2026 Boulder City Council/Mayor Questionnaire

Thank you for your willingness to run for office in our city. It's a significant commitment, and we at Open Boulder are grateful.Thank you also for responding to the Open Boulder questionnaire, which will be used for endorsement decisions. This is due on **5 PM on Sunday, August 30**. This gives our board time to review your answers before the forum on September 2. The questions are built around Open Boulder's core priorities:

1. Good governance
2. Financial responsibility, accountability, and transparency
3. Community safety and emergency preparedness
4. Community vibrancy and affordability

Note: we have also provided a Word version that you can use to prepare your responses in advance. Thank you!

The respondent's email (**benita4boulder@benitaduran.com**) was recorded on submission of this form.

What is your full name *

Benita Duran

Why are you running for City Council or Mayor? *

I am running because I believe Boulder needs thoughtful, accountable leadership that can bring people together and make government work well for the community. My background in city management, economic development and community service has taught me that good government is not just about adopting policies. It is about setting clear priorities, listening to the public, making responsible decisions, and then following through to ensure those decisions are implemented effectively.

I also believe Boulder is strongest when more people feel that they belong here and have a meaningful voice in shaping the future.   That means addressing affordability, supporting working families and local businesses, protecting our environment and making sure major public investments are transparent, understandable and accountable.

Council-Manager Form of Government *

City Council candidates often campaign on changes they would like to make, but accomplishing those goals requires working within Boulder's Council-Manager form of government. How do you understand the respective roles of Council, the Mayor, the City Manager, and City staff? Using one of your priorities as an example, walk us through how you would work within that structure to move it forward, build support, and ultimately get it implemented. For Mayoral candidates, please answer accordingly.

I have worked professionally in city management, so I have a strong respect for Boulder's council-manager form of government and for the distinction between policy and administration. Council establishes policy, priorities and the budget the City Manager is responsible for administering those policies and managing city staff. The Mayor presides over Council but remains a member of Council rather than serving as a separate chief executive.

I would not support individual council members directing staff or inserting themselves into day-to-day administration. Yet I know there is great benefit from staff learning from Council members' expertise and points of view. There has to be balance and trust in this level of engagement. Respecting professional management does not mean passive governance. Council appoints the City Manager and the City Attorney (adding this because the legal administration need to be aligned here as well), Council establishes policy, approves budget and ultimately must hold management accountable for results. Council should be asking whether its policies are being implemented, whether major projects are meeting approved scope, schedule and budget, whether the community is receiving the promised results and whether corrective action is needed.

For example , a project as massive as the BCH Site (renamed by staff as Alpine-Balsam), I would have advised my fellow council members to begin the process asking staff to determine a master schedule, budget and implementation plan. From the beginning, every undertaking should have a realistic check on the environment and changed conditions since the purchase of the site. Council members had changed since the purchase in 2015 and the new body had an opportunity to assess through discussions with staff in a public meeting, what conditions had changed and what leadership was needed. It may have been evident that the city staff did not have internal expertise for a complex project of this nature, no track record of doing so, and complicated by pandemic and changed economic and supply chain dynamics. Council would have had the responsibility of providing leadership to set a course of action that was aligned with a budget, cost effective and sustainable. If a member of Council, I would have requested a full budget and shared with the Council and the public from day 1 that clearly defined the public objective and the expected outcomes, seek meaningful community participation before major commitments or changes are made, establish measurable cost and performance expectations at every stage and then allow the Manager and professional staff to implement the project. Council's continuing responsibility would be to monitor progress against those expectations and ask difficult questions when performance materially departs from them. That is good governance and accountability, not micromanagement.

Council's Role in the Budget *

How do you see Council's responsibility in setting and reviewing the budget? Are there changes in the budget process or in budget allocations that you would actively pursue if elected? Why?

The City Manager has the professional responsibility to prepare and recommend a balanced budget, but I do not view Council's role as simply receiving that recommendation and voting yes or no. The budget is one of Council's most important policy documents because ti determines whether the priorities we articulate are actually funded. Council should become engaged early enough to establish priorities before the budget is substantially complete. It should understand major revenue assumptions, long-term obligations, reserves, capital commitments and significant changes in service levels. Council should also compare expenditures with measurable outcomes rather than simply comparing this year's appropriations with last year's.

Long ago, as it relates to the budget process, it was the practice that the annual budget draft was shared with Council in a July timeframe. It was an opportunity to begin to get familiar with the current trends of revenues , performance, economic conditions, etc. It helps to get this level of information early before initial public hearings commence. As I've been through recent budgeting process for our Library District, financial reporting on a regular basis reduces the surprises of anticipated lay offs or program cuts. I lean on having more transparency in budget processes for the benefit of taxpayers.

In terms of budget allocations, for major capital projects, I would expect regular reporting of the initial approved budget, current estimated total cost, expenditures to date, funding sources, material changes in scope, schedule and anticipated future obligations. Significant variances should come back to Council with an explanation and where appropriate, alternatives. I would also strengthen public participation earlier in the budget process. By the time a several-hundred-million-dollar budget reaches a final public hearing, many of the meaningful choices have already been made. Residents should have understandable information and opportunities to influence priorities before those choices harden into a recommended budget. Engagement tools like citizen assemblies help bring in community members to a budgeting process. The Manager should manage the budget. Council should establish priorities, authorize the expenditure of public funds, monitor performance and hold management accountable for results.

Ordinance 8758 / Bond Measure *

Do you support Ordinance 8758 and the associated bond issuance on the November ballot?

- ○ Yes
- ◉ No

For Ordinance 8758, please explain your position. For incumbents who voted to place Ordinance 8758 on the ballot: Has your position changed since that vote? Why or why not? *

Having worked on shaping and managing public engagement strategies for many bond and infrastructure financing ballot initiatives for the City of Boulder, City and County of Denver and Denver Public Schools, I believe strongly in a process that engages stakeholders on the front end, before a proposal hits a council agenda packet. This bond measure lacked transparency, engagement and community sentiment was that it is not the right time. I believe in respecting that perspective if we/city are going to ask people what they think/feel about this proposed infrastructure spend, then we should honor that feedback.   Additionally, I heard from a source that the CCRS and the deferred maintenance fund are not being utilized for these most pressing infrastructure needs and it would seem that these funding sources should be tapped and fully utilized before packaging a bond measure of this size.

Ordinance 8762 / Debt Limit *

Do you support Ordinance 8762 and the associated increase to the City of Boulder general obligation (GO) debt limit on the November ballot?

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No

Ordinance 8762 / Debt Limit *

Approximately what do you believe is the dollar value of the 3% of *assessed valuation* limit on City of Boulder indebtedness currently in effect (e.g., what is the current Charter limit on the amount of GO debt the city can issue)?

Approximately what do you believe is the dollar value of the 3% of *actual valuation* limit on City of Boulder indebtedness that is proposed in Ord 8762 (e.g., what is the proposed Charter limit on the amount of GO debt the city can issue)?

Please explain your position, including your understanding of how changing the debt limit from 3% of assessed valuation to 3% of actual valuation would affect the City's borrowing capacity.

Assessed valuation: $5,091,582,194 x 3% = $152,747,466 -- approx $152.75 Million

It is my understand from similar discussions of the Library Board that the County Assessor was to be providing this number in the coming weeks for 2026 estimates...

2025 total actual value of real property is $51.7 billion and actual value figure would put debt ceiling in range of $1.5 billion. (excluding exempt properties)

I understand the intent here. It brings Boulder into line with the methodology more commonly used by CO municipalities and the state. I understand that this change materially increases the city's legal borrowing capacity from roughly $150 million to $1.35 billion. For that reason, my support for changing the debt-limit formula should not be interpreted as support for automatically using that additional capacity. Borrowing capacity is a financial tool, not a spending mandate.

Alpine-Balsam / Project Oversight *

Have you followed the costs associated with Alpine-Balsam? When the cost of a major city project significantly exceeds its budget, what role should Council play in understanding the causes, overseeing the response, and determining whether changes in management or process are warranted? Are there changes you would make to the way Council oversees major capital projects, or to its oversight of Alpine-Balsam in particular?

Yes, I was directly involved in the organizing a community group to advocate for the city council purchase of the site. I was on the BCH board at that time and I live near the site. I've been following the physical activity on a regular basis.

Council has the responsibility of the overall budget for the project. The larger lesson, from my observational view of the past decade, is about governance and project accountability. Major capital projects evolve. The world changed during the pandemic. Other costs change because of inflation, design, unforeseen site conditions and other legitimate factors. A cost increase by itself does not establish mismanagement. But when a project materially departs from its original estimates, Council has a responsibility to understand why and to make that information understandable to the public.

For a project of this magnitude, Council should be able to readily identify the original acquisition cost, subsequent capital appropriations, expenditures to date, current estimated cost to completion, debt and other funding sources, material scope changes, and anticipated offsets or revenues. That information should not require residents or Council members to reconstruct a decade of appropriations and project decisions.

I would require standardized reporting for major capital projects, including budget-to-actual comparisons, schedule, funding sources, scope changes and projected completion cost, with predetermined thresholds that trigger enhanced Council review. Council should not manage construction. That is management's responsibility but Council must monitor whether the project Council authorized is the project being delivered and whether the public's money is being spent as represented. If there are significant variances, Council should ask why, determine what corrective action is appropriate, and elevate whether changes in process or management are warranted.

Administrative Costs Charged to Dedicated Taxes *

Boulder voters have approved dedicated taxes for purposes such as Open Space, Transportation, and the Arts. A portion of these revenues may be used to cover shared administrative costs such as HR, legal, and accounting. Do you believe these funds are being used effectively and consistently with the purposes voters approved them for? Why or why not? Please provide an example. What, if anything, would you change to strengthen accountability and public confidence in how these funds are used?

I would not conclude without reviewing the underlying allocations that current administrative charges are either appropriate or inappropriate. Shared services such as accounting, legal human services and technology are legitimate costs for administering programs and dedicated funds should bear a reasonable share when those services directly support them. The important questions are whether the methodology is consistent, understandable, documented and faithful to the purpose voters approved.

I favor a transparent cost-allocation methodology that identifies what administrative services are being charged, the basis for allocating those costs among funds, how the charges relate to the dedicated purpose and how the methodology changes over time. That information should be readily accessible rather than understandable only to someone with detailed knowledge of municipal accounting. Dedicated taxes represent a promise to voters. The City should be able to demonstrate clearly that it is keeping that promise.

My example of reference is through my involvement in being in the negotiations of the Library District's IGA with the City and the County. In this transition period, the new district reimbursed the City for the costs of the first year of the district. We were anticipating, as I recall, a pay back to the city that was approximately 20% greater than what the city requested from us. In my inquiry, the fact was that the city didn't have a structured way to determine actual costs for this one year transition period for general fund expenses. It was a transitional year and I recognized that it was a one time occurrence.

Wildfire *

Given Boulder’s wildfire risk and limited resources, what two or three wildfire mitigation or preparedness measures should Council prioritize? What role should the City play, and how should those priorities be funded?

I would prioritize three areas: 1) continue and expand targeted fuels mitigation and home-hardening efforts in the WUI I and 2 and other highest risk areas, including work involving City open pace, neighborhoods, HOAs and individual properties.   2) strengthen emergency preparedness: evacuation planning, communication systems, public education and ensuring that Boulder Fire-Rescue has the personnel, equipment and training necessary for rapid response. 3) continue regional coordination with Boulder County, neighboring fire agencies and utilities, particularly regarding electrical infrastructure, vulnerable populations and continuity of critical services during wildfires emergencies.

Funding should begin with the voter-approved resources already dedicated to climate and wildfire resilience, supplemented by aggressive pursuit of county, state, federal and utility partnerships and grants. Application of current wildfire reports and studies, along with condition assessments are components of determining funding priorities on a quarterly basis and a part of regular oversight of progress.   Wildfire mitigation is precisely the kind of investment where spending intelligently before a disaster can avoid vastly greater human and financial costs afterward.

Downtown *

Council recently rejected the formation of a Downtown Development Authority. What do you see as the most important opportunities or challenges facing downtown Boulder, and what actions, efforts or initiatives would you suggest to address them?

My focus would be on reducing barriers to filling vacant storefronts, supporting locally owned business which is approximately 75% of those downtown, improving cleanliness and the sense of safety, strengthening connections between downtown, CU and surrounding neighborhoods, encouraging arts, culture and events that bring people downtown, and making it easer for residents, employees and visitors to reach downtown by a variety of transportation modes. I also believe we need sustained collaboration among the City, property owners, businesses, residents, workers, arts and cultural organization and downtown organizations. Whether or not a particular governance structure such as a DDA moves forward, the underlying problems still require coordinated action. I would measure success in practical terms: fewer vacancies, more foot traffic, stronger locally owned businesses, greater community use of downtown and a place where people are comfortable, safe and genuinely want to spend time.

Performance Auditor *

An Open Boulder-affiliated committee has proposed that the City establish a Performance Auditor (different from a financial auditor), supported by a small office reporting to City Council and a resident-based Audit Committee, beginning in the 2027 budget. Do you support or oppose this proposal? Please explain why or why not?

I strongly support the objective, first and I agree with the proposal. I have some concerns and cautions. Council and the public need reliable information about whether major programs and projects are achieving their objectives, remaining within budget, and schedule, and using public resources effectively. Under Boulder's council-manager form, performance management is fundamentally an executive responsibility. The City Manager should have systems capable of identifying whether projects are on time, on budget and producing the intended results, and Council should be actively reviewing that performance as part of its oversight responsibility. If those systems were functioning as they should, some of the current demand for a separate performance auditor might not exist.

At the same time, I understand why Open Boulder and other residents are asking for an independent mechanism. Confidence depends not only on good management but on credible verification. I would therefore support examining a clearly defined performance audit function, including its independence, reporting relationship, authority, cost and how it would complement rather than duplicate existing management and financial-audit responsibilities. Before creating a permanent new office, I would want to determine what accountability functions already exist, where the gaps are and which structure would provide Council and the public with the most useful independent information. Whatever structure is chosen, I believe the principle is clear. Major public expenditures should be accompanied by measurable objectives, transparent reporting and accountability for results.

Question for Mayoral candidates only: Council Agendas and Prioritization *

How should the Mayor approach setting and prioritizing Council agendas? Do you believe the current process effectively advances community priorities? If elected, what, if anything, would you change?

Not a question for me

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