

READER

DARK ARTS, SADISTIC ENTERTAINMENT, SCARY BLUSTER AND BAD NEWS

OCTOBER 30, 2025 **FREE** VOL. 22 ISSUE 44



INSIDE

City Elections

CANDIDATE
QUESTIONNAIRES

**HAPPY
HALLOWEEN,
MY PRETTIES**

ELECTION

CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE
2025 ELECTION

Sandpoint City Council, wastewater treatment plant bond, Ponderay 1% local option tax and area budget and fire levies
By Reader Staff

Editor's note: Before each election, the Sandpoint Reader reaches out to candidates in local contested races to ask questions about how they would represent the constituents in the offices they seek. Below are questions and answers for the four candidates running for three open Sandpoint City Council seats. Those seats carry a term of four years, and are "at large," meaning there are no specific districts or seats representing those districts. Rather, those who win the most votes across all of Sandpoint's voting precincts win the seats. In addition, below is information on two ballot measures: a \$130 million revenue bond to replace Sandpoint's wastewater treatment plant and a 1% local option sales tax in Ponderay, as well as ballot questions on area budget and fire levies. All candidates who responded to our questions have been included below, with some answers lightly edited for length and/or clarity. The Reader joined KRFY 88.5FM and SandpointOnline.com to host a candidates' forum at the Sandpoint Center on Oct. 20. Find a recording of the forum at krfy.org. Finally, don't forget to vote Tuesday, Nov. 4.

Sandpoint City Council

- 1. Why are you running for Sandpoint City Council?
- 2. What concrete steps should the city take with the wastewater treatment plant project if the \$130 million bond measure fails in this election?
- 3. Do you support the city's current development impact fee schedule and timeline, with a one-time increase effective Jan. 1, 2026, and why?
- 4. If elected, you will serve on the last council before the 2030 Census, when Sandpoint will likely lose its resort city status with a population over 10,000, and therefore no longer have access to local option taxing authority. How would you prepare for the loss of that revenue gathering tool?
- 5. A major feature of the last city election was debate over whether to continue with a city administrator or eliminate the position in favor of a "strong mayor." Do you support continuing without an administrator or would you consider bringing back the position?

Joel Aispuro (incumbent)



Age: 38
Birthplace and residence: San Diego, Calif.; Sandpoint
How many years lived in Bonner County: 30
Past/current government service (if applicable): Eight years on Sandpoint City Council
Education: Sandpoint High School, family business
Contact info: jaispuro@sandpointidaho.gov

1. I am running for office because of my deep love for this community, my children and my future grandchildren. Eight years ago, I decided to become actively involved, which led to my election and

re-election to the Sandpoint City Council. I continue to possess the desire and passion to serve this community in that capacity. My experience is a crucial asset in this role; I have worked with many staff members, fellow councilors and various mayors. The ability to work effectively with others, especially those with differing views, is very vital in this position. It's about making decisions that benefit our community not only today but also in the future. This is a challenging endeavor, and I cannot achieve it alone. Nor will anyone else.

2. Following the election, we will assess the will of the people. If re-elected, we will then return to the drawing board to determine where further education is needed and to explore additional options, whether federal or state funding. I am confident that significant work has been done and will continue to be done on this matter.

3. I do support this. We voted to proceed with it; and,

legally, we are obligated to do so. This does not mean we are unaware of the potential impact, but it is a reality we must address. It is important that growth pays for itself. Impact fees assure that new development does not diminish the level of service for existing residents. While the increase is steep, this is because we have not increased it annually over most of the past 15 years, and the cost of everything is higher today. If we want current residents to continue enjoying their parks, pathways, police and fire service that they are accustomed to, new development must pay its fair share, and the new impact fees represent growth's share of demand on our infrastructure and services.

4. We will continue to work with our legislators on this issue to see if we can maintain our resort status. If not, we will once again collaborate with the mayor, council, staff and community to identify our best options moving forward. There is no simple answer

to this. Anyone who suggests otherwise has not been in this position. It's important to note that Sandpoint is part of a resort city coalition that is actively engaged in efforts to protect resort cities' abilities to collect local option taxes; regulate their housing markets, including short-term rentals; and assure that the impacts of tourism do not diminish the livability for year-round residents. We hope and trust that we will be effective with this approach.

5. My commitment is to do what is best for our city and community. This means continuing to work alongside other council members, the mayor, staff and the community to make the best decisions for Sandpoint. It is always about what is best for Sandpoint. And this is the leadership we need and I believe I bring that to the table. Perfectly? No, but with integrity and vision. Please consider me for re-election, Nov. 4.

Rick Howarth (incumbent)



Age: 67
Birthplace and residence: Great Falls, Mont.; Sandpoint
How many years lived in Bonner County: Part-time since 1988, full-time since 2017
Past/current government service (if applicable): Sandpoint City Council — 1.5 years
Education: Master's degree in mechanical engineering, University of Idaho, 1982
Contact info: 208 920-9090 or rick.a.howarth@icloud.com

1. I am running because I want to ensure the future of Sandpoint. I want to make sure city government is aligned with the desires of the citizens of Sandpoint,

< ELECTION, con't from Page 13 >

remains fiscally responsible, rebuilds trust and confidence while addressing the big needs (wastewater, roads, recreational facilities) of the city. I have over 40 years of experience in the high-tech industry leading large organizations and can leverage this knowledge for the city that I love.

2. If the \$130 million bond fails, the city still must find ways to rebuild a very old plant that is falling apart. There are several concrete steps that could be taken to address the challenges: leverage the reserves that the city has (between \$8 million-\$9 million) to make critical repairs to address the highest priorities to try and avoid any escapes; meet with state leaders and our local representatives to communicate the challenges of the current plant and request their support to help find state funding sources for the rebuilding of the plant; and work with state DEQ to find a way to minimally treat the inflows/infiltration that we get in the spring rain/snow season. This would allow us to build a significantly smaller treatment plant and thereby reduce the overall cost.

3. I did not support the current development impact fee schedule when it was brought before council a couple of months ago for two reasons: first the new development fees almost doubled across the board from the prior impact fees. I was in favor of a smaller increase. Secondly, I wanted to start the new fee schedule in August rather than the beginning of 2026 to provide all development (homes, remodeling, major projects, etc.) to have time to get their building permits under the old fee schedule.

4. I like the use of local option taxing authority, because when we have visitors in town, they are also paying taxes that help the city. So, it is a great way to take some of the financial burden for city improvements off the citizens of Sandpoint. What I would like to do is work to get a local option tax authority approved before 2030 and put a long

enough duration on it (10 or 15 years), that the city would still enjoy the additional revenues far past 2030. I would also recommend meeting with state representatives to work to provide an extension of the resort city status or find a new way of creating tax revenues through state legislative changes.

5. Organizational structures in and of themselves do not improve the functioning of any organization, rather it is the character and quality of people that are placed in roles of responsibility that determine how well an organization will function. If you have a mayor that can dedicate the time and energy to running the city, then the city administrator is not needed. If the mayor is limited in the time he/she can apply to running the city, then a city administrator may be a logical consideration, but even that really depends on the quality of the department heads. You must really look at the skills and capabilities of the leaders within city hall to determine what is the best structure to run the city.

Joe Tate



Age: 41

Birthplace and residence:

Born and raised in Sandpoint

Years lived in Bonner County:

1984-2002 and 2016-present (27 years total)

Past/current government service: First-time candidate for public office

Education: Bachelor's degree in sustainability studies (focused on the three E's of sustainability: economy, social equity and environment), Colorado Mountain College; master's degree in Counseling, University of Idaho-Coeur d'Alene

Contact info: bit.ly/JoeTate-Facebook

1. I'm running because I deeply care about Sandpoint — this is my hometown, and I

want to protect what makes it special while planning wisely for the future. My background in sustainability studies taught me the "three E's" of sustainable communities: economy, social equity and the environment. Those values shape how I approach decision-making today. As a licensed mental health counselor, I help people find solutions through listening, empathy and accountability — skills our city government needs now more than ever. I'm committed to transparent leadership, rebuilding public trust and tackling issues like affordable housing, infrastructure, and responsible growth with both practicality and compassion.

2. If the bond fails, the first step is to educate the public on the reality of our situation — this isn't a project we can avoid or delay. Previous administrations have kicked this can down the road, and now it's on us to take responsibility for decades of deferred maintenance. Whether through a revised bond, phased funding or grants, the work must get done. It's about being fiscally responsible while protecting our lake and community health. The question we should all ask is this: Will future Sandpoint residents look back with respect for doing the hard but necessary work — or with regret that we failed to act when it mattered most?

3. Yes. Growth should help pay for the impacts it creates. The 2026 increase allows time for builders and developers to adjust, while ensuring that critical infrastructure — roads, parks and utilities — keeps pace with demand. At the same time, we should look for ways to incentivize development that actually serves Sandpoint — single-family homes, local workers and year-round residents — not speculative or short-term properties. That could include reduced fees or streamlined permitting for workforce and primary residences. Impact fees must be fair, transparent and part of a broader housing strategy that supports those who live and work here full time.

4. We need to plan now

to avoid a fiscal cliff later. If Sandpoint surpasses 10,000 residents and loses resort city status, we must strengthen our financial resilience by diversifying revenue sources and improving efficiency. That includes exploring modest user-based fees, regional partnerships and more effective grant-seeking. Just as important is prioritizing economic development that supports our year-round workforce — so that we build stability from within, not just through tourism. Transparent budgeting and early community engagement will be key to navigating this transition responsibly.

5. I support evaluating the city's current structure with an open mind, but I believe clear accountability is more important than titles. The mayor-council model can work well if communication, transparency and collaboration remain strong. However, if the workload or complexity of city operations begins to exceed the council's capacity, reinstating an administrator could provide professional oversight and continuity. My focus would be on results — ensuring that whatever system we use best serves Sandpoint residents through efficient, ethical and transparent governance.

Joshua Torrez



Age: 45

Birthplace and residence:

Born in Denver, Colo.; resident of Sandpoint since 2017

Years in Bonner County: Eight

Past/current government service: board member, Colorado Wildlife Federation (served through 2024) and policy advocate with the National Wildlife Federation, representing hunters, anglers, birders and hikers on national conservation policy; board member, city and county of Denver Workforce Development; secretary, Ponderay Economic

Partners; Sandpoint Chamber member; certified U.S. D-License soccer coach and referee

Education: Bachelor's

degree in behavioral science (psychology emphasis) with a Spanish minor, Metropolitan State University of Denver

Contact info: torrez4council@outlook.com, torrez-4council.com, 208-645-8058, Instagram: @torrez4council

1. I'm running to keep Sandpoint's future in the hands of locals. I work multiple jobs, coach youth sports, and see firsthand the challenges facing families and small businesses here. My goal is practical, balanced leadership that supports workers, protects affordability and ensures growth benefits everyone — not just developers. Sandpoint's strength comes from its people, and our policies should reflect that local spirit while maintaining the mountain-town character we all love.

2. If the bond fails, we must act quickly to protect public health and the lake. I'd work to secure emergency funding through the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, the EPA and federal infrastructure programs. We can pursue phased improvements to keep the system running safely while rebuilding public trust through transparency and a clearer, more affordable long-term plan. Protecting our waterways and residents must come first.

3. Yes. I support impact fees because growth should pay its way. As development continues, it's important that new projects contribute to the infrastructure they depend on — roads, water, sewer and parks — rather than placing the burden on existing residents. The scheduled increase gives developers time to plan while ensuring fairness for locals. It's a responsible and balanced approach to managing growth.

4. We must plan ahead now by diversifying revenue sources and managing growth-related costs efficiently. I'd focus on expanding grants, partnerships and careful budgeting to reduce dependency on a single revenue stream. In addition to impact fees and long-term

< ELECTION, con't from Page 14 >

infrastructure planning, Sandpoint's recreation economy — from skiing and biking to lake activities and community events — can help generate sustainable revenue for both local businesses and the city. By supporting recreation and tourism in a balanced way, we can keep Sandpoint vibrant while protecting what makes it special. Transparency and community engagement will be key as we prepare together for that transition.

5. The city administrator role historically provided structure, guidance and accountability — helping manage budgets, laws and complex projects. Since Sandpoint recently transitioned away from that model, I believe we need to give the current system time to stabilize before making another change. My focus is on transparency, communication, and professionalism. If this new structure doesn't deliver stability and trust over time, I'd be open to reassessing it with community input.

Wastewater treatment plant bond

Sandpoint voters will see a measure on their Tuesday, Nov. 4 election ballot asking whether they approve of the city bonding for up to \$130 million to address the ailing wastewater treatment plant adjacent to Lakeview Park on the Pend Oreille River.

According to the question that will be asked on the ballot, the \$130 million would be put toward financing the design, acquisition and construction of a wide range of improvements to the aged plant, as well as pay for related expenses.

The anticipated interest rate would be 4.27% per year, with the total amount to be repaid over the 40-year life of the bonds estimated at \$257,285,000 — including \$130 million in principal and \$127,285,000 of interest. The \$130 million full-project bond contains 40% contingency.

If approved, ratepayers can expect to see their sewer bills

increase by up to 100% over the course of five years, though officials have pledged to seek outside funding sufficient to keep those increases as minimal as possible.

Visitors to sandpoint-wwt.org will find a rundown of the needs at the plant, which has operated for 70 years with some components dating to the 1940s and early '50s; an explanation of the elements of the proposed reconstruction; frequently asked questions; and media reports on the project.

Ponderay 1% local option tax, and other area budget and fire levies

In Ponderay, voters will weigh in on a 10-year, 1% local option sales tax intended to raise funds for continued development of public access to Lake Pend Oreille and the Pend d'Oreille Bay Trail, including a railroad underpass; ongoing construction at the Field of Dreams recreational

complex; creation of a Field of Dreams Endowment Fund for future maintenance at the facility; and support for streets and stormwater projects, with \$500,000 designated on top of the existing streets budget.

East Hope voters will consider a permanent override property tax levy, estimated to cost \$20.89 per \$100,000 of taxable assessed property value per year in order to fund street maintenance and capital improvements.

Residents in the Northside Fire District will vote on a special permanent tax levy of \$1,345,410 — up from \$661,071 — effective in Fiscal Year 2026 to pay for equipping and maintaining the district's operations. The additional \$684,339 would result in an estimated increase of \$20.20 per \$100,000 of taxable assessed value per year.

For more election information, including registration, polling place locations, sample ballots and calendars, go to bonnercountyid.gov/Elections-Home.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ELECTION DAY:

- Early in-person voting runs 9 a.m.-5 p.m. through Friday, Oct. 31 at the Bonner County Elections Office (1500 Highway 2, Suite 124, in Sandpoint).
- Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 4, with polls open from 8 a.m.-8 p.m.
- For all things election-related — including registration, polling places, sample ballots, results and other information — go to bonnercountyid.gov/elections or voteidaho.gov.



GEAR DROP:
Friday, Nov. 7 • 12-7pm

SALE DAY:
Saturday, Nov. 8 • 8am-2pm

Bonner County Fairgrounds
\$5/person | \$10/family

SKI SWAP

SARS.NET

HOME OF SANDPOINT BULLDOG SPORTS





ON THE RADIO:
103.3FM & 97.1FM

news • talk • sports
97.1
KSPT KBFI
1400 AM 1450 AM
northidahoradio.com

LISTEN ONLINE:
NORTHIDAHO.RADIO.COM

Sandpoint Bulldogs #11 seed
vs. Minico Spartans #6 seed (from Rupert, Idaho)
Round One 5A Idaho State Football Playoffs
Yokes 5:45pm kick at 6pm Pacific Friday 10/31

Your Vision, Our Focus



The Bonner General Ophthalmology Clinic is the only specialty eye clinic in the greater Sandpoint area. Our board-certified ophthalmologist, Dr. Mark Torres specializes in cataract surgery and provides expert care for a wide range of eye conditions, offering both surgical and non-surgical treatments to help protect and improve your sight.



Bonner General Ophthalmology
(208) 265-1011
423 N. Third Ave. Suite 110
Sandpoint, ID 83864
bonnergeneral.org

Schedule your appointment today!



VOTE: NOVEMBER 4, 2025— Support Fire & Sewer

Please support the Revised Northside Fire Levy
and the Sandpoint Sewer Bond.

Vote: Election Day, 8 AM to 8 PM at designated precincts
Absentee ballots must be returned by 8 PM

REVISED NORTHSIDE FIRE LEVY: Airport, Baldy, Beach, Colburn, Grouse Creek, Kootenai, Oden, and Selle Precincts will have a Revised Fire Levy on their ballots. This levy has been modified with input from local citizens. While none of us like taxes, some are more critical than others. Fire destroys human and animal life as well as property.
For info: facebook.com/www.northsidefire.org (Aug 28, 2025 Post)

Consider This: North Idaho has had unprecedented growth (16%) in last decade
Only 3% budget increases are allowed without the levy
Insurance cancellations/& or increased rates are increasing
Failure to pass the levy means reduced services and increased liabilities.

SANDPOINT MUNICIPAL BOND.

Sandpoint's wastewater treatment equipment no longer meets state or federal standards & must be overhauled. There are two means to pay for it:

Vote in Favor:

Means Sandpoint can qualify for state & federal programs including grants, low interest rates and possible loan forgiveness.
Estimated rate increases—106% over 5 years.

Vote Against:

Sandpoint residents would pay for upgrades directly.
Estimated rate increases—600% over 5 year.



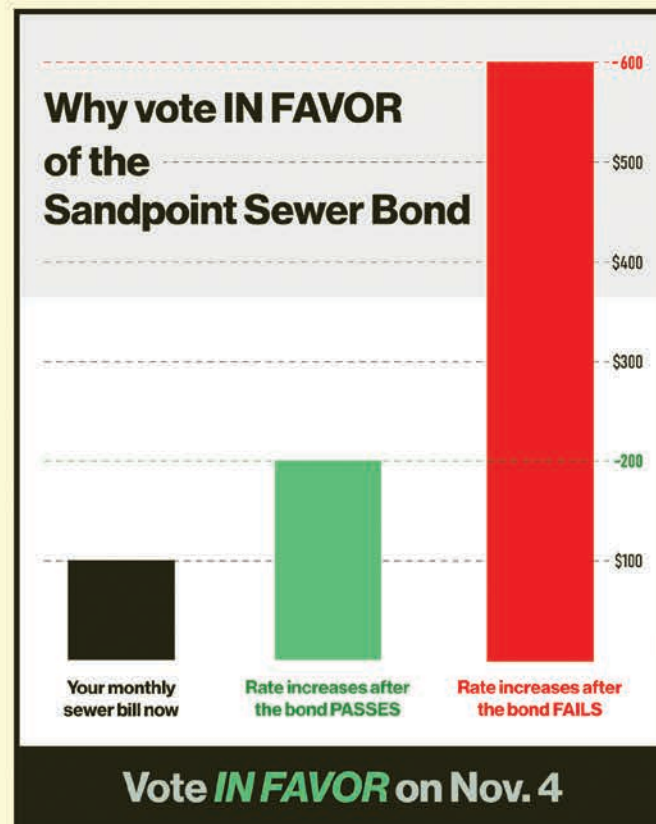
For more info:
Sandpoint-wwtp.org

CITY OF SANDPOINT SPECIAL MUNICIPAL REVENUE BOND

(Vote IN FAVOR or AGAINST)

CITY OF SANDPOINT
BONNER COUNTY, IDAHO
SPECIAL MUNICIPAL REVENUE BOND
NOVEMBER 4, 2025

- ☒ **IN FAVOR** of issuing up to \$130,000,000 of revenue bonds for the purposes provided by Ordinance 1430
- ☐ **AGAINST** issuing up to \$130,000,000 of revenue bonds for the purposes provided by Ordinance 1430



northidahovoterservices.org | facebook.com/NIVote