8%, more than 80% of households have no chance at homeownership, many of which are already dual income. Young families are leaving Kootenai County in droves because it's become difficult to raise a family here. This is a critical problem because we can't have a thriving local economy without young workers and entrepreneurs, especially with the lack of young people taking over positions in the trades left vacant by retirees.</p> <p>However, we have to recognize this is a national problem with many contributing causes, and it isn't something we have the ability to fix locally. We could build suburban sprawl all over the prairie, destroying the culture of the area, and it would still be expensive. We don't want more apartments, and we should especially reject government subsidized housing projects, like section 8.</p> <p>Having said that, I believe there are things we can do. We can put families first by requiring new development to be family-oriented. For example, small 900 ft² starter homes like we used to build in the '40s. I would also accept multi-family buildings in certain areas under the conditions that each unit is individually ownable and at least one or two bedrooms, which can be a stepping stone for a young family to start building equity on their way to the ideal single family dream home.</p>
10. All too often local residents feel that their public comment is not taken into consideration when decisions are made that directly affect their daily lives and their property value. What would you suggest so that the public's best interests become a priority over builders and developers?	No Response Received	No Response Received	<p>It's an unfortunate reality that many local residents feel ignored or unheard in the decision-making processes that shape the community. The cornerstone of rectifying this issue lies in the electoral process itself. Electing City Council members who genuinely represent the interests of the local populace is paramount. I am committed to being one such representative. It's not merely about holding a position but about embodying the trust and aspirations of those who elect us. We need council members who are deeply rooted in the community, who understand the nuances of its needs, and who prioritize the well-being of its residents over any external pressures. The city's development should not be dictated solely by builders and developers, but should be a collaborative effort that takes into account the voices of its inhabitants. By ensuring that our elected officials truly care about and act on behalf of their constituents, we can pave the way for a city that grows in harmony with the desires and needs of its residents.</p>

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11. What is your opinion of “Smart Cities” and how they apply to North Idaho?	No Response Received	No Response Received	<p>The idea behind a smart city is to use technology in order to make things more efficient. For example, synchronizing traffic lights to a central location and using AI to time them in such a way that optimizes traffic flow. This sounds great on the surface, but comes with drawbacks.</p> <p>Is it really a good idea to put cameras all over the city and link them to a central location? Should we have computers that are tracking your trip via your license plate as you drive around? Is it dangerous for the government or a foreign hacker to know where you go and when, or that you were 5 minutes late for work on Tuesday? If we decide to sacrifice some privacy in order to gain traffic efficiency, does it even solve the traffic problem at its root or is it just a band-aid?</p> <p>As a software engineer who has worked on both image recognition systems and internet connected sensors, I believe smart cities are well intentioned but ultimately far too subject to abuse to be prudent—in short, a Faustian bargain.</p> <p>However, I do believe there are less invasive ways technology can make the city more efficient, like using radar or in-pavement sensors to time traffic lights, which don't have the ability to track individual cars.</p>
12. Should the concept of “equitable outcome” be implemented as a part of the city council’s decision-making process? Why or why not?	No Response Received	No Response Received	<p>Absolutely not. All citizens are entitled to their basic God-given rights and to equal treatment under the law. The concept of "equitable outcome" is a perversion of this that subverts the principle of equal treatment under the law in order to prioritize some groups of people above others. Affirmative action is an example of this kind of policy. While well intentioned, it fails to recognize that two wrongs don't make a right and generally causes far more problems than it could ever solve. Many of the wrongs, whether real or imagined, that the "equitable outcome" people would like to address occurred long before Idaho was even a state and have no place in our laws or public policy.</p>
13. Is there anything in your personal, business, or career life that would be a conflict of interest in your ability to serve the people of this city?	No Response Received	No Response Received	No.
14. What is your background and why do you feel it qualifies you for this position?	No Response Received	No Response Received	<p>I'm an engineer and a small business owner. I run two small software businesses here in North Idaho, primarily providing custom software to make small manufacturing businesses more productive. I like digging into complex systems, understanding all the moving parts, and making them more efficient. I wear many different hats every day.</p> <p>I used to work for NASA, and made two trips down to the satellite ground station in Antarctica to upgrade communication gear for our weather satellites; when you see the moving storm on the map, that's where the image comes from. But I got so tired of government inefficiency that I left to start my own businesses. I never imagined I'd be running for public office someday!</p> <p>I also have some accounting expertise, giving me a unique ability to dive into the city's finances. I care a lot about long-term fiscal sustainability, and I know how to budget for long-term maintenance. I've never run for public office before, which I consider a point in my favor. I'm a quick learner, a long-term thinker, and the kind of guy who can't rest when there are problems to be solved.</p>