

Kootenai County Commissioner District 1

	Julie Hensley
1. What is your name, what office are you running for and why are you running for this position?	Julie Hensley for Kootenai County Commissioner District 1. I'm running for county commissioner to preserve the character, safety, and quality of life in our community. I want to be a voice that represents the citizens of Kootenai County. As a nurse, I've spent my career listening to people, solving problems under pressure, and advocating for those in need. These skills directly translate to public service. Running a business has given me firsthand experience with the burdens of overregulation, inefficient processes, and the need for clear, fair county codes that support, not hinder, local enterprise. I value fiscal responsibility, personal accountability, and limited government and I believe our county government should work for the people, not against them. I'm running for commissioner because I want to make sure that our community is set up for success today and in the future. The decisions made today will impact our community's quality of life and financial future.
2. What is your opinion of eminent domain? Under what circumstances do you believe it should be used?	I do not support the use of eminent domain, as it conflicts with the fundamental right to private property ownership. Property rights are essential and should never be overridden by government action. This is why long-term planning is so important. When counties proactively plan infrastructure, zoning, and growth well in advance, they can meet public needs without ever resorting to taking private land. Responsible planning reduces conflict, protects property owners, and ensures development happens in a way that respects individual rights and community stability.
3. If faced with a budget deficit, would you support cutting spending or increasing taxes? What would be your reasons for this decision?	I would lean toward cutting spending rather than raising taxes. Just like a household has to live within its means, a county government should prioritize fiscal discipline and make tough decisions to stay within its budget. Increasing taxes puts more strain on families and small businesses, while spending cuts force government to focus on core, essential services. That said, fiscal responsibility doesn't mean refusing to spend altogether. There are times when strategic investments, such as infrastructure or efficiency improvements can save money in the long run. The key is making sure every dollar spent has a clear purpose and long-term benefit, not just short-term expansion.
4. Do you support or oppose forced annexation? Why or why not?	I oppose forced annexation. Property rights are fundamental, and no one should be forced to join a city against their will. Forcing annexation expands government control without consent and often brings additional taxes and regulations that property owners did not choose. Annexation should be voluntary and driven by the property owner, not imposed by the city.
5. Our county is growing very rapidly, where do you see we need to improve infrastructure and what are your plans to improve it?	Our county is experiencing growth, and it's clear that infrastructure must keep pace to avoid costly strain on taxpayers. One of the most urgent concerns is our jail system, which is already operating well above its safe capacity. We currently house around 515 inmates, despite a safe limit of about 360. Even with planned expansion bringing capacity to roughly 456, we will remain near our limits. Additionally, our road systems, schools, and aquifer need to be evaluated. My approach is to thoroughly evaluate current infrastructure capacity and ensure our updated comprehensive plan is driven by accurate data. Growth must be aligned with infrastructure investment so we don't fall behind. By planning proactively, we can support responsible growth while protecting taxpayers from unnecessary costs.

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6. What is your opinion of red-light cameras and license plate readers? Should they be used by the County?	License plate readers can assist law enforcement in certain situations, but they also raise serious concerns about privacy, cost, and government overreach. These systems are relatively new, and we do not yet fully understand how they may be exploited or potentially misused over time. History shows that once surveillance technology is introduced, its use often grows beyond its original intent. They are also expensive to purchase and maintain, with ongoing subscription and data storage costs that place a continuing burden on taxpayers. Additionally, large databases of vehicle information create cybersecurity risks, and if compromised, could expose sensitive data about residents' movements. As Benjamin Franklin said, "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." Public safety is important, but it must always be balanced with protecting individual freedoms, privacy, and responsible use of taxpayer dollars.
7. Do you support or oppose Urban Renewal Districts? Why or why not?	I oppose Urban Renewal Districts because they divert tax dollars away from essential services like schools and public safety. Growth and development should be driven by the private sector, not government subsidies or incentives.
8. Do you support or oppose requirements for developers to pay for community infrastructure?	I support requiring developers to pay for the community infrastructure their projects create demand for. Growth should pay for growth, and existing taxpayers should not be forced to shoulder the full burden of new development. I would also support working with the state legislature to ensure impact fees can be used effectively for future infrastructure needs and to explore updates to the current eight-year rule, so counties have more flexibility in planning and funding long-term growth.
9. In your opinion, if elected, who do you see yourself accountable to and why?	Ultimately, I am accountable to God, which guides my principles, integrity, and sense of right and wrong. At the same time, in this role I am accountable to the citizens I serve. They place their trust in elected officials to represent their interests, make responsible decisions, and uphold transparency. My goal is to honor both by leading with integrity, humility, and a commitment to serving the community faithfully.
10. In recent years some groups have advocated for legalizing marijuana in our state, do you support or oppose the legalization of marijuana? Why or why not?	I oppose the legalization of marijuana in our state. Legalization raises concerns about public health, safety, and long-term social impacts, particularly on youth and impaired driving incidents. We've also seen in other states that legalization can create additional regulatory burdens and enforcement challenges, while not necessarily improving community outcomes. I believe we should focus on strengthening prevention and maintaining laws that protect public safety and community well-being rather than expanding access to another controlled substance.
11. County Commissioners have an enormous responsibility with the many departments that run our county. Which departments in your opinion should receive priority for increased budgets?	Priority funding should go first to core, essential services that residents depend on every day. That includes public safety, such as law enforcement, the jail system, and emergency response. Followed by infrastructure like roads and maintenance that keep the county functioning safely and efficiently. Budgeting should be based on a triage approach: protect life, safety, and critical operations first, then evaluate remaining resources for other departments. Any increases should be data-driven and tied to clear needs and performance. Ensuring taxpayer dollars are used responsibly and efficiently.
12. What should the county's policy be regarding federal funding of county projects?	The county should be very cautious with federal funding for local projects. While there are times when federal dollars may be useful for specific, clearly defined needs, they often come with strings attached, added bureaucracy, and long-term compliance requirements that can limit local control. I would prefer to keep county operations as locally funded and locally controlled as possible. Relying less on federal funding helps preserve independence, ensures decision making stays closer to residents, and avoids expanding obligations that taxpayers may not have agreed to long term.

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13. What is your opinion on restricting public comment at county meetings? Why do you hold this opinion?	Public comment should not be restricted. It is essential to open, accountable government. County meetings must remain transparent and give residents a meaningful opportunity to voice concerns, ask questions, and be heard. Government exists to serve the people, and limiting public input weakens trust and accountability.
14. What is your background and why do you feel it qualifies you for this position?	I bring a practical, real-world background that reflects the values of our community. As a small business owner, I understand firsthand what it takes to manage budgets, make payroll, and operate responsibly in a challenging economy. My experience as a nurse has also given me a strong foundation in advocacy, problem solving, and serving others, especially in high pressure situations. I've lived a life of fiscal responsibility and understand the importance of making careful, sustainable financial decisions. I've also been actively engaged in public meetings about local growth and its impact on our county. Many residents have encouraged me to run because they feel my values align with theirs, and I'm committed to representing their voice with integrity and accountability