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2016 MUNICIPAL ELECTION

## Skala beats out Tom Leuther to keep council seat

KELSI ANDERSON *Apr 5, 2016*

ANNALIESE NURNBERG

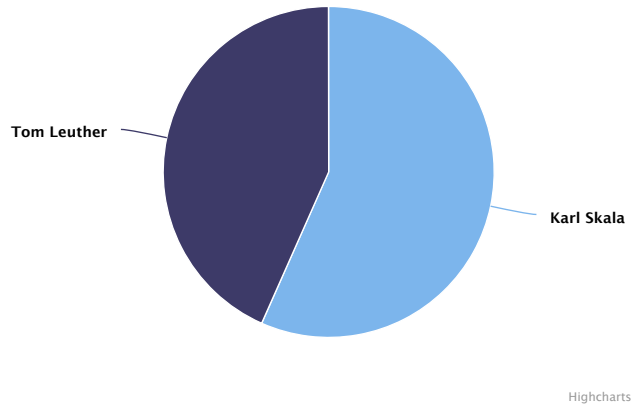
Karl Skala is interviewed during his watch party at Bleu Restaurant on Tuesday after winning the Third Ward Columbia City Council seat. Skala claimed nearly 57 percent of the votes.

COLUMBIA — Third Ward Councilman Skala won a third three-year term on the Columbia City Council by defeating pastor Tom Leuther in the municipal election on Tuesday.

Skala won the race with 1,396 votes, or 56.4 percent. Leuther garnered 1,080 votes, or 43.6 percent.

## Skala Wins Third Ward Seat

Source: Boone County Clerk



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### WINNER'S PRIORITIES

Skala's campaign emphasized his record of experience and civic commitment. He believes that to do a good job, a council member must research city issues at length before making a decision. His main stances align with the city's strategic plan: increasing the number of police and firefighters and boosting their efficiency, maintaining roads and utilities, and generating jobs. He is a proponent of the city's new three-year strategic plan to address social and economic inequity among Columbia residents.

### OTHER POSITIONS

**A "fighting chance for success":** The city must provide equal opportunity to Third Ward and other Columbia residents by improving the efficiency of its police, parks, transportation and other resources and focusing them on areas where they're needed most.

**Southwest power line:** Skala has consistently supported Option A for the transmission line and believes the council made a mistake when it decided to put the project on hold. He says the council must act soon to make a decision.

**Downtown infrastructure:** He supports form-based zoning and laments that funding has been diverted from other neighborhoods to fix sewer and other infrastructure challenges caused by the proliferation of student housing downtown. He thinks these new developments need to share in the cost of infrastructure for which they create demand.

### THE SCENE

Skala mingled with a small crowd of about 20 supporters in the downstairs reception room at Bleu Restaurant. Amid the noise of conversation, Skala's wife, Mahree Skala, interrupted to announce that Skala had won.

People broke out in applause, some cheering and hooting.

Taking the victory in, Skala waited until the applause abated, taking off his glasses and delivering his speech to a jovial crowd.

"I was just talking to some folks about the last 'landslide' that I had," he said. "One hundred fifty-six votes." The crowd laughed.

Skala's past three races against Gary Kespohl were all close, with Skala winning twice and losing once. Tuesday's margin over Leuther — 316 votes — was the largest he's ever won by.

"This is damn good," Skala said to more applause. "It's a reflection, I think, of community values in this town."

Skala commented on Leuther's campaign, saying he evaded questions about his points of view on some issues, especially in regard to his religious beliefs.

"Anybody is entitled to whatever belief system they want to have ... (but) that to me is very troubling, and it only suggests that this is a way to establish some sort of other sort of agenda, perhaps a religious agenda, to drive a political agenda," Skala said. "And we have no room for that in this town. Absolutely not."

As he continued, Mahree Skala interjected. "You're not running anymore, dear, the campaign's over."

"I'm overwhelmed by the fact that it's a much larger majority (victory) than I've ever had," Skala said after the speech. "I thought that was remarkable for the ward that I live in."

Skala said the Third Ward has been trending more conservative over the past few years, and he was concerned about getting the support he needed.

He had been especially worried about getting the vote in the Benton-Stephens neighborhood, which he said he has historically depended on a lot.

"I think those people came through again. They always do ... I'm really gratified that I got a lot of support even in those areas that have trended more conservative."

Skala supporter Dean Andersen attended the party. He was the Columbia resident who posted a YouTube video of sermons Leuther delivered at the Family Worship Center in which Leuther made anti-gay remarks.

"I'll sleep better tonight," Andersen said. "I was very happy to see Karl win. I believe Karl's a fair, hardworking, honest representative who puts his constituents first. I like to see elected officials that listen to constituents and aren't beholden to special interests ... and I think that's Karl."

Mahree Skala said she was relieved that her husband had won and was excited for life to get back to normal after a hectic campaign.

"He works very, very hard to be a good councilperson," Mahree Skala said. "I think that this affirms that people appreciate hard work and appreciate how much knowledge and experience it takes to be an effective council person."

#### **Leuther watch party**

Leuther, during a gathering at his home, said his supporters have nothing to hang their heads about. He was happy the city heard his campaign's "conservative opinion" and hoped it would spark increases in free-market and capitalist philosophies.

As for the future, Leuther will continue his involvement in non-profit work. Regarding City Council, Columbia might not have seen the last of Leuther .

"I'll say this: If nobody else runs, I would consider it very seriously," Leuther said. "We ran a good campaign, we worked hard, we talked to a lot of people, and I really just can't think of anything we would do differently."

*Supervising editor is Scott Swafford.*

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