

Kootenai County Clerk

	Jennifer Locke
1. What is your name, what office are you running for and why are you running for this position?	My name is Jennifer Locke, and I am running for re-election as your Kootenai County Clerk to continue delivering experienced, accountable, and fiscally responsible leadership. With nine years of direct experience in the Clerk's Office—three as the elected Clerk and six as Chief Deputy Clerk—I have a proven record of effectively managing the Clerk's five diverse departments: Auditor, Elections, District Court, Recorder, and County Assistance. My priorities are to further strengthen the budget process for greater fiscal accountability and to continue safeguarding election security through rigorous protocols and a strict chain of custody. I am dedicated to ensuring stability and continuity in our county government while continually seeking new ways to save taxpayer dollars. I remain committed to delivering excellent, efficient, and cost-effective services to every citizen. It has been a privilege to serve you, and I would be honored to continue working for the citizens of Kootenai County.
2. How could the Clerk's office be improved? Please provide your top 2-3 ideas.	As Clerk, my next step toward improvement will be expanding financial transparency. After implementing a three-year trend analysis of revenues and expenses, I will build on this foundation by introducing department-level performance metrics. These measures will allow us to monitor efficiency more closely and ensure taxpayer dollars are used as effectively as possible. Another priority as Clerk will be to enhance operational flexibility through increased cross-training. The Clerk's Office manages 106 employees across the five divisions. Cross-training enables us to provide seamless service during busy periods and staff transitions, optimizing processes without increasing staff levels, even as our County grows. Finally, I will continue collaborating with our state legislators on legislation that may impact our County. I am dedicated to ensuring that new laws are practical, secure, and fiscally responsible for Kootenai County.
3. Election integrity has become a serious concern for voters. How will you preserve election integrity to the highest level?	Election integrity is the foundation of our constitutional republic and remains my top priority. In Kootenai County, we use a 100% paper ballot system, ensuring a physical record of every vote. To maintain transparency, we live-stream the opening of absentee ballots, the counting process, and secure ballot storage. A dedicated camera monitors the County's only absentee drop slot, which feeds directly into a locked, secure box inside the Elections building. Security is built into every step. Idaho law requires ID and proof of residence for registration. Every absentee signature is verified by a human eye against the voter's file. As required by Idaho Code 34-2410, our vote tally systems are never connected to the internet. Our results are proven: Kootenai County's 2022 state audits showed that the hand tallies matched our vote tally system counts exactly. Through strict chain-of-custody protocols, I am committed to keeping our elections secure for our over 110,500 registered voters.

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4. As AI continues to advance in capabilities and is more frequently being used by hackers, what would you do to protect election infrastructure against fraud?	Every county in Idaho uses paper ballots, and under Idaho Code 34-2410, “no vote tally system shall be connected to the internet at any time, and no vote tally system shall receive or transmit data through wireless communications.” This creates a critical air gap. As noted by the Secretary of State (https://voteidaho.gov/making-voting-secure/), the physical ballot—not a digital image—is the official record of the vote. This provides a tangible audit trail that is immune to AI tampering. Counties are required to use the statewide voter registration system, which is secured by the Secretary of State’s Office and requires dual authentication protocols. Elections offices must follow strict procedures to access the system, ensuring only authorized staff manage voter data. On Election Day, every person registering to vote must complete a paper application, show acceptable ID, and provide proof of residence before being processed in a poll book and receiving a ballot.
5. Our county is growing very rapidly, where do you see we need to improve election infrastructure and what are your suggestions?	As Idaho’s 3rd-largest county with over 110,500 voters, our growth demands a proactive approach. We administer elections for 52 taxing districts across 74 precincts, requiring detailed planning and up to 525 poll workers. While we have improved our processes to handle record turnout, we must continue to advance both our operational processes and physical safeguards. My priority is to move toward a state-certified voting system that delivers secure, faster results and assigns each paper ballot a unique, randomly generated, non-sequential identifier. This goes beyond a watermark on a ballot; it guarantees every ballot is authentic and verifiable while strictly protecting voter anonymity, as mandated by Idaho Code 34-901. By pairing this secure system with a strict chain of custody, we can manage growth without compromising the integrity of the vote. My goal is to ensure Kootenai County’s election infrastructure sets the gold standard for security, transparency, and efficiency.
6. What is your preference: paper ballots or electronic ballots? Why do you believe this method is best?	Paper ballots provide a physical and human-readable audit trail. In Idaho, all counties use paper ballots. This ensures that every citizen’s vote is recorded in a tangible and verifiable manner. Voting on paper ballots is the best method because it enables transparent audits and recounts. The Kootenai County Elections Office maintains a secure and rigorous chain of custody for every ballot to ensure the voter’s intent is preserved.
7. Do you support or oppose requirements for developers to pay for community infrastructure?	I support the principle that new development should cover the costs of the infrastructure it requires. In a fast-growing area like Kootenai County, it is only right for developers to cover the costs of new infrastructure rather than shift the financial burden onto existing residents and taxpayers. While developers may pass some of these costs to property buyers, I believe growth should pay for itself. However, this only works if our taxing districts use these increased funds in a financially responsible manner.

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8. In your opinion, what does the Clerk provide in terms of checks and balances in regard to the other elected officials?	In Idaho, the Clerk functions as a vital check on county government, and one of the most important responsibilities is serving as the Ex Officio Auditor. In this role, the Auditor provides financial oversight and is statutorily responsible for monitoring the spending of all other elected officials and their departments to ensure they remain within the budgets set by the Board of County Commissioners. The Auditor's Office also creates reports throughout the year for the Board and the community to review. Additionally, in the role of Clerk of the Board, the Clerk's Office ensures transparency by attending Board of County Commissioners meetings to record the official minutes.
9. How would you utilize the budget that you manage while being fiscally responsible?	I manage the Clerk's budget with one clear goal: providing the high-quality services the law requires while being a responsible steward of taxpayer dollars. My approach relies on thorough, line-item reviews with my department heads. Together, we examine every expense and revenue trend to identify opportunities to cut costs or improve efficiency. Since my service as Chief Deputy Clerk and throughout my term as Clerk, the Clerk's Office has consistently returned unspent funds to the County.
10. What is your view on eliminating the property tax in favor of a higher sales tax?	Many constituents that I have spoken to want to see property taxes eliminated, especially for homes with a homeowner's exemption. They feel that as long as property taxes exist, no one truly owns their home. While no state has fully eliminated property taxes yet, Idaho should lead in finding alternatives. I will continue conversations with constituents and state legislators to address these concerns. We saw progress with Idaho's HB 292 in 2023, which used state sales tax revenue to lower local property taxes. Other ideas in recent years have included raising the sales tax by almost 2% in exchange for eliminating property taxes for homeowners with a homestead exemption. I have also discussed with constituents the possibility of a voter-approved local option sales tax. However, new legislation would be required to allow counties to pursue this. This would let our community decide whether to shift the tax burden to visitors and consumption, rather than penalizing homeowners.
11. As the county's population continues to grow, do you believe the Clerk's office currently has sufficient funds to operate efficiently?	The Clerk's Office has sufficient funds to operate efficiently with disciplined management. My priority is to identify revenue sources beyond property taxes to address new expenses. For example, increased court filings and cases have required additional District Court staff, and I have funded most of these positions using state liquor apportionment revenue, minimizing the impact on taxpayers. I have implemented measures, in compliance with state law, to achieve greater efficiency and cost savings for Kootenai County. During my time at the County, I have helped downsize departments and redirected resources to areas experiencing increased demand for services, such as District Court.

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12. 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 county?	No.
13. What is your background and why do you believe it qualifies you for this position?	My qualifications for this office are rooted in nine years of leadership in Kootenai County. I've spent the last three years as elected Clerk and six years prior as Chief Deputy Clerk. This experience has given me a thorough understanding of our 106-person team and the five departments I oversee. With my experience in county government, a BA in Economics, and eight years running a small business, I have the skill set to manage the county budget process, oversee elections, and implement strategic problem-solving in our fast-growing community. I don't just manage these departments; I understand their statutory requirements and direct impact on taxpayers. I am committed to maintaining professional stability and ensuring our government continues to serve Kootenai County with the highest fiscal responsibility. Please visit jenniferforclerk.com to learn more about me and the Clerk's role.