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!

What is your full name *

Jill Adler Grano

Why are you running for City Council or Mayor? *

City Council

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.

Council sets policy, adopts the budget and city programs, shapes the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan, refers measures to the ballot, and establishes the city's state legislative priorities. Council also hires and evaluates the City Manager, City Attorney, and Municipal Judge. The City Manager runs city operations, directs staff, and prepares the proposed budget. Staff provide professional expertise, advise Council, and implement its decisions. The Mayor presides, helps shape agendas and build consensus, and represents the city, but remains one vote of nine.

Council should oversee major initiatives after they are set in motion, track costs and implementation, measure outcomes, and make corrections when something is not working. In my view, that follow-through has weakened in recent years, and I would make it a priority.

Having served on Council, I understand the structure and can get to work on day one. Having been away from Council for several years, I also bring an outside perspective on what is happening and where we need to course-correct. Both are important at this precarious moment.

Wildfire home hardening is a good example of where Boulder needs thoughtful leadership and a serious implementation plan. Council has already strengthened building standards. At its August 27 study session, Council discussed the Home Hardening Implementation Hub, prioritizing the highest-risk areas, and developing measures to track progress.

The next challenge is deciding whether, when, and how requirements should extend to existing homes. Some council members and community advocates support mandatory compliance within three to five years. I share the urgency, but a mandate is not the same as getting homes hardened. We have to keep that end goal in mind.

There are two very different paths available to us. We could adopt requirements without understanding local costs, legal constraints, contractor capacity, or the assistance residents will need. That approach could (and likely would) produce public outrage, displacement pressures, litigation, wasted money, and years of delay. Or we could build a phased, legally sound, adequately funded program that earns public participation and materially reduces wildfire risk. The difference will be the quality of the process and implementation.

Here is how I would work within our governance structure:

1. Build Council support for a process committee to sequence public engagement. It should work with staff to identify who needs to participate, which policy questions remain open, and when public input can still meaningfully influence the outcome. We should begin by sharing the risk data and listening to practical concerns; then discuss standards, costs, financial assistance, enforcement, and timelines; and finally

demonstrate how that input shaped the proposal before Council acts. The committee should strengthen and organize staff's existing engagement work, not become another approval body.

Homeowners, renters, HOAs, multifamily-property owners, contractors, insurers, and public-land managers should help identify barriers and workable solutions. The city should also pursue grants and other funding so that the cost does not displace families, burden seniors on fixed incomes, or simply get passed through to renters.

2. Seek the City Attorney's advice early. The City Attorney reports directly to Council and should evaluate the city's legal authority, property-rights implications, enforcement options, and what constitutes a reasonable compliance period before an ordinance is drafted. If specialized outside expertise is warranted, Council should consider it in coordination with the City Attorney. Legal review should shape the policy at the beginning, not arrive after the city has committed to a particular mandate. Land use attorneys that I have spoken with about the current community proposal have been met with a great deal of concern. My understanding is that mandates on private property must be given an appropriate amortization schedule and can be challenged and overturned if insufficient time is required.

3. Council should give direction to the City Manager to develop credible implementation options. Council should ask staff to build on the work already underway with verified counts of priority properties, a clear risk-based sequence, and Boulder-specific retrofit costs based on representative housing types and actual local bids. The estimates presented so far are useful for illustrating scale, but staff acknowledge that they are broad national figures rather than a Boulder program budget. We also need to understand staffing, contractor availability, workforce training, permitting capacity, and the physical time required to complete the work.

4. We should fund participation and phase implementation. Assistance should be based on need and should include upfront support or directly provided work for households that cannot afford to pay first and wait for reimbursement. Requirements and deadlines should reflect risk, actual costs, available assistance, and the capacity to perform the work. The program could begin with the highest-risk areas and the most effective, achievable improvements while establishing longer timelines for more expensive or complicated retrofits.

5. Home hardening must also be coordinated with fuel reduction on city-owned and private open lands; residents cannot be asked to carry the entire responsibility.

6. Council should set measurable milestones and hold implementation accountable. Council should require public reporting on completed improvements along with participation rates, costs, geographic progress, available workforce, and remaining barriers. Council should use that information in budget decisions, policy adjustments, and evaluation of the program. If the program is not producing results, Council must be willing to correct it.

The goal is not to pass the toughest-sounding ordinance. The goal is to harden enough homes and manage enough surrounding land to provide real, widespread, lasting protection. I would rather build a program that succeeds on the ground than adopt a mandate we later retreat from because we failed to plan for implementation.

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 budget is one of Council’s most important policy tools. The City Manager prepares the proposed budget, but Council is responsible for establishing priorities, examining tradeoffs, adopting the final budget, and then overseeing whether public money produces the results residents were promised. Council’s job is not simply to approve or reject the Manager’s proposal each fall.

Council should engage early enough to influence how the budget is built. It should receive clear information about the full cost of programs, including staffing, consultants, facilities, and long-term obligations. After adoption, Council should review spending and outcomes throughout the year rather than waiting until the next budget cycle.

I support establishing an independent auditor who reports to Council. I would want the auditor to examine the city’s finances, use of restricted funds, and long-term liabilities before I committed to sweeping or arbitrary cuts. The auditor should also help determine whether programs are operating efficiently and accomplishing what Council funded them to do.

Those offices may not be fully operational during my first budget cycle. In the meantime, I would begin with three areas:

1, Consultants, studies, and planning processes. Boulder spends millions of dollars on consultants, plans, vision documents, and public processes. Outside expertise is sometimes necessary, but too often we commission a study, put it on a shelf, and later pay someone else to study the same issue again. Cutting consultants will not solve the entire budget problem, but it is a reasonable place to begin.

2. Programs and staffing added during the COVID and federal-relief years. The city’s responsibilities and resources changed significantly during that period. Some programs remain essential; others may have been designed for temporary circumstances or supported by one-time federal funding. I would review the departments and programs that expanded most rapidly, asking what was added, how it is funded now, what outcomes it produces, and whether it duplicates work elsewhere. The goal should be to align today’s organization with today’s needs and sustainable revenue.

3. Facilities and long-term capital obligations. We must give much stronger attention to maintaining existing assets before expanding our obligations. Major capital proposals should show repair, renovation, replacement, and consolidation alternatives. Council should see the complete financing cost and the ongoing expense of staffing, operating, maintaining, and eventually replacing the facility. Deferred maintenance is expensive, but adding facilities without accounting for their lifecycle costs only makes the problem worse.

In allocating limited resources, I would prioritize core services, safe and usable public spaces, wildfire protection, infrastructure maintenance, small business support, and housing investments that provide demonstrated public benefit. New initiatives should identify not only their first-year funding but also what they will cost over time and what existing priority may receive less as a result.

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? *

I support investing in our rec centers, public-safety facilities, and other essential infrastructure. Boulder has had deferred maintenance for too long, and delaying necessary work will only make it more expensive. However, I do not support this bond package as presented.

The measure authorizes up to $400 million in borrowing, with a maximum repayment cost of $650 million. A commitment of that size requires a clear, prioritized capital plan explaining what will be built, why each project is necessary, what alternatives were considered, and what taxpayers will ultimately receive.

Instead, several major estimates remain insufficiently developed or explained. The proposal includes approximately $30 million for the municipal building and $171 million for a new police and public-safety building even though a site has not been identified. Without a site, completed design, or project scope, it is difficult to understand how reliable that estimate is. The ballot language also identifies projects through a "such as" list, leaving substantial discretion over how the proceeds may ultimately be allocated. While we have been told that this is an "up to" amount and we may come in below budget, I cannot think of a time Boulder has ever come in below budget.

I am also concerned about who carries this cost. Repayment comes from a property tax, and Colorado assesses commercial property at a much higher rate than residential (about 4x). Using the city's own illustration, a $1 million home would pay about $400 a year, while a $1 million commercial property would pay closer to $1,600. Most commercial leases in Boulder pass property taxes through to the tenant, so a meaningful share of this lands on the businesses occupying our storefronts rather than on the people who own them.

I would support a more specific, phased investment plan that distinguishes urgent repairs from replacement, expansion, or new construction. I would also require independent oversight, regular public reporting, and clear thresholds for returning to Council when costs, timelines, or project scopes change materially. We should be able to point residents to a single public accounting of what a major project was budgeted at and what it has actually cost. That we cannot currently do that for Alpine-Balsam is precisely why these safeguards need to be built in from the start rather than added later.

(One final note here: There is a political component here. The bond polled poorly even before businesses and community members became upset about it. Council should not send failing proposals to the ballot. When we move something forward before it is ready, we lose trust with the community and hurt our ability to move it forward again without significant time and space between efforts.)

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?

- [x] 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.

Using the most recent certified property values, Boulder's current debt limit is approximately $151 million. Under Ordinance 8762, the limit would become 3% of actual value, or approximately $1.55 billion. In other words, this would increase the city's potential GO debt capacity by roughly ten times.

I support Ordinance 8762 because assessed value is a poor basis for a Charter debt limit. Colorado taxes only a fraction of a property's actual value, and the state legislature regularly changes assessment rates and deductions. That means Boulder's borrowing limit can rise or fall because of decisions made at the Capitol, not because Boulder's property values, infrastructure needs, or ability to repay have changed. Actual value is a clearer and more stable measure.

But this measure does not authorize the city to borrow $1.55 billion. It raises the maximum the Charter allows. Voters would still generally have to approve specific GO debt. That is why I can support this amendment while opposing the $400 million bond package. I am not opposed to borrowing for necessary public infrastructure. I do not support borrowing $400 million before the projects, costs, priorities, and safeguards are sufficiently clear.

If the ceiling is raised, Council should require every future bond proposal to show residents the city's total outstanding debt, annual debt payments, full repayment cost, and the effect of the proposed borrowing. A much higher ceiling must come with much greater transparency.

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, closely. The city is preparing a full accounting of cost and financing, and I welcome it. It should have existed as a standing public document years ago rather than being assembled under pressure in an election year, and my first recommendation is that it become a recurring report rather than a one-time response.

But I want to be careful about the conclusion people are drawing from this, because I think a good deal of it is wrong. The dominant story right now is mismanagement and concealment. Having spent twenty-two years watching construction costs in this city, my read is different. A substantial share of the escalation on Alpine-Balsam happened because the city followed its own land use code. Our deconstruction requirements, our energy code, and form-based code all added many millions to the project.

We should be talking about Alpine Balsam in a larger context because that same land use code is adding money to every affordable housing project in Boulder, to every small commercial tenant improvement, and to every homeowner trying to build an ADU. Alpine-Balsam is a controlled experiment in the part we imposed on ourselves, and we should read it that way rather than looking for someone to blame.

Council's role is not to manage capital projects. It is to demand information and to notice when it is missing. On this project we did not have a running cost-versus-budget picture, we did not require a cost-of-compliance analysis at the decision points, and we did not track our own regulatory choices against the price of the buildings we were asking for. That is an oversight failure, and it is Council's responsibility to change.

What I would change:

Fiscal notes on code changes. When Council adopts or amends a code provision that affects construction, the packet should estimate what it adds per square foot, both to city projects and to private and affordable housing. If a requirement is worth its cost, that case can be made in public. If we are unwilling to state the cost, we should not adopt the requirement.
A cost-of-compliance line in every major capital project budget, broken out and reported, so we can see what portion of a project's cost comes from our own standards.
A variance trigger. Any project exceeding its approved budget by 10 percent or its schedule by six months returns to Council in a public study session automatically, not at staff's discretion.
Independent cost estimate review at schematic design and again at 60 percent construction documents for projects over $25 million.
A permanent public capital dashboard, budget versus actual, updated quarterly.

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?

The principle is fine. The practice is where public confidence gets lost because the allocation methodology isn't legible. Residents can see that a share of Open Space or Transportation revenue goes to central administration. They generally cannot see the basis on which that share was calculated, whether it has grown faster than the underlying service, or who reviewed it. When people can't see the method, they assume the worst, and in a year when the General Fund faces a shortfall and dedicated funds don't, that assumption isn't unreasonable.

Open Space is the clearest example, because it's the largest dedicated fund and the one voters have repeatedly and specifically protected in the Charter. The Open Space Board of Trustees should be receiving an annual reconciliation of indirect charges against the fund, with the methodology attached, and should be positioned to object. I don't believe that's happening in a form that constitutes real review. Instead, Open Space has been handed arbitrary increases.

What I'd change:

1. Publish the cost allocation plan annually, in plain language, with the drivers used for each fund.
2. Route it through the relevant boards (OSBT, the Transportation Advisory Board, the Arts Commission) for comment before adoption, not after.
3. Independent review of the allocation basis every three to five years, which is precisely the kind of work an auditor would do.
4. Trend reporting. If indirect charges to a dedicated fund are growing faster than that fund's direct program spending, Council should have to look at it.

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?

First, home hardening and defensible space in the wildland-urban interface with an income-indexed subsidy. The single highest-return intervention is at the structure: ember-resistant vents, Class A roofing, and a cleared five-foot perimeter. I discussed what I think we should do here extensively in the first answer

Second, grassland and interface fuels management, not just forest fuels. Marshall was a grass fire in December, driven by wind, and it destroyed more than a thousand homes without a forest anywhere near it. Boulder's open space holdings are an asset here and also a responsibility: the same land that makes this city what it is delivers fire to our edges. Mowing, grazing, and irrigation ditch maintenance on the eastern and southern interface are unglamorous and consequential.

Third, evacuation and notification capacity. Redundant alerting that doesn't depend on one system or on cell coverage, mapped and tested evacuation routes for constrained neighborhoods, and clear pre-positioned plans for people who can't self-evacuate.

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?

The DDA was a financing mechanism proposed as a solution to a problem that isn't a financing problem. Downtown Boulder's core problem is not a lack capital. Pearl Street is some of the most valuable commercial real estate in the state. What it lacks is an alignment between what that real estate costs to occupy and what a business that serves Boulder residents can pay. TIF doesn't touch that. It diverts incremental revenue growth away from the General Fund and from other taxing entities toward an area that is already capturing value, on a but-for premise the literature repeatedly fails to support, and with well-documented effects on retail composition (you get more of what can pay Pearl Street rents, which is exactly the problem people were asking the DDA to fix).

The actual challenge is vacancy. When a landlord's option value on a future high-rent tenant exceeds the present value of a lower-rent lease today, holding space empty is the correct financial decision for that owner and a disaster for the community as a whole and for small businesses. We need to find ways to help fill vacant spaces and bring foot traffic back to Downtown.

What I'd pursue:

1. A commercial vacancy registry with disclosure, as the prerequisite for anything else. We currently argue about downtown vacancy without agreed-upon data.
2. Regulatory changes to support adaptive reuse and space activation.
3. A legacy business registry with targeted lease assistance for the long-tenured independents that give downtown its character.
4. Beneficial ownership disclosure, so we know who actually owns Pearl Street.
5. Local procurement. The city spends real money that could be directed to local vendors.
6. Use CAGID. We already have a downtown financing district with a real revenue base and existing bonding capacity. It can fund public realm improvements, parking restructuring, and streetscape work without diverting incremental growth away from schools, the county, and city services.

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 support establishing an independent Performance Auditor who reports to Council, supported by a small professional office and a resident Audit Committee, beginning with the 2027 budget.

After learning more about this proposal, I became convinced that Boulder needs this kind of independent oversight. A financial audit tells us whether the numbers are accurate and proper procedures were followed. A performance audit asks different questions: Are programs achieving their intended results? Are they operating efficiently? Are there less expensive or more effective ways to deliver the same public benefit?

City staffing, spending, and programming have grown substantially in recent years, while Boulder now faces real financial constraints. We need to know what is working, what is not, and where savings can be found. Too often, government reports activities—meetings held, grants awarded, or dollars spent—without measuring whether conditions actually improved. Council should focus much more consistently on outcomes.

The auditor must be genuinely independent, have a clearly defined scope, and produce findings and recommendations that are public. Council should also be required to discuss the findings and track whether recommendations are implemented. Otherwise, audits risk becoming more reports that sit on a shelf.

Because this is the last question, I will add one thing: once I have done my homework and decided that I support something, I become a champion for it. We need real leadership right now, and I believe I can help provide it.

I may not align with Open Boulder on every issue, but there is a great deal we agree on this year. When we agree, you can count on me to fight for those priorities. I recognize that, if endorsed, I may not be your first choice. But I believe I have a strong chance of being elected, and I would rather begin as partners than find ourselves working on opposite teams. An antagonistic start can be difficult to overcome, and I feel that our relationship is currently in a stronger place, with more trust and potential for partnership, than it has been in a long time.

I hope those of you who know me recognize that I am willing to listen, learn, and reconsider my position when the facts warrant it. I also hope we can continue building a positive and productive relationship, even when we do not agree on everything.

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?

N/A