

2026 AITKIN COUNTY ELECTION GUIDE



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AITKIN COUNTY VOTING INFORMATION

Where and when do I vote?

There are three ways to vote in Minnesota: by mail, early in-person and in-person on Election Day.



Voting by mail began Sept. 18. Some precincts in rural areas are mail ballot precincts, and ballots are automatically mailed to registered voters there. If you don't live in a mail ballot precinct, you can still request a ballot at mnvotes.gov/absentee. You can return your ballot by mail, and those ballots must be received by no later than 8 p.m. on Election Day. Or, you can drop it off yourself at your county elections office no later than 5 p.m. on Election Day.



Early in-person voting also began Sept. 18. You can go to your county's early voting location(s), usually the courthouse or government center, and fill out an absentee ballot. You will need to know your MN ID or Social Security number to fill out the application.

Starting Oct. 16, voters can cast ballots as part of the "early voting process," which is more similar to voting on Election Day. You'll fill out a short certificate, fill out a ballot and then put it into the ballot counter.

Aitkin County's early voting locations are: Aitkin County Government Center in Aitkin (Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.) and East Lake Minisinaakwaang Community Center in McGregor (Wednesday, Oct. 14, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.)



On **Election Day**, Tuesday, Nov. 3, you can go to your local polling place to vote until 8 p.m. You can find your polling place at mnvotes.gov/pollfinder.

Local election officials also send teams of election judges to nursing homes and hospitals during the 35 days before the election and provide ballots to voters who live in the city or town where the facility is located. You can contact facility management or your local election office to find out when that will happen.

How do I register to vote?



You can register to vote or update your registration online at mnvotes.gov or by returning a paper form to your local elections office until Oct. 13. You'll need your Minnesota ID or Social Security number.

You can also register when you vote, either early in-person or on Election Day. You'll need to bring one proof of residence, like your driver's license or a photo ID paired with a bill or lease.

AITKIN COUNTY VOTING INFORMATION

Where can I find more information?



For more details on voting, you can visit mnvotes.gov, call 1-877-600-VOTE (8683), text 651-217-3862 or contact your county election office.

For more on the 2026 election, including candidates, maps and more, visit kaxe.org/election2026.

What is KAXE?



KAXE is a Northern Minnesota community radio station, founded in 1976. We have signals in Grand Rapids (91.7), Bemidji (90.5) and Brainerd (89.9), and our broadcast can be streamed at kaxe.org or on the NPR app.

KAXE News began in 2023, and our team of five journalists put together this Election Guide. The team includes News Director Chelsey Perkins, Northwest Minnesota Reporter Larissa Donovan, North-Central Minnesota Reporter Megan Buffington, Northeast Minnesota Reporter Emma Krab and Stella Mayerhoff, Report for America corps member covering water and agriculture.

Stay updated on local news across our region by listening to the *Up North Report*, our daily 5-minute newscast. You can find it at our website or on your favorite podcast app.

More about this KAXE Election Guide



KAXE's election guides inform people about voting and elections. We don't want to tell you how to vote, but we want to play a role in empowering you to vote by providing unbiased and trustworthy reporting.

This Election Guide features only contested races in communities with a population of at least 100. "Contested" means those in which more people are running than the number of available seats.

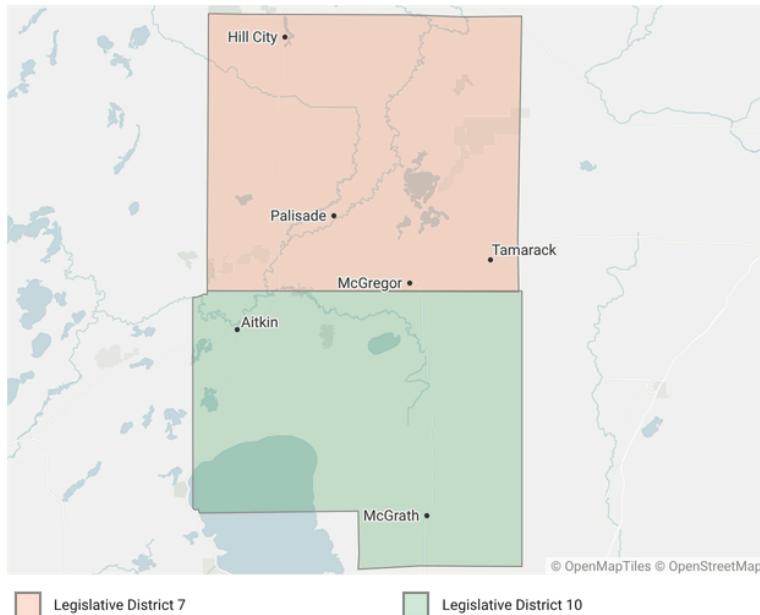
Candidate responses have not been edited and are published as submitted. As necessary, our News Team added contextual information and corrected inaccuracies, marked with editor's notes in italics.

KAXE contacted every candidate at least three times using contact information submitted to the Secretary of State's Office when they filed for office. Please contact us at news@kaxe.org with questions or comments or to report any errors.

AITKIN COUNTY VOTING INFORMATION

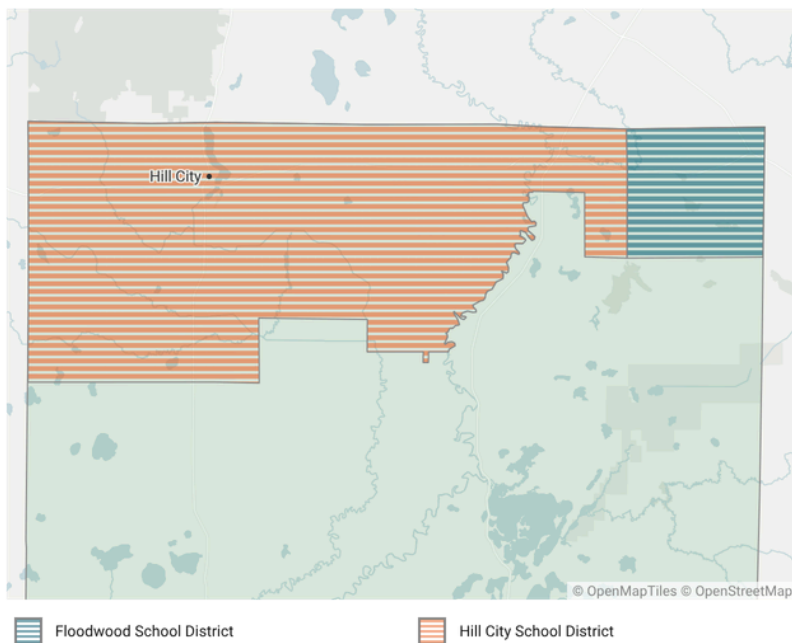
Which district do you live in?

Legislative Districts



Created with Datawrapper

School Districts

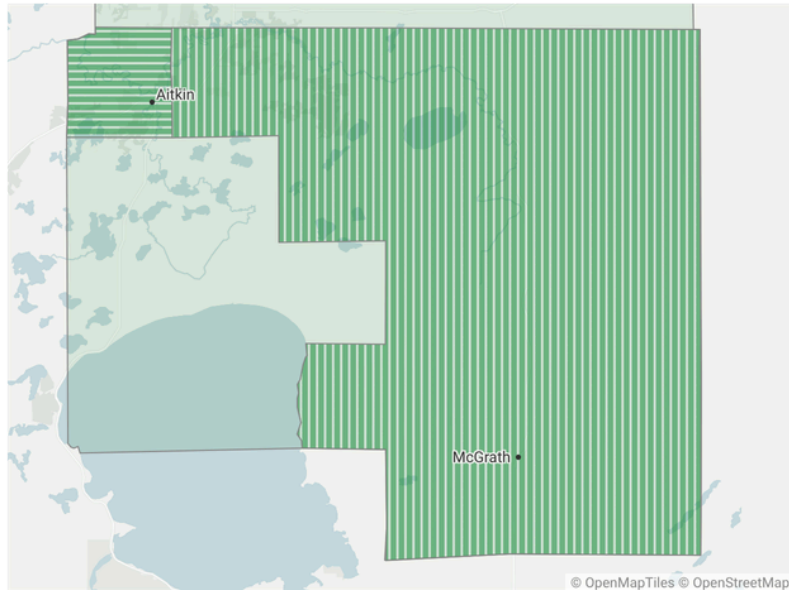


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AITKIN COUNTY VOTING INFORMATION

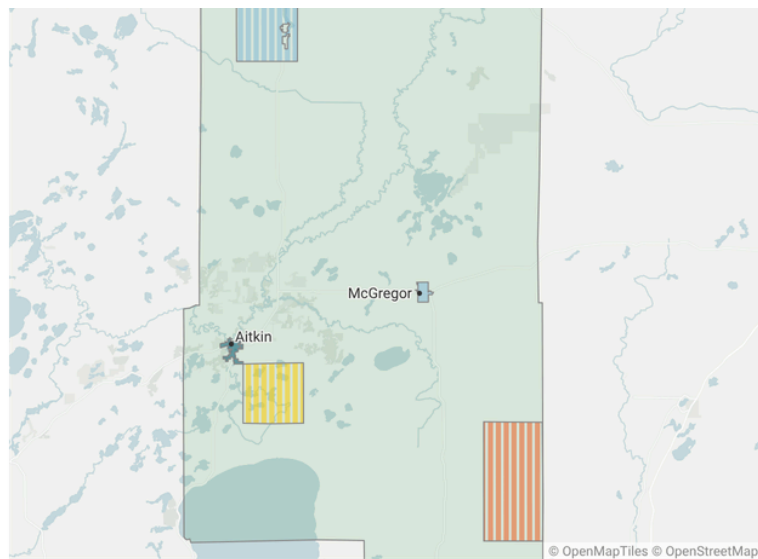
Which district do you live in?

County Board Districts



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Cities and Towns



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U.S. HOUSE 8TH DISTRICT



Pete Stauber*

Incumbent

Republican

petestauberforcongress.com



Trina Swanson

DFL

trinaforcongress.com

*Candidate did not respond to KAXE's survey.
Candidate campaign website as reported to the Minnesota Secretary of State.

U.S. HOUSE 8TH DISTRICT



Party: DFL
Age: 46
Community:
Hermantown

Trina Swanson

When Trump's administration asked me to carry out directives I believed were unethical, I walked away from my career. I started my own law firm and decided to use all my experience and leadership skills in national security, foreign policy, diplomacy, and immigration to fight for fellow Minnesotans.

Why are you running? Our district has seen the outcome of relying on the same representation for years: a focus on identity politics rather than day-to-day issues, and catering to the Trump administration rather than Minnesota families. Across this district, voters keep asking the same question: who has the experience and dedication to make life more affordable and strengthen our communities? Our current representation has been unable to articulate how they will enact concrete change.

Being effective in Congress requires Representatives with the skills to work across the aisle, identify solutions, build coalitions, and get laws passed. It requires an understanding of the issues at hand, including foreign policy, national security, and immigration. It also requires a willingness to learn about the issues one may not be fluent in, recognizing that we have a broad depth of issues to tackle in this country. I am ready to be that Representative.

Why should voters elect you? I have proven my commitment to listening to voters across the District regardless of affiliation. Sitting down and having conversations with people, listening

to their struggles, questions, and concerns, is the only way to move beyond divisive identity politics. I have worked hard to ensure my candidacy is centered around my skills, experience, and tangible solutions for Minnesota families' everyday challenges. I grew up here. The 8th District is my family, friends, and neighbors. I know I can win the 8th because I am winning people over one conversation at a time. This message is resonating: Minnesotans are ready for representation that puts kitchen table issues first and brings opportunity at home.

What are your top three priorities, if elected? Please describe specific policy goals. I have traveled all 31,000 miles and 21 counties in this District, and it is clear that the District wants strong communities with good-paying jobs, affordable and accessible healthcare, new industry investment, and to preserve our lakes and wilderness for future generations to enjoy. To make this a reality, we must enact universal healthcare, ensure proper federal funding for childcare, schools, hospitals, and the programs the working class relies upon, and attract new industries with good-paying, union jobs to the district.

(continued on next page)

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? JET Global Solutions, LLP; Founding Partner and Attorney at Law

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. I grew up in Hermantown, Minnesota, where my mother worked as a nurse and my father worked first as a carpenter, then at the paper mill. They instilled in me the Minnesota values of unions, hard work, and caring for your community. Those lessons drove me to a career in public service at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and I was proud to represent the United States across the globe, leading offices and national emergency responses. I proudly served under several Administrations, worked with people from both sides of the aisle, and identified and implemented solutions to problems.

U.S. HOUSE 8TH DISTRICT

Trina Swanson (continued)

We currently have a representative who supports cuts to programs that the middle class relies upon, so the 1% can receive greater tax breaks. I will fight for Minnesota to receive proper federal funding, instead of today's status quo: placing the responsibility on the state, resulting in property tax increases. People should be able to stay in the communities they love, raise families, and retire with dignity.

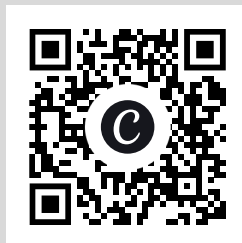
What are your natural resources policy positions?

Generations to come must be able to enjoy this amazing land we call home. We must respect the science, experts, and regulatory processes that ensure corporations use the most advanced technological means in their industries to minimize the impact on our environment and manage natural resources sustainably.

I will ensure proper funding for federal agencies with oversight of our natural resources. We must return to proper staffing levels across federal agencies and reopen the critical offices that closed.

I support our mining industry and miners, just as I believe in protecting Minnesota's natural resources by consistently enforcing environmentally responsible regulatory practices. At the end of the day, mining must benefit our communities, prioritize our workforce, and protect our environment. When I am elected to Congress, I will support legislation to protect the Boundary Waters, while also supporting and protecting Minnesota's robust mining industry.

Looking for statewide candidates? Visit the link below for detailed guides on who's running for U.S. Senate, Minnesota governor, attorney general, secretary of state and auditor.



kaxe.org/electionguide

MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE

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Senate District 7



Robert Farnsworth
Incumbent
Republican
robarnsworth.com



Kim (Kotonias) McLaughlin
DFL
kimfords7.com

Read more on page 11

Senate District 10



Tara Killen
DFL



Nathan Wesenberg*
Incumbent
Republican
wesenbergforsenate.com

Read more on page 12

House District 7A



Spencer Igo
Incumbent
Republican
spencerigo.com



Erin McCabe Ningen
DFL
teamerin7a.com

Read more on page 14

House District 10A



Melissa Maertens
DFL
mmformn.com



Mark Striemer
Republican
streimerforhouse.com

*Candidate did not respond to KAXE's survey.

MINNESOTA SENATE DISTRICT 7



Party: Republican
Age: 48
Community:
Hibbing

Robert Farnsworth

Why are you running? I am running to continue to fight for the values we all share in the Northland. We all saw the damage done by the DFL trifecta in 23 and 24, that included higher taxes, tab fees, and mandate on our schools and businesses. We cannot go back to that, but must move forward as a more business friendly state that does not burden our schools, counties, and cities with unfunded mandates.

Why should voters elect you?

My experience in the Senate demonstrates that I have kept my word to fight for a lower cost of living, capital improvements in our region, and flexibility for our schools. In addition, I have worked across the party lines for the Good of our region.

What are your top three priorities, if elected? Please describe specific policy goals. I would like to see true permitting reform that would allow our current mines as well as a proposed mines to get on track for job creation in our region. I would like to see reform in education by reducing mandates on our school districts, but also addressing the grad standards that are not preparing many of our

students for the life they will live beyond high school. We also need to address the cost of living issues, and the way we can do that at the state level is through tax relief and other financial relief such as car tab and boat registration fees. This should have included returning the \$18 billion surplus to the taxpayers in 2023, but that did not happen and I will work to return future surplus to the taxpayers.

What policies would you champion to help alleviate growing property tax burdens on residents at the local government level? The best thing we can do to alleviate property tax burdens is to remove the numerous mandates imposed upon our counties and cities by the state. Particularly, during the DFL trifecta, numerous mandates were put on our local units of government, which is forcing them to raise taxes in order to pay for it. We need to either repeal the mandates or allow counties and cities to opt out.

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? MN State Senate and Hibbing School District

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. I am currently in my first term in the Minnesota State Senate. I have been a teacher for over 25 years. I am also a licensed real estate agent in Hibbing. In the Senate, I serve on the Education Finance, Higher Education, and Transportation committees. I am also board share of the IRRR.



Read more answers from the candidates at kaxe.org/electionguide

MINNESOTA SENATE DISTRICT 7



Party: DFL
Age: 64
Community:
Hibbing

Kim (Kotonias) McLaughlin

I have served on the Hibbing Fire Civil Service Commission, the Range Association of Municipalities and Schools, the Boys & Girls Club, and other local organizations. In my third term on the Hibbing School Board and as a member of the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission, I bring experience, transparency, and a commitment to serving the Northland. I'm ready to be your State Senator and be a strong voice for our communities.

Why are you running? I'm running to be a strong voice for the Northland in St. Paul and to ensure that our communities have the representation they deserve. I'm running so that the people here have a seat at the table.

As a proud Iron Range native raised in a hardworking union family, I learned the values of integrity, respect, hard work, and showing up for neighbors. I live in this community and I understand the challenges that families face, from stretching a paycheck to accessing the services they rely on. Throughout my career in public service and local leadership, I have worked to make government accountable, responsive to the people, and overall more efficient.

Our area needs a State Senator who puts people over politics, who works collaboratively, who actually delivers results that strengthen northern Minnesota, and who moves the Northland and its families forward.

Why should voters elect you?

I humbly believe that the experience and skills I bring to the table are exactly what Minnesotans need in our state legislature, now more than ever. I'm an accountant, fraud examiner, and school board director with experience in ensuring public dollars work for the people.

I'm a collaborative problem solver. As your senator, I'll deliver results. I'll bring people together to work toward solutions, leveraging the expertise of the people here. Together, we'll work for things that matter to our region including strong public schools, affordable healthcare, good-paying jobs, lower costs, and safe communities.

I believe in transparent, accountable governance that works for the people. I have experience as a local elected official, currently serving on the Hibbing School Board, on the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission, and as a Minnesota School Board Association delegate.

It would be an honor and privilege to serve as your State Senator.

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Minnesota North College - Business Manager

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. I am Northland rooted. I'm a proud native raised in a working-class union family and a diverse immigrant community built on shared values. Thirty years ago, my husband Paul and I chose to raise our daughter in Hibbing.

A first-generation college graduate of Hibbing Community College and the University of Minnesota Duluth, I've spent nearly 28 years serving Minnesota's public higher education system as an internal auditor and business manager. I'm a Certified Public Accountant and Certified Fraud Examiner.

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MINNESOTA SENATE DISTRICT 10



Party: DFL

Age: 56

Community:

Maple Grove Township

Tara Killen

keeping everyone focused on a common goal.

I've also built a small business, created a nonprofit and volunteered in my community. Together, these experiences have taught me to listen, negotiate, build consensus, think strategically, manage competing priorities, solve problems and be accountable for results—skills I believe are essential to representing people effectively in the Minnesota Senate.

Why should voters elect you?

I haven't held elected office before, and I won't pretend that experience doesn't matter. But there are different kinds of experience.

I've spent my life working in the real world, where decisions have consequences, budgets have limits, regulations matter and people with very different priorities still have to find a way to get the job done.

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Frontier Integrity Solutions, Project Manager

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. My education and career have given me experience across very different worlds. My educational background spans the social sciences, physical sciences and applied technical fields. Separately, my military service taught me discipline, responsibility, teamwork and the importance of contributing to something larger than myself.

I've spent 14 years in the natural gas industry managing complex projects, people, budgets, regulations and compliance. That work requires bringing together people with different expertise, responsibilities and priorities, understanding how those pieces fit together, resolving conflicts and

Why are you running? I'm running because I believe government should bring people together to solve problems, not divide us into sides and tell us who to blame.

Throughout my life and career, I've worked with people with different backgrounds, responsibilities, priorities and points of view. I learned that we don't have to agree on everything to listen to one another, understand what matters and build solutions that work for all of us.

I see too many people who feel unheard, too many families struggling to afford their lives and too much politics focused on winning the fight instead of solving the problem.

I believe in balance, accountability and remembering that we are people and Minnesotans before we are political parties. I'm running because I don't want to simply complain about what government has become. I want to help make it work better—and leave something better for the people who come after us.

I know how to listen, ask questions, seek out people who know more than I do, weigh competing needs and take responsibility for the outcome. I don't need everyone in the room to agree with me, and I don't believe disagreement makes someone my enemy.

I'm not asking people to vote for me because I have all the answers. I'm asking them to vote for me because I will do the work to find good ones, tell them the truth, listen even when we disagree, and remember every day who I work for.

What are your top three priorities, if elected? Please describe specific policy goals. 1. Democracy - If we lose this, we lose everything. Laws matter. Voting matters. All voices matter.

(continued on page 17)

MINNESOTA HOUSE DISTRICT 7A



Party: Republican

Age: 30

Community:
Wabana Township

Spencer Igo

Why are you running? I am running for re-election to continue the work of the people of House District 7A. Serving as our representative has been an amazing and humbling experience to not only deliver on the needs of our district, but also to create partnerships that are working and advocating to make our home even better. My experience in this life is all due to one thing, being raised right here in Northern Minnesota and the Iron Range. It is that upbringing that lit a fire inside of me to serve and advocate for our home. We can have a thriving economy, vibrant schools, and communities that flourish if we continue to work together. That is why I am running for re-election so that we can continue creating and fostering partnerships that lead to not just the success of our community, but our entire state.

Why should voters elect you?

I am asking for your vote to continue to build on our combined commitment and goals for our district. My focus these past two years has been around energy, housing, and funding education. I was able to pass bipartisan bills like a first in generation nuclear energy study, housing reforms and funding, and a historic bipartisan constitutional amendment that is now on every Minnesotan's ballot this fall that will increase funding to schools at 0 cost to the taxpayer. All these accomplishments are the building blocks for the work I am asking to

continue to work on. We need to continue to pass energy bills that diversify our electric grid and restore affordability and reliability. Housing policy needs to continue to drive on cutting red tape and mandates to build the homes people want. It is work like this that will make our communities strong for generations to come.

What are your top three priorities, if elected? Please describe specific policy goals.

My top three priorities would be centered around affordability in our state and streamlining government. One priority would be removing the moratorium on nuclear power so that we could have conversations and invest in the potential if Minnesota were to build this carbon free baseload power. Second, we need to remove duplicate programs in state government. By doing this, tax dollars are spent more efficiently while reducing the cost of the programs which ends up as tax savings. Finally, we need to continue the work on permitting reform at all levels of government. This doesn't mean cutting regulations, it means making a system that has a clear process and timeline, so people, business, and communities know what to expect.

(continued on page 16)

MINNESOTA HOUSE DISTRICT 7A



Party: DFL
Age: 60
Community:
Hibbing

Erin McCabe Ningen

Why are you running? I'm running because I believe that we need citizen leaders from all walks of life to step up and get involved in government. Corporate donors and professional political operatives have drowned out the voices of everyday Americans who keep this country running strong. I am not taking any special interest money because we deserve a representative whose time, effort, and vote belong exclusively to the people of northern Minnesota.

public education with private school vouchers. Our Healthcare System is flawed. I support single-payer Medicare for all. We must move our economy beyond boom-and-bust cycles of mining dependence. We can stimulate job creation by reducing the influence of lobbyist insiders to ensure that innovative ideas have a fair chance to gain public support.

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? First Call for Help of Itasca County-988 Crisis Call Specialist. Sportsman's Restaurant & Taverna-Server.

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. I studied political science and constitutional law at Bemidji State University. I bring state policymaking experience from serving two appointed terms on the Minnesota Community College Board and one term on the Minnesota State University Board. More importantly, I have the lived experience of a single mother navigating rising costs, dwindling healthcare access, and the daily realities facing working families.

Why should voters elect you? Most of us agree: it's time for a change. I possess the courage, integrity, and common sense to prioritize serving the people of the Northland over party battles or lobbyist interests. I bring some fresh ideas to the table along with a commitment to make government work for all of us.

What are your top three priorities, if elected? Please describe specific policy goals. Public education, health care, and jobs. Quality public education ensures that all Minnesota kids can build a stable, meaningful life. We should change the formula for the permanent School Fund so it does not disadvantage rural schools, and we should protect against defunding

What policies would you champion to help alleviate growing property tax burdens on residents at the local government level?

We should reform our system for funding schools. The current system relies too heavily on local tax levies. We must close the tax loopholes to ensure that the top 1% and corporations pay their fair share. I support adding the 5th tier for income tax. We need to be mindful of mandating local projects for which the state doesn't provide the funds.

MINNESOTA HOUSE DISTRICT 10A



Party: DFL
Age: 57
Community:
Brainerd

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Self Employed- Chef, Consultant, Instructor

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. I bring more than 30 years of leadership experience in property management, inventory management, and small business ownership. Throughout my career, I have developed strong skills in budgeting, process improvement, team leadership, customer relations, and strategic planning.

I enjoy solving complex problems and finding practical solutions that help organizations operate more efficiently while delivering strong results. In corporate life, I oversaw complex operational processes and workforce coordination, while entrepreneurship has provided hands-on experience in financial

Melissa Maertens

management, marketing, and business development. My background in economics helps me make informed, practical decisions. I bring a results-oriented approach focused on organization, collaboration, and effective solutions.

Why are you running?

I believe rural communities deserve strong representation from someone who understands the everyday challenges families, businesses, schools, and healthcare providers face. I am running because I believe we can solve problems without treating every issue as a partisan battle. I want to bring my leadership and business experience to the Legislature and focus on practical solutions that strengthen our communities.

Why should voters elect you? People should vote for me because I bring a practical approach, and a genuine commitment to put people first. I will listen, ask questions, study the issues, and work with others to help return funding, reduce mandates when possible, and help move our communities forward.

My priorities are clear- strengthening our local economy, protecting access to rural healthcare, and investing in quality education. I believe rural Minnesota deserves a representative who will show up, listen to people throughout the district, and put the people's needs ahead of political games. I will bring my leadership and business experience to the Legislature and work to be a thoughtful, principled, and practical voice for the people of MN House District 10A.

What are your top three priorities, if elected? Please describe specific policy goals.

My top three priorities are economic growth, rural healthcare, and education. I want to strengthen small businesses and local economies by reducing unnecessary barriers, encouraging entrepreneurship, and connecting local employers with the skilled workers they need. I also want to encourage local sourcing so more dollars stay in our communities.

I will work to protect access to quality healthcare by supporting efforts to recruit and retain medical professionals, strengthen rural healthcare facilities, and expand innovative solutions such as mobile and community-based care.

I want to help Minnesota attract and retain excellent teachers, invest in school infrastructure, and expand career and technical education so students graduate with the skills they need for careers, and opportunities close to home. My goal is simple: strong communities where people can live, work, and thrive.

(continued on page 17)

MINNESOTA HOUSE DISTRICT 10A



Party: Republican
Age: 69
Community:
Brainerd

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? retired

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. BA in Biology and Education, Coach, Insurance Agent, Registered Representative, Pharmaceutical Representative. Certified Home Inspector.

Why are you running?

Minnesota's political leadership has become morally corrupt, leading to Billions in fraud and educationally turned the public school's curricula into an immoral cesspool.

Editor's note: In December 2025, federal prosecutors

Mark Striemer

estimated fraud in state-run Medicaid programs could exceed \$9 billion; Gov. Tim Walz and state officials said that was a sensationalized number, though they've acknowledged it could exceed \$1 billion.

Why should voters elect you? I have experience in Business, Teaching, and 38 years in sales which requires communication and negotiation skills. Embracing truth and rejecting falsehood leads to trust and beneficial progress. We live in a time where Truth is often redefined to mean whatever suits one's agenda. That is not truth and needs to be exposed for the deceit that it is.

What are your top three priorities, if elected? Please describe specific policy goals. Re-establish equal justice under the Law, prosecute and incarcerate those leaders who were complicit in the billions in fraud, while removing from office those who do not uphold their oath of office. Secure our voting system with hand counted paper ballots with one day voting. (With the exception of traditional absentee ballots for military and others unable to be at the election site.) Remove all taxpayer funding for sex change procedures and do what we can to protect life from conception to natural death.

Editor's note: See previous note. Voting machines are faster and more accurate than hand counts.

What policies would you champion to help alleviate growing property tax burdens on residents at the local government level? If we eliminate fraud is it possible to reduce or even eliminate property tax? We need to go back to essential services not the expensive nanny state policies like the family leave act that continue to increase costs to employers and ultimately, the taxpayer. We never had it in previous decades and the mindset that more and more of these benefits should be mandatory is leading to financial collapse.

Editor's note: State-run Medicaid programs, which fraud concerns have been focused on, are primarily funded by federal dollars. Residential property taxes in Minnesota go toward local government, with taxes on other types of property also going to the state General Fund.

MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE CONTINUED

Kim (Kotonias) McLaughlin (continued)

What are your top three priorities, if elected? Please describe specific policy goals.

Trust and integrity in government and getting money out of politics are woven into the fabric of nearly every voter conversation. People want a government they can trust and a lawmaker who puts people first. I'm listening and my priorities are aligned with what constituents say. We'll fight for:

- Healthcare: Affordable high-quality physical and behavioral healthcare services right here in greater Minnesota, including affordable prescription drugs.
- Public Education: Fully funded public education. This includes general education, career and technical education, and special education and related opportunities. In supporting public education, we need to ensure that costs don't fall on the backs of local taxpayers.
- Strong Communities: Supporting small businesses, EMS, and affordable childcare, senior services, and housing.

I prioritize people over politics. I believe zip code should never define or limit opportunity. I will fight to ensure the people of the Northland receive the resources we deserve.

What policies would you champion to help alleviate growing property tax burdens on residents at the local government level?

Using a multi-faceted approach, I'll champion policies that reduce property taxes. Short term, I'll work for direct taxpayer relief through expansion of the homestead market value credit and renters' credit. I'll also propose a task force to study the 1970s "Minnesota Miracle" to determine whether an updated version could reduce increased reliance on local property taxes to fund essential services. Our government must provide necessary services, including education, healthcare, and infrastructure, but we must not place undue burden on property taxpayers.

I'll prioritize tax relief for working and middle-class Minnesotans before giving tax breaks to the wealthiest. We need to ensure taxpayers are getting the greatest value from every dollar. Increased transparency, effective oversight, regular audits, and community input can help local governments control costs and make responsible decisions about levies and spending.

My goal is straightforward: provide meaningful property-tax relief while protecting the essential services our communities depend on.

Spencer Igo (continued)

What policies would you champion to help alleviate growing property tax burdens on residents at the local government level?

I would continue to champion energy policy around nuclear, biomass, and carbon sequestration. All these policies offer the ability to create new industry and tax base which takes the burdens away from taxpayers and stabilizes our economies. We can combine this energy policy with reforms to programs like ESST and PFML so that they work better and more efficiently in ways that respects employees and businesses. By continuing to work on permitting reform these three things would result in thriving economic development not only in our district but the entire state that would benefit local governments and every single taxpayer. Finally, we need to remove or change the unfunded mandates that have flowed to all levels of local government.

MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE CONTINUED

Tara Killen (continued)

I will represent the voice of the people, even when it is hard, in what I vote for and in what I bring forward as senator. 2. Strengthening local infrastructure - Rural schools, healthcare and EMT services are not options...they are a part of infrastructure and deserve representation as such. I will fight for rural counties to receive a fairer share of tax dollars and work for equalizing compensatory funding for schools and teachers. 3. Cost of Living and Rural Affordability - bringing back balance. This is not a Left issue or a Right issue, this is a People issue. We are not the Twin Cities. We don't have the same problems or the same lifestyle. I will work for reinvesting in rural communities.

What policies would you champion to help alleviate growing property tax burdens on residents at the local government level?

I would champion to make the Homestead Credit Refund stronger, champion increasing the agricultural homestead credit and examining whether Green Acres adequately protects working farms from today's land-value increases, and also Minnesota already has tools like the Greater Minnesota Business Development Public Infrastructure program, Job Expansion Program, Minnesota Investment Fund, and rural revolving-loan programs that can help rural communities build infrastructure, grow local businesses, create jobs, and attract private investment. I want to strengthen and better target those tools so state dollars act as seed money—growing our local tax base and creating lasting rural wealth, so over time we can fund strong schools, roads, and public services without continually increasing the burden on homeowners, farms, and small businesses.

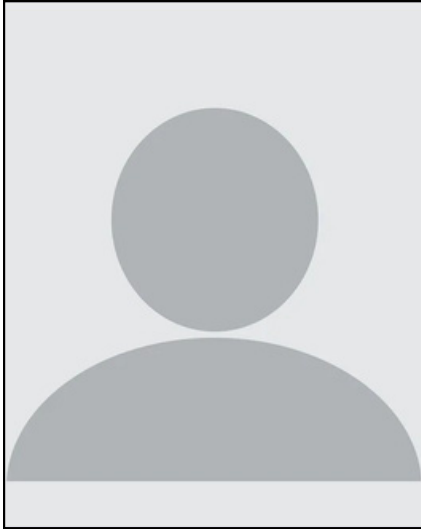
Melissa Maertens (continued)

What policies would you champion to help alleviate growing property tax burdens on residents at the local government level?

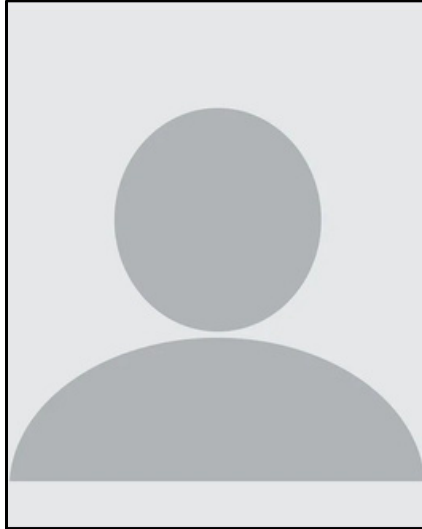
Rural communities face a unique challenge: in places like Aitkin County, we have an aging population and a limited local tax base, yet strong schools are essential to attracting younger workers and families that we need for our communities to continue. I support making better use of Minnesota's Permanent School Fund to provide additional school funding without increasing property taxes. Schools aren't just an education expense—they are part of our economic infrastructure.

I also support helping local governments find efficiencies through shared services, technology, regional cooperation, and better long-term planning. And the state needs to be careful not to shift costs onto counties and townships without providing the means to pay for them. For homeowners who are struggling, I support strengthening targeted property-tax relief such as the Homestead Credit Refund. Ultimately, we need to control spending growth while maintaining the services our communities depend on.

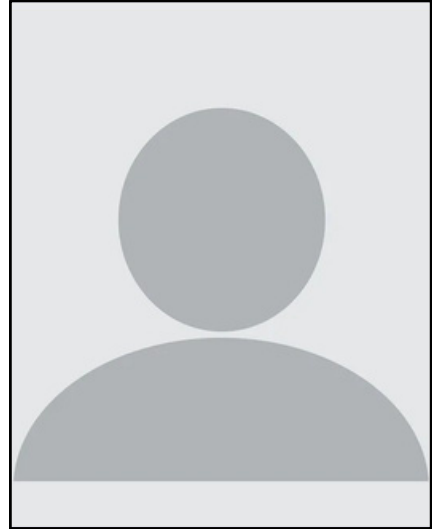
HILL CITY SCHOOL BOARD



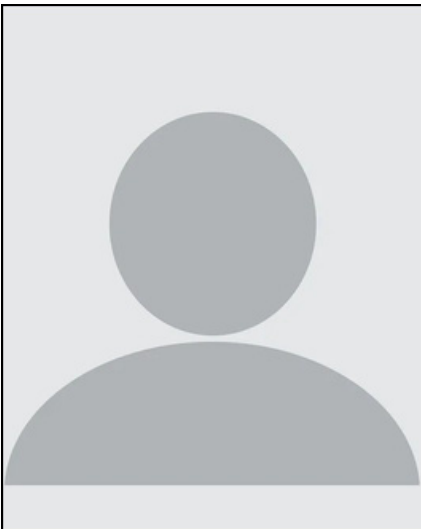
Elizabeth Gillman*



Matt Huseby*



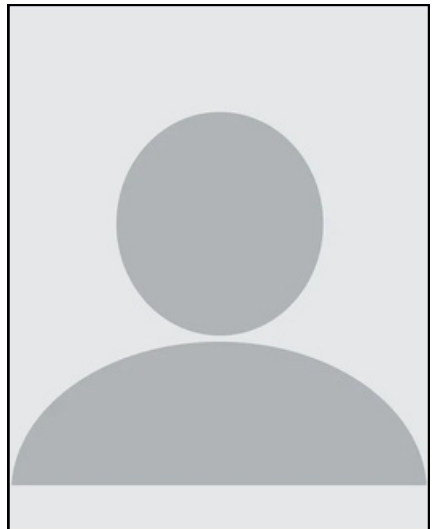
Heidi James*



Adam Johnson*



Sarah Kingsley
Incumbent



Jeremy Nelson*
Incumbent

*Candidate did not respond to KAXE's survey.

HILL CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Sarah Kingsley



Age: 40

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Sugar Brook Villa Assisted Living - Nurse

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. I have worked as a Nurse my whole life, I am a bus driver for Hill City activities, I am currently a school board member and I

have worked in the school as a Paraprofessional in the past. I am a mother to 5 boys that also go to Hill City school and they have thrived there. We are lucky to have such an amazing school!

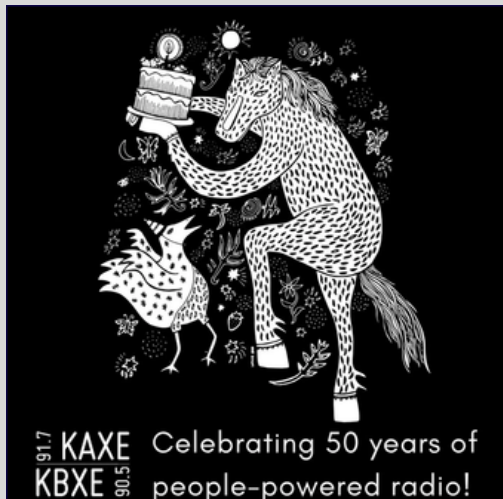
Why are you running? I have been on the school board for a few years now, it's such a great opportunity to work within the school and help make a difference in the lives of teachers and students.

Why should voters elect you? I can be a voice for all community members who want to be heard and together we can support our children in the best way possible.

What are your priorities, if elected? Please describe specific goals. To be a voice for our parents and community.

What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing your district, and how do you plan to address it if elected? There will always be challenges to face and as a team we can face them together.

What is one success in the district that you would offer support for as a board member? We have a great team that listens, understands and will help in anyway possible. We are successful because we can work individually and also have each other to problem solve.



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AITKIN COUNTY OFFICES

Read more on page 21

County Board District

1



Timothy Catlin

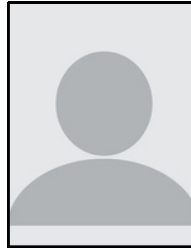


J. Mark Wedel
Incumbent

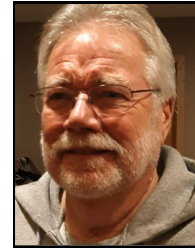
Read more on page 23

County Board District

3



Travis J. Leiviska*
Incumbent



Patrick Murphy

CITY OFFICES

Read more on page 24

Aitkin City Council (elect 2)



Joshua Gaffaney



Julie Miller
Incumbent



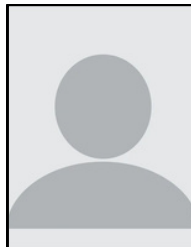
Leeann Moriarty



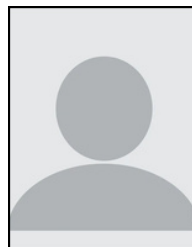
Annie Root

Read more on page 28

McGregor City Council (elect 2)



Elizabeth Eddy*



Cory Eken*



Gregory S. Weaver

*Candidate did not respond to KAXE's survey.

AITKIN COUNTY BOARD DISTRICT 1



Age: 64
Community:
Aitkin

Timothy Catlin

Why are you running? I am running for Aitkin County commissioner because I've spent my life here, and I care deeply about the people who call this place home. Having lived here my whole life, I understand the challenges residents face — from rising costs to limited access to services — and I believe our county deserves strong, steady leadership that listens and responds.

Which of those three issues is most important to you, and how would you address it if elected? Fiscal responsibility has to remain at the center of every decision. With limited resources we need to make sure every tax dollar is used wisely. That means careful budgeting, transparent spending, and making sure we're getting the best value for the money we invest in county operations.

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Retired from Law Enforcement, Currently working part-time for the Aitkin County Sheriff's Office at the Judicial Center

Why should voters elect you? My goal is simple: to bring common-sense leadership, practical problem-solving, and a commitment to serving the people who built this community.

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. Public Service for over 40 years including roles as the Aitkin County Sheriff and the City of Aitkin Chief of Police, Entrepreneur

What are the three biggest issues your county is facing?
Economic development

Providing essential services

Fiscal responsibility

What would be your top spending priorities and savings priorities in the county budget? My top priorities in the county budget would focus on protecting essential services while being responsible with every tax dollar. In a county with one of the lowest income levels in Minnesota, we have to make sure our spending reflects the real needs of the people who live here.



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AITKIN COUNTY BOARD DISTRICT 1



Age: did not answer
Community:
City of Aitkin

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Aitkin County Commissioner

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. Currently serving as Aitkin County Commissioner. Prior experience includes Aitkin City Mayor, Aitkin City Council, Aitkin School Board, Aitkin Municipal Airport Commission, Aitkin Fire Department (28 years),

J. Mark Wedel

Minnesota Housing Finance Agency Board, Minnesota Board of Teaching. Education includes Aitkin High School, Brainerd Community College and Mankato State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration.

Why are you running? To put my experience at work for the people of my District and to maintain fiscal integrity and responsible spending for the taxpayers of Aitkin County.

Why should voters elect you? Having lived in this District my entire life I can identify with the needs and concerns of the people of this District. Also, I believe my "track record" reflects that I have been very cautious about spending taxpayer dollars.

What are the three biggest issues your county is facing?

1.) Having to deal with the "unfunded mandates" forced on us by the State and Federal Government; 2.) Assuring that affordable healthcare is available to all citizens; 3.) Keeping the tax levy as low as possible.

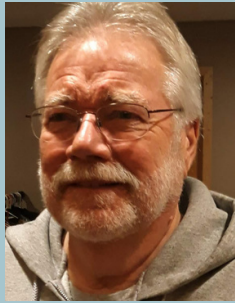
Which of those three issues is most important to you, and how would you address it if elected? Maintaining essential services while being responsible to the taxpayers of Aitkin County.

What would be your top spending priorities and savings priorities in the county budget? Public Safety, Veteran Services and maintaining safe roads and bridges.

Who is KAXE?

KAXE is a Northern Minnesota community radio station, founded in 1976 with signals in Grand Rapids (91.7), Bemidji (90.5) and Brainerd (89.9). The KAXE News team of five journalists put together this Election Guide. The team includes News Director Chelsey Perkins, Northwest Minnesota Reporter Larissa Donovan, North-Central Minnesota Reporter Megan Buffington, Northeast Minnesota Reporter Emma Krab and Stella Mayerhoff, Report for America corps member covering water and agriculture.

AITKIN COUNTY BOARD DISTRICT 3



Age: did not answer

Community:
Long Lake/Glen Township

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Retired Vice President Operations Raveill Trucking McGregor

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. Currently serve as elected Glen Township Supervisor. Elected in 2024 to the Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative Board of Directors. Legislative Rep / Lobbyist IAM Union AFL /CIO at Northwest Airlines now Delta Airlines 1990-1995. Served as Board Chair of Growth Innovations for 7 years. During my tenure, Growth Innovations expanded support for local businesses through its lending and technical assistance programs, strengthened partnerships with community stakeholders, and advanced initiatives focused on economic growth, entrepreneurship, workforce development, and housing. One of the organization's most significant accomplishments during this period was its

Patrick Murphy

partnership in the development of a new 44-unit multifamily housing project in Aitkin with INH Properties, the City of Aitkin and Aitkin County. Retired VP Ops Raveill Trucking McGregor MN.NWA/Delta MSP Hub Ops Manager. 23yrs. New York Institute of Technology MBA degree 2009. Honors Graduate Metro State U BA Degree Business / BA Labor degree

Why are you running? My focus is working for and representing all residents of District 3 Aitkin County. I felt the need to serve as the voice for our Aitkin County residents. I'm a life-long resident of Minnesota. My wife and I were fortunate to purchase our family lake home from our grandparents thirty-eight years ago. I know the concerns and will continue to listen to all Aitkin County residents. I am currently President of (ACLARA), Aitkin County Lakes and Rivers Association. ACLARA is the voice for over 3500 lake owners in Aitkin County. We must continue to maintain essential public services including senior services, health and human services. As a Township Supervisor I understand the need for safe roads and bridges while remaining mindful of the impact on taxpayers.

Why should voters elect you? I have an extensive business background at the executive level. I believe that my leadership and business skills will best support all of our residents of Aitkin County and District 3. I will work to represent all residents and businesses in Aitkin County.

What are the three biggest issues your county is facing? Keeping our hospital and attracting medical staff.

We need housing. We need to attract new business and grow our county responsibly.

Which of those three issues is most important to you, and how would you address it if elected? Keeping our hospital, attracting medical staff. Some of our hospital staff are forced to live outside of Aitkin County. Over half of our workforce at Ravell Trucking lived outside of Aitkin County due to lack of housing, Housing is number one factor to recruiting the best work force. We need to attract new business and grow responsible. The key to attract business is housing.

What would be your top spending priorities and savings priorities in the county budget? Aitkin County does have a large senior population that chose to retire on many of our pristine county lakes. We need to continue to keep our lakes clean and free of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS). We are attracting a workforce that can work from home. We need to continue working to expand and fund our WI-FI fiber service. We need to take care of our elderly with expanded senior living facilities. We cannot cut food banks subsidies and transportation. Our Minnesota winters up north are severe and could be fatal to our residents without heat and food. We need to take care of all.

AITKIN CITY COUNCIL



Joshua Gaffaney

Why are you running? To represent our young families, our workforce development, and to help improve school infrastructure.

Why should voters elect you? I have made this town my home after my honorable discharge from the U.S Army infantry in 2015. Ever since I've grown with this community. I desire to keep local and to support our school education. Ensure our families can receive a thriving community.

What are the three biggest issues your city is facing? Higher property taxes, Our school infrastructure, Public safety.

Which of those three issues is most important to you, and how would you address it if elected? Our school infrastructure, Allocating and fundraising so that our taxpayers don't Suffer in the process.

What steps, if any, would you take to support or oppose data centers? Use memorandums opposing data centers. Conditional use permits that force developers to pay for some local infrastructure upgrades, limit water and power.

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Currently focused on continuing my education at CLC

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. My volunteer work, I'm a lifelong problem solver.

What happens after you vote?

- In-person ballots, cast on Election Day, are typically counted quickly, often by machine.
- In Minnesota, mail-in and absentee ballots begin processing 18 days before the election but are not counted until after polls close at 8 p.m. on Election Day.
- Following Election Day, county election officials audit and proof their work to make any corrections as necessary before they canvass their results. It is routine for election officials to discover small errors or typos, such as entering the number 48 instead of 84.
- Election results are not official until they have been reviewed and certified by a canvassing board. If necessary, the canvassing board oversees a recount. Canvassing boards are also involved in the process of randomly selecting precincts for review after every election.
- Canvassing boards convene at the municipal, school district and county levels. Statewide races and those crossing county lines are certified by the State Canvassing Board.
- The county canvass report is sent to the Secretary of State's office, where it is reviewed and presented to the State Canvassing Board.
- Election results aren't final until they're certified, a process that varies by state. The State Canvassing Board will meet to certify results on Nov. 19.

AITKIN CITY COUNCIL



Age: 53

Julie Miller

make people feel comfortable when they bring forth questions, concerns, and ideas. I treat city staff, other elected officials, and residents with respect even in times of disagreement. I take responsibility for decisions as well as my mistakes. I listen to ideas that differ from my own when I am considering solutions to problems. And finally, I am consistent, transparent, and dependable.

Which of those three issues is most important to you, and how would you address it if elected? The issue that is the most important to me is addressing the rising costs of doing city business with a limited tax base. I will continue to work with department heads to prioritize needs and limit spending. Second, I will encourage city administrative staff to further their use of state, federal, county, and private grants to help pay for infrastructure, parks, economic development, public safety, and other projects. And finally, I will continue to advocate for annexation by squaring up the city limits. This will increase our tax base without incurring additional costs because city services are already being provided to these properties.

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Aitkin Public School District, Special Education Teacher

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. I have served on Aitkin's City Council for 13 years (non-consecutive).

Why are you running? I am running for city council because I believe I possess the attributes of an effective leader. Over the years, I have focused on what I believe is best for the community, rather than on any personal interests. I think beyond the immediate problem and look towards the future. I am approachable. I

Why should voters elect you? Voters should elect me because I am intelligent and open-minded. I believe in common sense solutions. I have a long history of fighting for the property owners of Aitkin to keep their taxes low while maintaining services that our city workers provide.

What are the three biggest issues your city is facing? The biggest issue that the city of Aitkin faces is rising costs with a limited tax base. Second, aging infrastructure. Third and finally, a lack of economic development in our downtown and industrial park.

What steps, if any, would you take to support or oppose data centers? I would meet with impacted individual business and property owners to make a common sense decision.



Photo credit: Lorie Shaull

AITKIN CITY COUNCIL



Age: 57

Leeann Moriarty

Why are you running? Be able to share my knowledge of city government.

Why should voters elect you? With previous knowledge of how the city operates. I am able to communicate with the citizens of Aitkin what is happening in the city.

What are the three biggest issues your city is facing? Taxes, lack of affordable housing, and employment opportunities

Which of those three issues is most important to you, and how would you address it if elected? All of the issues need to be addressed. Lack of affordable housing has been at the top of list for some time. Finding grants to help contactors and landlord repair old homes.

What steps, if any, would you take to support or oppose data centers? Data centers are hot topics right now. I do not oppose nor do support them without further information or investigation if any would be good fit for Aitkin or even Aitkin County.

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Eyecare center of Aitkin, optician

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. I have previously served on the city council. I stay update with what is going on in the city.



Photo credit: Lorie Shaull

AITKIN CITY COUNCIL

Annie Root



Age: 37

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Care-taker, Carpentry, Headstone Cleaning and Restoration

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. Aitkin High School and University of Minnesota College Graduate. Housing management/development. Volunteer/senior services.

Why are you running? The importance of civic duty has been impressed upon me since childhood, and I feel that City Council is a good place to begin, with what I

hope will be a lifelong journey. I believe local elections are reflective of how we would like to see our state elections run, and at a local level, I can vocalize and represent my neighbors diligently and directly. I am eager to serve my community in a capacity that allows voices to have positive, tangible effects.

Why should voters elect you? I deeply value my neighbors and community. I understand our daily struggles within the town, and I would like to have input into ensuring that our spending of public monies is in accordance with a budget that does not put undue burden on our local businesses and homeowners. Affordable housing availability is an issue I find particularly troubling and have high on my personal agenda. I have the time, vigor, and fresh perspective to advocate for everyone in our town. We all are Aitkin and we all deserve to be heard.

What are the three biggest issues your city is facing? Cost of living, public housing and continuing to support local businesses that we rely

on for revenue. I want to continually ensure that our Fire, Police, Street and Utilities Departments are supported adequately as they all bring a great service to our town.

Which of those three issues is most important to you, and how would you address it if elected? Cost of living. I think an undue burden has been cast on businesses and homeowners to enact policies that do not always reflect our actual needs as a community. I would like to have better input to create a budget that serves our residents in a multitude of ways.

What steps, if any, would you take to support or oppose data centers? I vehemently oppose any data centers whatsoever. I will take all steps at my disposal to deter any data centers in our area. I will always vote 'NO' on any policy in that regard.



Photo credit: Lorie Shaull



Age: 57

Gregory S. Weaver

northern Minnesota. My education includes degrees in Secondary Mathematics Education and Accounting, and I have held a Minnesota teaching license since 1994. Throughout my career, I have developed strong skills in planning, problem-solving, budgeting, leadership, and working with people from many different backgrounds.

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? Retired Military

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. My background in planning, operations, budgeting, and community service has provided me with a broad range of experience that I believe qualifies me for office. In addition to a 30-year military career, I spent three years with Pierce County, Wisconsin, supporting the Administration Office, County Board, Emergency Management, and Veterans Service Office. I also served as a volunteer firefighter and Emergency Medical Technician for 10 years in

Why are you running? Community service is important to me. I feel I can bring a fresh point of view, along with the time, experience, and desire to make a positive difference in our community. I want to be involved, listen to the concerns of residents, and help make decisions that move our community in a positive direction.

Why should voters elect you? If elected, I will listen to the community and to my fellow council members. I will bring my experience, ideas, and willingness to work together to help find practical solutions to the challenges we face. My goal is to help make our city as strong, responsible, and healthy as possible for everyone who lives here.

What are the three biggest issues your city is facing? I

believe one of the biggest challenges facing our city is working within a limited budget.

The flow of information is critical today, being able to access city government information online is critical to its residence.

Increase community involvement and participation.

Which of those three issues is most important to you, and how would you address it if elected? We need to

modernize our small city council and administration office. I would push to create a city website where residents can quickly access information and pay utilities.

What steps, if any, would you take to support or oppose data centers? I support any

new business that can bring money into our community, but not at the expense of our residents.



Photo credit: Lorie Shaul

TOWNSHIP OFFICES

Hill Lake Township Ballot Question

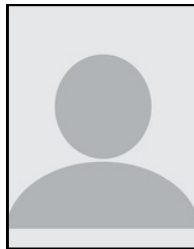
Shall Option B (M.A. 367.30 Subd. 2), providing for the appointment of the clerk and treasurer by the town board, be adopted for the government of the town?

Millward Township Ballot Questions

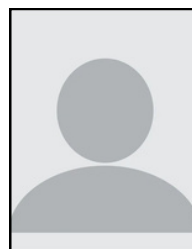
Question 1: Shall Option D, providing for combining the offices of clerk and treasurer, be adopted for the government of the town?

Question 2: Shall Option B, providing for the appointment of the clerk-treasurer by the town board, be adopted for the government of the town? Note: Approval of the Option B questions is contingent on the simultaneous approval of Option D.

Nordland Township Board of Supervisors Seat A

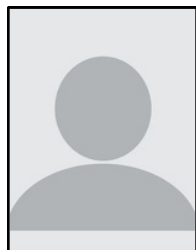


Michael Burgmeier**

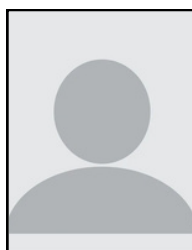


Darryl Palm*
Incumbent

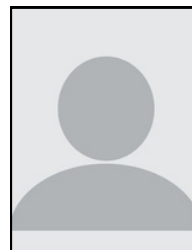
Board of Supervisors Seat B



Tom Betley**



Richard Nix*



Randy Slette*
Incumbent

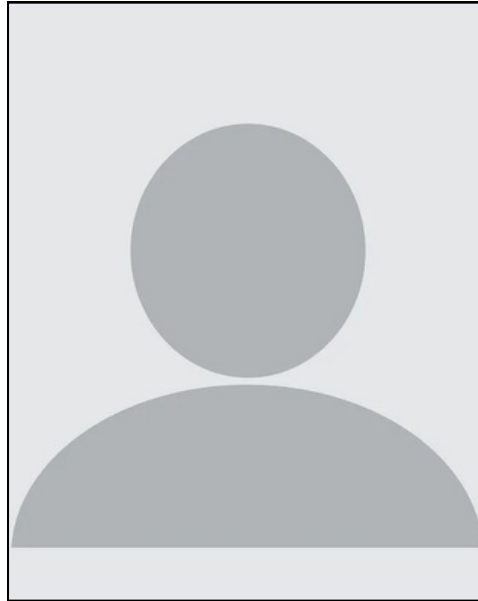
*Candidate did not respond to KAXE's survey.

**Candidate declined to answer KAXE's survey.

9TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT SEAT 2



Matthew Mallie
Incumbent



Henry C. Ambelang*

*Candidate did not respond to KAXE's survey.

9TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT SEAT 2



Age: 56

Community:

Brainerd/Baxter of Crow
Wing County

Matthew R. Mallie

Brainerd Lakes area for approximately 20 years. During this time, I served as a city prosecutor for Brainerd, Baxter, Nisswa, Pequot Lakes and Jenkins and as a contract attorney for the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. I also practiced in the areas of family law, estate planning, civil litigation, while also serving as a civil city attorney.

Why are you running? To continue to serve the people of the 9th Judicial District and the State of Minnesota.

Why should voters elect you? I believe I am best qualified to serve based on my prior experience as an attorney, prosecutor, and past several years of service as a District Court Judge. I was selected to the bench after an extensive vetting process in which the commission for judicial selections recommended me. This selection was based on my application, letters of reference,

a thorough interview process and background check.

Name a public leader you admire and explain why.

Judge David Ten Eyck. He was always well prepared and thoughtful with his decisions.

What are the biggest challenges you would face in this role, and how would you overcome them?

An ever increasing case load, addressed by working evenings and weekends as needed.

How do you plan to improve transparency and trust in the judicial system?

Working with Court Administration to assist and increase access for and with the public.

Where are you currently employed, and what is your role? District Court Judge

Please share any prior experience and education that you believe qualifies you for office. Prior to my appointment on the bench, in June of 2019, I was a practicing attorney in the

Know your voter's rights. You have the right to:

- Take time off work to vote, without losing your pay, personal leave or vacation time.
- Vote if you are in line to vote anytime before 8 p.m.
- Register to vote on Election Day if you can show the required proof of residence.
- Bring your children with you to vote.
- Ask anyone for help, except for an agent of your employer or union. A voter who requires assistance in marking a ballot, by reason of blindness, disability, or inability to read or write, may be given assistance to do so by a person of the voter's choice, other than the employer or agent of that employer or officer or agent of the voter's union.
- Vote if you are not currently incarcerated for a felony conviction, even if you are on probation or parole, or have other conditions like restitution.
- File a written complaint at your polling place if you are unhappy with the way an election is being run.