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 *

Ryan Jamieson

Why are you running for City Council or Mayor? *

I'm running for three reasons:

First, I want working with this city to be understandable and navigable. Our municipal code is far too big and complex for a city our size, and the policies stacked on top of it are worse. That means rewriting Title 9 and cleaning up what surrounds it, so a resident, a small business owner, or a nonprofit doesn't need to hire a consultant to talk to their own government.

Second, I want to know whether any of what we fund is working, and today we largely can't say. I want measurement and reporting far beyond what we do now: what a program was meant to accomplish, what it actually accomplished, and what it cost, published on a schedule. That takes transparent budgeting, and it takes an independent City Auditor to check the work, a peer to the City Manager rather than an employee of one. Our charter already permits it and we have simply never done it.

Third, I want our climate spending aimed at the risk most likely to hurt us. We sit at the top of Colorado's list for wildfire risk and we fund mitigation like an afterthought. I'd reallocate toward wildfire first and print the split in every budget so anyone can check whether I got it done.

There's a gap between the city we want to be and the city we are. I want to fix that gap.

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 the ordinances, and appoints and evaluates a very short list of direct reports: the City Manager, the City Attorney, and the Municipal Judge (plus hopefully a City Auditor). They own the "what." The Manager administers city operations and owns the "how." The Mayor presides, carries an equal vote, and as part of the Agenda Committee with the mayor pro tem, one rotating councilmember, and staff, sets the coucil's focus week by week. Staff are the people who actually know how the machine works, which means any reform they don't own will struggle.

You can win the vote and still get nothing, because the thing you voted for has to survive a work plan, a budget cycle, and a hundred small implementation decisions you will never see.

So take the priority I'd move first: reallocating our climate spending toward wildfire mitigation. I picked this one deliberately, because it's the cleanest fit with what council actually holds. I can't direct staff. I can appropriate, and money is the instrument that sits in council's own hands.

I'd start with the City Attorney, and for two reasons. The obvious one is the answer: what do the climate tax's authorizing measures actually permit, and how much room does council have to move the allocation without going back to voters? I'd rather have that on the record in the spring than discover the constraint in October. The less obvious reason is that asking the question in public, on an agenda, is itself how you establish that this is a council priority. In this form of government you move things by making them unavoidable, not by announcing them.

Then I'd work toward direction to the City Manager on three things.

One: stand up an implementation team under a single accountable leader, Manager-led, spanning Fire-Rescue, OSMP, Planning, Housing, Finance, Climate Initiatives, Emergency Management, and Communications. That ask comes straight out of the "Boulder as Fire Adapted Community" brief, and I like it precisely because of where it draws the line. Council says there will be one person accountable for this. The Manager decides who that is. The moment I start naming staff or drawing an org chart from the dais, I've traded a real outcome for a satisfying moment.

Two: success criteria, with the rationale behind them, and progress reporting for every one of the wildfire projects we're already running. Attachment A of the August study session packet lists 137 of them, 102 active and 35 draft. For each, I want to see how the responsible department is tracking against its assigned goal, how that project is funded, and where additional money could reasonably accelerate it. Today it is genuinely difficult to tell where we spend money on wildfire, and a list of 137 projects with no criteria attached is an inventory, not a plan. This is the reporting that tells council where a dollar buys the most speed instead of leaving us to guess, and it's the necessary predicate to any serious argument about moving the allocation.

I'd attach one standard to it: measure completions, not activity. The packet gives us 400-plus detailed home assessments a year, miles of new mowing buffer, hundreds of acres grazed, and nowhere a count of homes actually remediated, or a percentage towards a total that would merit us calling something successful. Efforts get their value from their impact, we should be reporting that.

Three: go find the outside money. County, state, and federal programs that can carry part of the remediation work, identified and pursued rather than mentioned. Larimer and Jefferson Counties have both landed $10 million federal wildfire grants recently, and there's no reason we should be leaving that on the table while we argue internally about our own split.

None of those three is a policy change and none of them costs much. They set the table. They also start building accountability into mitigation before we get to the fight over how much to move, which is the right order: I'd much rather walk into that fight holding departmental numbers than a slogan.

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?

Council appropriates, and council is supposed to oversee. We do the first part reliably. We are not really doing the second.

We already have the instrument that was supposed to fix this. Budgeting for Resilience and Equity was built to give every program area outcomes, measures, and yearly targets, which on paper is exactly the right tool. It isn't doing the job. Departments were each asked to identify three outcomes and measures for their program areas, and as far as I can tell nobody handed them a standard for what a useful measure looks like. So what came back is mostly activity: things counted, things processed, things attended. A count of activities is not progress toward a goal. A dashboard full of them will tell you an organization is busy without ever telling you whether it's winning, and my read is that a number of departments still haven't settled on what their own priorities are.

Wildfire is my worked example. Attachment A of the August study session packet lists 137 wildfire projects, 102 active and 35 draft. Its columns are: number, national cohesive strategy, program, status, project name, and lead department. That's the entire table. No success criteria, no funding, no dates. So a councilmember holding that attachment cannot answer the question that actually comes up at budget time: if I move another million dollars into this, where does it land and what does it buy? I want to shift our climate spending hard toward wildfire. I can't responsibly argue for a specific number until somebody can answer that, and right now nobody independent of the programs themselves is assigned to.

So, a few changes I'd actively pursue.

First, success criteria and progress reporting attached to funded work, quarterly, starting with wildfire and expanding from there. BRE actuals move on a yearly cycle, which is fine for a dashboard and far too slow for oversight of active work. And if we're going to fund something, we ought to be willing to say in advance what it's supposed to do.

Second, project-level accounting for capital projects, published by default rather than by records request: approved budget, current forecast, variance and the reason for it, schedule against baseline, and funding sources. Those numbers already live in our project management, contracting, and finance systems. We simply never publish them together in one place a resident can follow.

One thing I want to be straight about, since it's where I part company with some people who agree with me on nearly everything else: I'm not running on cuts. People talk about belt-tightening, and when you ask them to name the line, it isn't there. My argument isn't that we spend too much. It's that council still can't reliably tell you what we got for the marginal dollar, and that is a fixable problem.

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'm a no, and the projects aren't the problem. Fire Stations 1 and 5 are past due. The police and 911 dispatch facility is genuinely inadequate. South Boulder Rec has been limping for years. I want all of it fixed, and I'd like to be on the council that fixes it.

There are a few reasons I'm voting no, but the biggest one is sitting at Broadway and Alpine.

We have not demonstrated that this city can deliver a large infrastructure project on time and on budget. We bought 8.8 acres for $40 million in 2015. In February 2019, renovating the pavilion was estimated at $48 to $58 million. Two months later it was $90 to $120 million. It doubled in a quarter. By December 2024 the Western City Campus carried a $140 million figure, and Terri Brncic's floor for the whole thing is $304 million with the Phase II housing not yet in it. When she filed a records request in June asking what had actually been spent and where it came from, the city couldn't produce an answer, because no such table had ever been assembled. Eleven years and roughly $300 million in, nobody had added it up. I take that up in more detail below, because it deserves its own answer.

That's one project. It is also the only comparable track record we have, and it is the record we're asking voters to extend by $400 million.

What 8758 doesn't bring with it is any of the rails that would make that risk tolerable. The ordinance calls the project list illustrative rather than binding. There's no requirement riding along with this measure for quarterly variance reporting, no automatic trigger that returns a drifting project to council for a decision, and no independent audit function to check any of it. So we would be borrowing the largest sum in the city's history into precisely the management system that produced Alpine-Balsam.

So my answer isn't never. It's not yet, and here's what would change it. Take the two pieces nobody actually argues about, South Boulder Rec and the public safety buildings. Scope them separately at a size where we can see the bottom. Publish the estimate the day it's adopted and the variance every quarter. Finish them. Deliver those on time and near budget with the numbers visible the whole way, and come back in 2028 for the rest of the backlog. I'll be an easy yes, and so will a lot of the people voting no this fall for exactly the reason I am.

We should prove to taxpayers that we can manage project spending before we ask them to guarantee a generation of debt against it. Trust gets earned at a scale where failure is survivable. This isn't that scale, and we haven't earned it yet.

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?

- (selected) 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.

Roughly $151 million today, and roughly $1.55 billion under Ordinance 8762.

I'm a yes on it. Colorado's statute for municipalities sets the limit at "three percent of the actual value, as determined by the assessor, of the taxable property in the municipality," and the city's own explanation of the measure says a change to actual value "is consistent with how most municipalities and the state calculate debt limitation." That's the main reason I support it. It brings us in line with common practice instead of inventing something.

The gap also isn't a decision anybody made. Under Gallagher the residential assessment rate started at 21 percent and ratcheted down for decades, reaching 7.15 percent by the time voters repealed Gallagher in 2020, and the legislature has kept adjusting rates since: for 2026 the local-government residential rate is 6.8 percent, with an additional value reduction on qualifying residential property. The upshot is that Boulder's borrowing ceiling has moved with state assessment policy even though voters never decided to change the charter's three percent.

More to the point, raising the limit doesn't borrow a dollar. Ordinance 8762 changes the ceiling; it doesn't issue anything. Debt of the kind we're talking about here still requires voter authorization, and that is the real control.

One thing the city should state plainly before November: 8758 authorizes up to $400 million of GO debt backed by a new property tax levy, while today's charter formula produces a ceiling of roughly $151 million. Those two measures are directly related, and voters deserve to know how much of that $400 million could legally be issued if 8762 fails. The honest answer probably turns on legal debt margin rather than the raw ceiling, since debt payable in part from other revenue sources can be excluded from the limit. That's precisely the kind of thing that should have been walked through from the dais on August 6 rather than bundled into a single agenda item with four other unrelated measures.

So: fix the yardstick, and decline the ask. Those are separate questions.

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. The best public accounting I've seen is Terri Brncic's August 18 opinion piece in the Reporting Lab, and I've leaned on her reconstruction ever since. She's on your board, so you know the work. Her arithmetic: $40 million for the 8.8 acres in 2015, $16 million for demolition, $140 million appropriated in 2025 for the site, and roughly $108 million in interest. An all-in floor near $304 million, with Phase II housing still outside it.

I won't claim a construction estimate doubled in a quarter. What happened is worse and more useful. In February 2019 council was shown a Pavilion renovation preliminarily estimated at $48 to $58 million, and within months it faced an all-in picture as high as $90 to $120 million once deconstruction, site work, and debt repayment were counted. The construction number didn't explode. It was never the whole number, and council decided against it anyway. That's a governance failure, not a contracting one.

Understanding the causes. Separate them on the record, because "costs went up" is four problems wearing one coat: scope growth council itself approved, estimating error, market escalation, and an incomplete accounting of what was in the number to begin with. Those call for different fixes, and lumping them together is how nothing changes.

Overseeing the response. Decide at the decision point rather than after it. A material move in the all-in figure should trigger a stop, a re-baseline, and a public vote to continue, restructure, or walk away. Once a project is this far along, "should we continue" has stopped being a decision and become a formality.

Whether management or process changes are warranted. Council has one chief executive responsible for delivery across the organization, and capital projects are about as clean a thing to evaluate an executive on as exists. If a pattern of cost growth never surfaces in the City Manager's evaluation, the accountability loop is open at both ends.

Changes to capital oversight generally. A quarterly public dashboard for every project above a threshold: approved all-in budget, current forecast, variance and why, schedule against baseline, funding sources. Variance thresholds that return a project to a council agenda automatically, without anybody filing a records request to notice it drifted. And an independent auditor able to examine a project in flight rather than write its history afterward.

On Alpine-Balsam in particular. Produce the consolidated accounting: spent and committed to date, by source, by year, by phase, financing shown, before November. The city isn't really disputing the gap. Its own Western City Campus page says costs for the two projects are complex because some cover both, and that staff are "working to provide additional information on costs on this very complex set of projects." When Terri asked in June, the answer was that after twelve years there is no compiled simple table. I believe that, and that is the problem. We are asking voters to extend a twelve-year record we cannot add up.

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'll start opposite to where you'd probably expect: dedicated funds should carry as much of their own administrative and operational burden as they possibly can.

OSMP genuinely uses the City Attorney's office, HR, IT, and Finance. Somebody has to close those property transactions and run that payroll. If the General Fund absorbs that work it's subsidizing a department voters already funded, and the General Fund is what pays for everything without a dedicated tax behind it: plowing, fire, police, the maintenance backlog. The attorney who closes an open space acquisition is delivering open space. So when the city says part of this increase comes from phasing out a General Fund subsidy, my reaction is good. That's the right direction.

Are the funds being used consistently with what voters approved? Probably, mostly, and I can't actually tell. Neither could the people whose job it is to know.

On July 9, 2025 the Open Space Board of Trustees voted 4-1 for a resolution calling for greater transparency and accountability on exactly this. Cost allocations ran about 8.5 percent of OSMP's roughly $32 million operating budget in 2024 and are projected to hit about 14 percent by 2031, an increase of nearly two-thirds. Trustee Brady Robinson said the projections march ever onward and upward and that he wasn't comfortable with the lack of transparency. Chair Harmon Zuckerman wanted a breakdown showing how much of the allocated cost actually relates to open space purposes.

They didn't say the charges were illegitimate. They said they lacked the detail to tell how much supported open space purposes. The city's explanation was reasonable: a two-year lag in updating allocations, the subsidy phaseout, conservative growth assumptions. But a charge that grows by two-thirds as a share of a department's budget has real policy consequences, and it arrives through budget mechanics rather than as a decision anybody makes in public. When overhead can move five and a half points without a public accounting of what drove it, nobody can tell whether the added charge is a fair cost of delivering what voters approved.

OSMP isn't being singled out either. Its allocation is roughly in line with other dedicated-tax departments, which is exactly why I'd audit the methodology citywide rather than fight over one fund.

Four changes. Publish the full cost allocation plan annually in one place, with the methodology and allocation driver for each central service, not just the total. Give OSBT, the Transportation Advisory Board, and the arts commission that breakdown before adoption rather than after. Put the methodology on the audit plan, since right now nobody independent of the allocation process is assigned to say whether it's sound and consistently applied.

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?

The Forest Service's Wildfire Risk to Communities tool puts Boulder in the top three percent of communities at risk, and a fire on our western edge can reach homes in twenty to sixty minutes. I'd sequence this by what we actually control.

First, the land we own. The city holds roughly 70 percent of the WUI natural-area acreage. Nobody has to be persuaded and no ordinance has to pass, so we can start now. I'd direct a risk-ranked OSMP treatment plan within a year, aligned to the CWPP and prioritized by the likeliest fire pathways into town: annual grassland mowing at least 300 feet out from private property in the WUI, timber and shrub treatment at least 1,500 feet in from the western edge within three years, prescribed fire where it's safe, and funded recurring maintenance rather than a one-time push. And the question I'd keep asking: where does another dollar buy faster acres?

Second, the private ground on the boundary. The other 30 percent, where fire doesn't read the parcel map. That's cost-share, convening, and the city carrying the coordination burden so a homeowner isn't organizing their neighborhood's mitigation on weekends.

Third, the accountability work I described under the Council-Manager question, which I won't repeat at length here: one accountable leader, success criteria and funding visibility across all 137 projects, outside money actually pursued, and reporting that measures completions instead of activity. That isn't a separate initiative. It's the predicate for any serious argument about moving the money.

All of it is also how we build the machinery for where this has to end up, which is mandatory remediation of existing WUI Class 1 and 2 properties. Roughly 3,179 homes, about $9,000 a parcel, call it $29 million, done in connected blocks, because IBHS finds a fully hardened home still faces a 90 percent chance of total loss if the house next door ignites. I support getting there. I don't think we can enforce it tomorrow. We'd need the assistance dollars, the verification process, and the contractor capacity standing first, or we'll have passed an ordinance most people can't comply with and lost the public before we start.

Funding. About $1.5 million of the Climate Tax currently goes to wildfire, and I want that share increased significantly. Pair it with the county wildfire sales tax, the OSMP budget where mitigation is a legitimate open space purpose, and the state and federal grants we should be chasing far harder.

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?

I supported the DDA and I still do. It isn't on the ballot, though, so the useful question is what we do between now and the next attempt, and how we make sure the next attempt lands.

I see two related challenges downtown. The first is that it costs too much and takes too long to get a door open here. Permitting, review, and the rules about which uses are allowed where all stack on top of each other, and every stage adds months. The second is rent. Here's the connection: a tenant signs a lease and starts paying rent on day one, then waits through review before they can open. Fourteen months of rent with no revenue is a rent problem our own process created. Cutting that timeline is the fastest rent relief the city can actually deliver, and it doesn't cost us a dollar.

Commercial real estate is financialized, valuations and loan covenants run off rent rolls, and asking owners to write down their buildings is asking them to default. I'm not interested in starting there while the city's own processes are broken. A vacancy tax has the same problem: it taxes the symptom and leaves the cause in place. I can't throw stones if I'm in a glass house.

Things council can do now, without asking anyone's permission:

- Make change of use by right. Turning a dead office into a nail salon shouldn't be a year of review.
- Stop triggering full-building code upgrades on modest conversions, which is what kills small tenant improvements before they start.
- Retract the ground floor commercial mandate in mixed use, which has handed us a lot of empty ground floors and not much commerce.
- Publish a plain-language guide for every permit type so applicants learn the requirements before they spend money discovering them, and publish the median days from application to decision every quarter.
- Make it easier to create real pop-up programming, especially around Sundance.
- Let the city act as a tenant where we have the need anyway.

Then the groundwork for round two, which I'd start early rather than three weeks before a filing deadline. Sit down with the library district, the county, the school district, and the neighborhoods early enough that their fingerprints are on the proposal instead of on the opposition. Name the first five projects with costs and dates attached. Publish the baseline, the increment math, and what success looks like once the money starts coming in so anyone can check our work.

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 have an obvious bias here: I started my professional career as an internal auditor so I'm not neutral on this issue.

The case is easy to make and easy to check. Boulder's internal audit function today reports functionally to an Internal Audit Committee made up of city leadership, and administratively to the CFO. That is inside the City Manager's chain of command, not independent of it. I'm not alleging anybody did anything improper, I'm saying the structure is wrong on its face: the executive approving the policy that governs the people who examine the executive is a control weakness in any organization, and it would be written up as one in any audit I've ever run.

The point of a performance auditor is not catching villains. It's giving council a routine, undramatic, non-accusatory way to say that a program has drifted off its numbers and needs to change course, at the moment it drifts rather than $200 million later when the only option left is to finish it. Right now the only people evaluating a program are the people running it, so we shouldn't be surprised when everything passes.

Four important points on the role:
First, the City Auditor must report to council, is appointed by council, and is removable only by a supermajority of council. If the Manager can influence the auditor's tenure or compensation, the independence is decorative.

Second, they require the authority to self-initiate. An auditor who can only examine what it's assigned becomes a compliance function. We need a published annual audit plan, approved by council with the resident Audit Committee's input, and the auditor needs flexibility to open something on their own judgment.

Third, budget protection. The office's appropriation shouldn't run through the organization it audits, it should be directly approved by Council.

Fourth, publish everything, including the follow-up. Reports public on release, management response attached, and a standing tracker of prior recommendations showing implemented, in progress, or declined with reasons. Closing identified gaps becomes part of performance evaluations for the City Manager and their direct reports so we don't keep getting the same findings year after year.

And finally, on the resident Audit Committee: I'd want a real skills bar for it, meaning people with audit, finance, or large-project delivery backgrounds rather than a general-purpose citizen board, and I'd want it advisory on the plan rather than approving individual reports, so it strengthens independence instead of adding a second political filter.

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 mayoral candidate.