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 (**ryanwithboulder@gmail.com**) was recorded on submission of this form.

What is your full name *

Ryan Schuchard

Why are you running for City Council or Mayor? *

I want to make Boulder work for everyone, now and in the future. My focus is to cut the costs of living, adapt our community to a world it wasn't built for, and make local government more effective, with climate action woven into every part of it.

During my campaign in 2023 and while in office, I've become focused on systems under strain. Boulder is struggling with energy reliability failing with no clear end in sight, wildfire threatening our community at a catastrophic scale, and BVSD closing and consolidating schools, to name a few.

Another challenge I have been working to address I want to continue to solve is trust in government. A well-functioning democracy and local government depend on people understanding they can count on their municipality to work well. Trust has been low and worsening in the US for decades, and it took a downward turn after Trump took office again. I want to help uphold policies and practices that give residents real reasons to believe their government is responsive and dependable, and keep strong foundations for us to build from.

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.

Roles: Boulder's City Council sets policy and direction. The City Manager, who we hire and who reports to us, runs day-to-day operations and directs staff. So my job is to work with my Council colleagues to set clear priorities, ask the right questions, and hold the Manager and staff accountable for results, while staff bring the expertise and continuity that make good policy work.

I try to bring this model to every council priority. Listen first, build a coalition on council since nothing moves without four additional votes, direct staff clearly through the workplan and budget process rather than trying to manage them directly, and use council's oversight tools, memo packet standards, workplan check-ins, budget review, to make sure direction turns into results.

There's also a crucial part of getting things done in this form of government that's easy to overlook, and it has less to do with the interface between council and staff than with council's own ability to function as a body. No matter how good an individual councilmember's ideas are, a majority of the council is needed to adopt anything. Time for the full council to meet publicly and decide together is scarce. Individual councilmembers also have very little in the way of shared staff support beyond what's provided for public meetings. So one of the most important skills for a councilmember is effective teamwork and the willingness to proactively build relationships, organize, and help the full council find consensus so we can prioritize and focus.

Example: The 2026 council workplan item on wildfire hardening. The first step was to study the issue and listen to the community. I hold open office hours for the public every week, and what I learned from community advocates over my time on council pointed to one thing. We needed an approach focused on protecting the community from fast-moving wildfire at a catastrophic scale, not incremental fixes.

I also knew one of the problems was that council lacked a real basis in analysis and partnership with staff to specify exactly how to move forward. So I formulated the idea for a workplan item on this concept, talking it through with fellow councilmembers, city leadership, and key staff, including Mike Chard and Mike Calderazzo, to ask what we could put in place that would build the foundation for really ambitious action. Then I vetted the idea with the Mayor directly, to hear his concerns and get his feedback before it moved further.

That process led to the workplan item council is now working on, co-developed with Rob Kaplan, whose focus is the home hardening hub, alongside my leadership on the cost-benefit assessment and prioritization work. My approach has centered on talking and collaborating with stakeholders on their own terms and iterating. The result is a project that's made real progress on safety and is now underpinning the discussion we're having about how to set up a plan for large-scale, retroactive protections for existing buildings, landscapes, and beyond that will be timely, cost-effective, and well-vetted for hidden surprises.

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 responsibility: Council's job is to set the direction the budget serves, adopt it, and hold staff accountable for the results it delivers. I take that seriously and I serve on council's Long-Term Financial Strategy committee, where I am working to help build a transparent, actionable long-term strategy so major costs are visible years ahead, not discovered mid-crisis, and we can create a dashboard for the city's long-term financial health to guide decisions as we go.

Changes called for: Yes, there are four areas where we are working to strengthen the city's approach to budgeting and need to plan to continuously improve:

1. Development of a dashboard for long-term health indicators with a systematic way to check how the budget is moving us relative to that direction. Such a dashboard would lead us toward a stronger, more diversified revenue base, consistent with Blue Ribbon Commission recommendations, including gradually rebalancing Boulder's revenue mix away from heavy sales tax reliance toward a greater share of property tax. Done right, that shift is revenue-neutral for cost-sensitive households, with real guardrails like relief for seniors and lower-income homeowners, not a tax increase dressed up as reform. I also support pushing to repeal TABOR so Colorado communities can invest in what residents actually need.

2. Big decisions held to high standards. Major commitments like airport obligations, a downtown development authority, or metropolitan district financing evaluated for long-term impact using real tools, both the long-term dashboard and other considerations, with a clear line of sight to that before the proceedings get going too far.

3. Timing and sequencing that gives council a meaningful way to shape the biggest decisions at the key junctures for big decisions. As part of that, more organized, deliberate process for considering new directions, one that includes learning from what's worked and what hasn't, and methodically culling what no longer serves the city well without making the process so unpredictable that it's hard to plan around. And weighing choices against each other for their co-benefits, looking at how different investments affect outcomes together and favoring the ones that deliver multiple benefits at once, rather than treating every line item in isolation.

4. Finally, budget documents that are legible for average resident, building on the Blue Ribbon Commission's principles, so the tradeoffs behind Boulder's spending are visible to the people who fund it, not just to finance staff. We are headed in the right direction with outcome-based budgeting *and* I am with members of the community who are eager to see this framework more fully translated for the public. Developments are planned to be released this fall which I have been working to support that I hope will be a good step forward. And we have to keep going. Full detail on my budget priorities is at ryanwithboulder.com/budget.

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? *

Essence of the issue: Boulder has more than $500 million in deferred maintenance across 75 public buildings, including our police station, fire stations, and recreation centers. That's a bill we're already paying through breakdowns, patchwork fixes, and rising costs that get worse the longer we wait. This measure gives voters the option to take care of the facilities citywide at the lowest overall cost over time, and avoid pitting the police station against rec centers in a fight over scraps. I wrote an op-ed on it with Mark Wallach, here: https://boulderreportinglab.org/2026/04/16/mark-wallach-and-ryan-schuchard-we-must-fix-boulders-aging-infrastructure/

My position: Yes, I support giving voters the choice and I will be voting "yes" myself.

Has it changed: No. My position hasn't changed since I supported referring this to voters on August 6.

Why or why not: As a member of the Long-Term Financial Strategy committee, I led the charge, alongside Mark Wallach and Nicole Speer, to bring this backlog into the public's eye, including co-authoring an op-ed with Mark laying out the challenge, with the goal of making the public part of the decision instead of deferring the problem to future councils. I understand the sticker shock residents are feeling. I feel it too. That's why I helped bring this forward as soon as possible rather than let it keep compounding.

Also, regarding where the $400 million figure came from: It wasn't staff proposing the maximum amount. It was a unanimous recommendation from the LTFS committee, which wanted to bring forward the approach that would save the community the most money over time while taking care of everyone, not the smallest number that could get by for now. That's still the right approach today, which is the other reason my position hasn't shifted.

I've also been clear, including from the dais, that a measure this size has to come with accountability. Residents are right to expect cost efficiency, useful reporting on how the money is spent, and a budget process they can follow.

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.

Essence of the issue: This change brings Boulder in line with how other Colorado municipalities calculate debt capacity, including Denver, Longmont, and Loveland, as well as the state itself. Actual capacity creates more flexibility. Only about a third of Boulder's General Fund is currently available for non-dedicated purposes. Raising the debt limit gives the city more room to respond in times of need without that room being artificially capped by an outdated calculation method.

Position: Yes, I support it.

Dollar values: Boulder's current debt limit under the 3 percent assessed-valuation standard is approximately $150 million. Under Ordinance 8762's proposed 3 percent actual-valuation standard, that limit would rise to approximately $2.2 billion.

Explanation: Assessed value is a fraction of a property's real worth, set by the state's residential and commercial assessment rates, so measuring our limit against it understates our actual borrowing capacity relative to the value of the tax base backing it.

Raising the ceiling doesn't obligate us to borrow more. It gives future councils room to respond to a real need, like the facilities backlog, without running up against an outdated calculation method first. I'd hold any use of that expanded capacity to the same disciplined evaluation I've pushed for on every major financial commitment: clear goals, a real alternatives analysis, and alignment with our long-term financial strategy.

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?

Following the issue: Yes. Alpine-Balsam is a massive, somewhat singular project. It is also really two different projects sharing an 8.8-acre site, the Western City Campus, which will house city operations and our customer service center, and the Alpine-Balsam housing project, managed by Boulder Housing Partners. The main direct costs come to around $140 million for the Western City Campus and not the housing project. It does include most of the site's shared infrastructure. That $140 million estimate has held roughly steady since the project was first assessed back in 2019. Staff is compiling a fuller report that will add the land purchase, housing costs, remaining infrastructure, financing costs, and consulting costs that should be out soon.

The project sells off 6 buildings that have real problems like structural failures, corroded load-bearing columns, leaking pipes, and electrical systems that can't support modern equipment.

Council role: When a major project's cost picture gets this complex, council indeed has a role to keep track of performance against plans, and to ensure a framework exists to make sense of a project that is unusual its complexity. That means asking staff for a complete accounting and continuing to strengthen the systems that produce it.

Alpine-Balsam is a good example of why that systems work matters. It's unique among our capital projects in that it is consolidating ten departments into one location, ending the repair spending that comes with staying put, while also selling six buildings we no longer need, expected to bring in $20 to 40 million, and building housing and flood infrastructure on the same site at the same time. That combination, plus a timeline that goes back to the original 2015 purchase and was interrupted for several years by the pandemic, makes the cost picture more layered than for a single, standalone building. The city has been building better systems for this kind of complexity: total-cost-of-ownership budgeting starting with this project in 2022, and centralized facilities staff instead of costs scattered department by department. I want to see that continue toward a clear, complete public accounting, both what's been spent and the path from here to completion, so residents can follow it as easily as they can follow a simpler project.

Changes to capital projects: I want to keep building toward a finished, public report that shows spending across both Alpine-Balsam projects in one place, including financing costs and the remaining path to completion. And I want the total-cost-of-ownership standard we started here to keep extending across every major capital commitment as we go forward.

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?

Essence of the issue: Programs covered by dedicated funding, especially open space, transportation, and the arts, are some of the city's crown jewels. But administering them costs the city money, time, and liability beyond what people might instinctively expect. Also, when dedicated funds accumulate to a high enough total, they limit the city's ability to manage and adapt. Boulder carries a very high ratio of dedicated funding relative to peer cities, with only about a third of the General Fund available for non-dedicated purposes, which makes us less adaptable to a wildfire emergency, a budget downturn, or a new opportunity.

Effectiveness: Yes, the programs are generally effective.

I've evolved on this through my time on council and on the Long-Term Financial Strategy committee. Well-run cities balance dedicated funding with flexibility, and Boulder isn't there yet. What changed my thinking: a program's stated purpose already includes the cost of running it, and not sharing those costs consistently is part of what let deferred costs build up elsewhere.

This council has made progress. We've moved to allocate costs equitably across all funds, so every department contributes to shared services like HR, legal, and technology, something not done systematically before. That reflects the reality that these programs are part of a wider city, and running them costs money like everything else.

There are three upgrades I want to keep working toward:

1. Create a public dashboard showing the path to long-term financial health.

2. Relieve Boulder's structural overreliance on dedicated funding by gradually rebalancing revenue toward property tax in a way that's revenue-neutral for cost-sensitive households, using user fees where appropriate, and keep pushing to repeal TABOR.

3. Develop a customer service initiative that sets a much higher standard and clear controls for the outcomes our money delivers, built around the user experience. A starting point is making permitting far easier to navigate.

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?

Essence of the issue: Boulder faces an untenably high and growing risk of catastrophic fast-moving wildfire. My council cohort has begun organizing real, meaningful community protections, with help from a strong push by dedicated community members, including Open Boulder board members and affiliates. I've played a leading role, and I strongly support the strategies staff shared just last week, plus a next generation of hardening for structures, landscapes, and the energy grid.

Priorities: Three, in order. First, establish a goal for collective hardening of Boulder's buildings, landscapes, and grid, at a scale that creates collective protection against fast-moving wildfire. This means a ratcheting, probability-driven approach citywide, the same approach I'm taking at my own house: highest-risk, easiest wins first, then raising the bar in stages. We've already expanded the wildland-urban interface hardening zone from about 4,600 to more than 16,000 properties and adopted new construction and landscaping standards. Next is holding the whole city to high standards.

Second, build an energy hardening marketplace, the mechanism that makes hardening happen at scale. Boulder's free home wildfire risk assessments tell residents what to fix, but there is not yet a real standard service or workflow in which a single leader picks up the DHA and leads the work to completion. There's real willingness among private homeowners to invest, but without a clear workflow connecting assessments to contractors guided by clear quality standards, public money and regulation alone will underperform. With that workflow, real private capital follows, and we get a clearer picture of what's working, including in the rental market, where under 1 percent of assessments have been for a rental. Such a marketplace could help create local jobs too. Most important, it's the foundation for getting wildfire hardening done in private homes at a large scale.

Third, fix Boulder's power reliability problem with Xcel, one of Boulder's most important issues right now, and not on track. Wildfire mitigation and power reliability have to be solved together, since a shutoff meant to prevent a fire can itself put people at risk. I want a grid that's more reliable and calibrated to actual risk, not just prone to broad shutoffs.

Role: The city's role is building the shared systems and market infrastructure individual owners can't build alone, assessment tools, a vetted contractor network, financing options, while owners and the private market do the actual work.

Funding: Start small: build the workflow and user experience that unlocks private capital at the site level, as I discussed on council on August 27, not a large public spend upfront. From there, take a portfolio approach: outside grants where available, and Open Space carrying its share of wildland-interface risk without carrying it alone. For broader public funding, I'd point to the facilities bond and my push for a diversified city balance sheet, the same purpose-built approach we've built for pavement. This is personal. My family left the Bay Area after summers of unlivable wildfire smoke, and my wife was an executive at PG&E's during their wildfire response and power shutoffs. California is roughly a decade ahead of Colorado on this, and my experience there is driving me.

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?

Essence of the issue: The core challenge downtown is raising the tide there in a way that raises it for all of Boulder, with real support and process behind any commitment this large from the city as a whole.

Opportunities and challenges: Council recently split 4-4 on referring a downtown development authority to voters, so it didn't move forward this cycle. I voted no, and I stand by that.

Downtown and University Hill have seen real economic decline: rising vacancies, falling property values, sales tax revenue that hasn't kept pace. My no was about process and readiness, not the goal. We had clarity on the DDA as a financing tool, but not the underlying questions: how much is commercial vacancies versus the wider public realm, what role private owners should play, how much goes to shared amenities versus private buildings. We also did not reached consensus on the problem we were solving, or how we'd hold that spending accountable, questions the elected council should own, not hand off for a 30-year commitment.

In part because of that, we did not have consent from the wider city to shift control over citywide dedicated taxes to a much smaller set of voters in one part of the city.

Downtown and the Hill are going through tough times alongside the rest of the community, losing families and enrollment; BVSD has lost roughly 3,600 students over the past decade. Both come back to the same challenge: growing the pie for everyone. Public money spent on private amenities needs a clear line back to public value.

Ways forward: As I said at council on August 6, we need to take the next step to develop a broad base of of consensus on defining actual interventions, including the mix of public spending on public amenities, public spending on private assets and inducements, and non-spending measures--and with that, develop a clear change model to begin easing into and testing. Along side that, I would like to pursue reform of permitting and fees, work with the Downtown Boulder Partnership on activation initiatives, and pilot investments like restrooms and a transit circulator. Ending Xcel's power outages belongs on this list too.

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?

Essence of the issue: Predictable, effective government means residents should be able to understand how the city spends money and check the city's work, especially on budgeting.

Position: Yes. *And* performance auditing is only as good as how you define the performance you're trying to measure. What I would like to see the initiative focus on is how we are doing with the transition to outcome-based budgeting from a council point of view.

That's a process this council has been moving toward for a few years now, through standardized evaluation criteria in council memo packets and a broader shift toward judging programs by results rather than by whether a plan got adopted. A council-based Performance Auditor is a natural extension of that work.

Rationale: My sense is that the biggest opportunities this uncovers won't be about waste. They'll be about service quality, achieving more for residents in terms of customer service and user experience, permitting is a good example. The city is already moving in that direction, and I think this proposal could help move it along, once the scope of what gets audited is defined clearly enough to be useful. I'd want the office's reporting lines and the Audit Committee's composition and independence worked through carefully as it's designed.

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