

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 *

Tara Winer

Why are you running for City Council or Mayor? *

Why are you running for city council?

There is so much more that needs to be done in the wildfire mitigation, economic vitality, reducing red tape in our Planning and Development department, government transparency ,, reducing or eliminating any government waste, and gaining the public's trust in the way Boulder spends it's money.

I personally would like to see the East Bookend economically strong and safe with activation of space at a permanent Farmer's Market, and a safer, more visually attractive pathway to get from the Limelight to the Farmer's Market than what we have now which is the Arboretum Path.

I want to make sure our businesses and restaurants thrive.

And I personally would like to see us put mandatory restrictions on homes abutting the WUI. Not just suggestions but an ordinance.

I would like to be a force in making this all happen.

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 makes the laws. They are legislators. The mayor runs the meeting (amongst other things). The mayor has only one vote like the rest of council. The city manager works for Council. The city manager carries out the day to day work of the city in accordance with council council approved plans. The City Attorney's role is to make sure the city work is carried out according to local, state and federal law.

Council informs the city manager what their priorities are at council retreats, which are scheduled after a new council is seated. She then asks staff to bring back to us implementation options using our ideas as well as staff's ideas for guidance.

She will do the same if we have a majority of 5 on an issue that is not listed as a priority.

As an example, if I want to see us require mandatory wildfire hardening for homes on the WUI, I would need at least 2 other council members for a total of 3 to ask staff to research it. Even better, if I had 4 other council members that agreed, then we can ask staff to create an ordinance. The best way is if something is a council priority. A council priority is chosen at council retreats where a super majority agrees on approximate 5-10 priorities, and that number depends on the scope of the priorities.

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 and her team prepare and set the budget. Council reviews it. It's council's job to look at all the details and potentially make changes. One important note: It's not that the council can't change anything; but if council wants to increase the budget somewhere, they have to find other places to cut the budget, and a majority of council has to agree to this.

I would rather council discuss the allocations in the budget before the budget is set. We weigh in on the budget after it's set so the direction is harder to change and it's hard to re-allocate.

The budget conversation is not structured for council to get in the weeds.

What would I pursue: I believe we do not have enough money in the budget allocated for core services like snow and ice removal as an example. Health and Human Services has a large budget. I would like to make sure there are no redundancies with the County, who is also in charge of HHS.

Lastly, I would like to look at programs that don't give us enough bang for our buck. Just because a program has been in existence for years and years doesn't mean, in this time of a constrained budget, we should keep it

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? *

Originally my position was no. I thought \$400M was way too high. Property tax hikes are hard on seniors on fixed incomes who bought their homes decades ago for so much less than they are worth now and are now saddled with property taxes many of them cannot afford. Second, businesses pay 4x the amount and it's the small businesses that bear the burden due to triple net.

Also, the ballot measure polled poorly, so I saw no reason to put it on the ballot as is. My belief was that we didn't have enough public trust in the workings of our local government for people to vote yes.

However, then this happened:

For months, the South Boulder Rec Center advocates were asking for a lap pool. The City agreed to put language about aquatics into the ballot language. I was able to get the language in the ballot measure changed to "lap pools" instead of the general aquatics language that was there.

After that happened, I could not very well vote no to putting this on the ballot.

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.

I have real concerns about how Council is proposing to raise our debt limit for this bond, and I think voters deserve to understand what's actually being asked before they vote.

And a concerned citizen brought the following info up to me:

Staff wants to change a single word in the City Charter: "assessed" to "actual." That sounds small, but it isn't. Our debt limit is currently tied to the assessed valuation the County uses, which totals about \$5 billion. If we switch to actual property values, it would be a 10x increase in the number our debt limit is measured against \$155 billion. I am still in the understanding phase of the details of this, and it's complicated. But it requires way more scrutiny than it's getting.

I understand why Council needs to raise the debt limit and I'm not opposed to a bond for real capital needs, which we have. But raising the cap by such a large amount at the same time we're raising property taxes significantly, deserves a lot more attention than council gave it, including myself. I think Council should have asked for a debt limit much closer to what this bond actually requires. Why did we need to raise the debt limit by as much as we did??

I don't think we Council fully understood how big this change is before putting it on the ballot. There was no real discussion about it that I remember. Council and staff are having enough trouble with constituent trust so to do this without the having the discussion and community input it needed.

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?

his is an example of council not having enough scrutiny over a city project that is going way over budget. It is just now that we are diving into the details of the Alpine-Balsam project.

I am now following this project more closely. We are now getting detailed facts about the Alpine Balsam project. While I won't include them here, as that is not what you are asking, one thing I would like to note is that Council approved the \$16M in deconstruction costs in 2019, even though they had other less expensive options to choose from. I would assume decisions were made along the way that could have saved the city so much money.

When a major project's cost significantly exceeds its budget, I believe Council has the following responsibilities:

Council should insist on a transparent, itemized accounting that separates scope changes, inflation and market conditions, decisions made by prior Councils, and any genuine execution or planning failures, so we can see what we are dealing with.

We should oversee things as they are happening, not after the fact. For instance: regular public reporting, study sessions, and benchmarking against peer cities so we know whether a cost overrun is specific to Boulder or just reflects construction-cost trends.

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?

Do you believe these funds are being used effectively and consistently with the purposes voters approved them for?

I would say yes for the most part. But there is a trend that is concerning to the public, and to me as well: Boulder charges its dedicated funds: Open Space, Transportation, Arts, etc, a share of citywide "cost allocation": HR, legal, accounting, IT, and similar shared services. And I agree with this, as it isn't fair to ask the General Fund to absorb 100% of those costs that these departments also utilize. However things can go overboard. For instance, Open Space pays into costs for Fire Mitigation, and it should. However, OSMP manages tens of thousands of acres of land and 155 miles of trails. There is an approximately \$30 million maintenance backlog on OSMP trails alone. As a Council, we need to address this backlog and make sure what happened with our \$400 million in deferred maintenance of city buildings does not happen to our open space.

Our arts funding has a similar issue. Arts advocates say the city is now using 2A tax revenue to cover arts-office staff costs that used to come out of the General Fund, which is why the real net increase in grants/programming fell short of what voters were told to expect.

What to do about it is the question.

I think we can set a cap on cost allocation as a share of a dedicated fund's budget, revisited by Council on a fixed schedule, so administrative overhead can't outpace a fund's core mission.

I think an independent city performance auditor can help. They should have the authority to review the allocation formula.

Voters care deeply about these dedicated taxes. They approved these taxes for specific purposes. Some shared-cost allocation is legitimate and fair; but the city needs to be transparent with how that money is being used.

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?

Measured retroactive home hardening in the most vulnerable areas of the city, which would be the first two rows of homes that back against open space or 1500 ft into the built environment.

Some ideas would be:

- removing all flammable trees and bushes
- Installing 1/8" screens for the vents
- Creating a 5 foot non combustible perimeter around a home.

The city and county would have to help subsidize those that can't afford it.

We can fund this using Climate tax money and also OSMP funds.

We can also partner with the county who has programs and money for wildfire mitigation.

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 challenges facing the downtown:

Real and perceived safety in our downtown and creek corridors.

Vacant office space.

Aging infrastructure like parking garages, curbs and sidewalks.

Cost to open a small business / restaurant is making it out of reach for many.

Real cost to consumer: Rising cost of parking, rising cost of eating at a restaurant

Efforts , actions, initiatives:

I would not give up on the DDA. It was missing wide community support. We need to answer the questions the Open Space and Transportation advocates asked about taking their funds away and show it is worth it in the long run, because it will increase sales tax revenue. We need to do a way better job with communication.

A DDA would help with infrastructure and could help new small businesses and restaurants get off the ground.

Driven by the pandemic and remote office work, vacant office space is harder to fix. People have suggested changing second floor office space to housing. It is quite expensive and also sometimes impossible due to rules and regulations. But it's worth a try, as that would bring more people downtown. Incentives (carrots) would work better than taxes (sticks). We will need to think outside the box to solve this one.

It is almost impossible for a someone to open up a restaurant without a huge amount of capital backing them. We need to make it less expensive to open a business. You shouldn't need a consultant to help you understand our zoning codes. Therefore, fixing title 9 in the BRC by removing redundancies, archaic rules, and rules upon rules will be a high priority of mine.

Although we cannot do much about the rising cost of labor and food for restaurants, we can bring more people downtown. We have Sundance coming which will help business revenues in the month of January. But we need to do more. We just approved a new hotel where the Spruce surface parking lot is. We need to keep the downtown relevant with new ideas!

Improving the East Bookend with a permanent Farmer's Market would help bring people to the downtown as well. To fix safety issues at Boulder Creek park, more activation to bring people in plus hiring more urban rangers and having more police presence is a crucial component.

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 this. Boulder already tracks whether programs are hitting their goals through their processes, but departments write their own metrics for their own programs. Checking one's own department without bias is just about impossible. And we need to show transparency and accountability from an independent source to get back community trust in government.

The office would answer to Council and an Audit Committee, not to the city manager. This is a good thing, as we need an independent source to realistically critique.

An auditor could do other things like test whether programs are actually reaching the residents they're meant to reach. I am not looking for a gotcha exercise. The goal is making sure programs actually work and taxpayer money is used well.

According to responsible sources, Boulder doesn't need a ballot measure to do this. The City Charter already lets Council appoint "an auditor for such independent audits as are in this charter required or authorized to be made by order of the council". Council would simply need to pass an ordinance defining things.

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?

I am a council candidate so I won't answer this.

This form was created inside of Open Boulder Foundation.

Google Forms