PLAN-Boulder County

2026 Candidate Questionnaire

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Responses to questions 1 through 12. Questions 13 and 14 are directed to mayoral candidates.

OPEN SPACE

> **1. This fall, Boulder citizens are being asked to approve a $400 million bond issue to pay for backlogged maintenance on rec centers and fire/police facilities. Unaccounted for in this funding source is about a $30 million backlog of deferred maintenance of Open Space and Mountain Park trails. What priority would you place on addressing this backlog and where should the funds come from? Are there policies that should be passed to prevent future trail maintenance backlogs?**

High priority, and it should be paid for out of the open space fund, not out of a general obligation bond.

Start with the numbers: OSMP's capital program page says the department continues to estimate roughly $30 million in maintenance needs across more than 150 miles of trails. Against that, the High Quality Trail Network line in the 2024-2029 capital plan is about $3.1 million. Six years of capital against a backlog we have already measured, at roughly a tenth of the need. That's not how you close a gap.

Where the money comes from: inside the open space fund, and out of grant money we are not chasing hard enough. We chase state and federal grants unevenly, not to mention private grants, and trails are precisely the kind of work that attracts them: discrete, visible, measurable, and easy to cost share. That takes a person whose actual job is finding and writing them, which is a small investment against a $30 million number. Past that, closing this backlog means raising the trail line inside the open space capital plan and stating plainly what it comes ahead of by increasing the transparency of our budgets so everyone can see. Funding a tenth of the need and calling it a plan is not a viable way forward.

What I would *not* do is add trail maintenance to the $400 million bond, even if it passes. That project list is already overstuffed: two rec centers, a police and 911 facility, two fire stations, the Municipal Service Center, and the Penfield Tate building; some of these would naturally fall off, so any additions would simply suffer the same fate.

The policy that prevents the next backlog is unglamorous. Every new asset, whether it is a trail, a trailhead, or a building, should arrive with its lifecycle maintenance cost attached and appropriated rather than assumed. And the deferred maintenance liability should be published every year, by asset class, whether or not we can fund it that year. We got into this by treating maintenance as the thing that can always wait twelve more months. You fix it by making the waiting visible.

> **2. What level of wildfire mitigation funding should be the responsibility of Open Space and Mountain Parks?**

OSMP should carry the entire cost of mitigating the land OSMP owns, and it should carry it as recurring maintenance rather than as a series of one-off projects. This is not a fire department problem that happens to sit on open space, it's a core function of land management. Expecting other departments to fund wildfire mitigation in Open Space is an admission that we have too much Open Space to manage effectively.

What OSMP should not carry is the structure side. Home hardening, the Wildfire Resilience Assistance Program, assessor capacity, and the code work are city and county obligations, funded from the climate tax, the county wildfire sales tax, and outside grants. OSMP's obligation is the acres. It is not the houses.

On the acres, concretely: a risk ranked treatment plan with completion dates rather than intentions, annual grassland mowing at least 300 feet out from private property, timber and shrub treatment reaching at least 1,500 feet in from the western edge within three years, and prescribed fire wherever it can be done safely, all reported as completions, not as activity.

WILDFIRE MITIGATION

> **3. Given our high risk from wildfires and limited resources, what 2 or 3 measures should Council prioritize in the city's code, staffing and financial resources, and the council bully pulpit? Who should be responsible and where should the money come from?**

Three, in this order.

First, treat the land we own, on a published schedule, funded as recurring maintenance. Responsible: the City Manager, through OSMP, with completion targets council can actually read. Money: the open space fund, the county wildfire sales tax, reallocation of our own climate tax, and outside grants. Larimer and Jefferson counties each landed $10 million federal wildfire grants. We should be at least that aggressive, and we have not been.

Second, one accountable implementation lead. There are 137 wildfire projects on the city's own list, spread across ten departments, consolidated into 25 program areas and then into 10 Tier 1 programs. Nobody owns that end to end. I would direct the Manager to name a single implementation lead spanning Fire-Rescue, OSMP, Planning, Housing, Climate, Emergency Management, and Communications, and to attach success criteria and quarterly progress reporting to all 137. I will not name staff or draw an org chart from the dais. That is the Manager's job. Setting the expectation and appropriating against it is mine.

Third, build the capacity a home hardening requirement will need before we impose one. The Fire Adapted Community brief asks for the IBHS Wildfire Prepared Home Essential standard on 3,179 Class 1 and 2 WUI properties at roughly $9,000 each, about $29 million. I support getting there. I will not vote to enforce it tomorrow, because the assistance dollars, the verification process, and the contractor capacity do not exist yet. The constraint is staffing and the cap, not the standard. Fix the constraint and the mandate becomes achievable instead of performative.

On money overall, the climate tax sends about $1.5 million a year to wildfire out of roughly $9 million. That split should move toward wildfire. Adaptation is climate work with the shortest payback we have.

Two things worth pressing on with the bully pulpit. First, Council needs to lead the city and marshal its communications resources to regularly and repeatedly communicate both the risk and the remediation necessary citywide, and with targeted outreach to residents and neighborhood groups in WUI 1 and 2. This work should surprise no one. Second, Council should have progress reports from staff on the remediation work across the board on a monthly basis, and the dashboard should be publicly accessible so everyone can see it. The city needs clear leadership here, it’s Council’s job to provide it, and I can bring that experience in leadership to Council.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

> **4. What is your understanding of the reliability of Boulder's long term water supply? Do you view it as prudent to carefully match the demand for more development with the ability to provide water into the future? What concerns, if any, do you have about this?**

Roughly two thirds of our water comes from direct flow and storage rights on Middle and North Boulder Creek, including Barker, Silver Lake and the mountain reservoirs above it. About a third comes from the Colorado-Big Thompson and Windy Gap projects. That diversified supply, including substantial senior local rights, puts Boulder in a comparatively strong position but it does not insulate us.

This year is a useful warning. Colorado had its warmest March on record, mountain snowpack disappeared extraordinarily early, and Boulder entered Drought Watch in April. By May the city still had enough reservoir storage to avoid mandatory restrictions. That is evidence that the system is resilient. It is not evidence that the climate signal does not matter.

The demand side is genuinely good news we don't discuss enough. Around 2000 Boulder was delivering roughly 24,500 acre-feet of treated water a year. Demand has fallen substantially since then even as the city grew. Conservation, fixture standards, pricing and more efficient irrigation worked. We should keep going, particularly with incentives for efficiency in existing buildings, waterwise landscaping and better irrigation systems.

So yes, matching development to our ability to serve it is prudent, and for the most part Boulder already does that. We actually have unusually clear reliability standards: the city plans to meet essential indoor and public-safety needs through extremely severe droughts, preserve basic landscape viability through roughly a 100-year drought, and meet unrestricted demand in about 19 years out of 20.

My concern is the age of the assumptions underneath those standards. The reliability criteria date to 1989 and the principal Source Water Master Plan to 2009. To Boulder's credit, that planning did not simply use the twentieth-century record; it incorporated tree-ring hydrology extending back centuries and considered climate-change scenarios. But climate science, Colorado River risk, runoff timing, demand and our growth assumptions have all moved substantially since then.

I would like those reliability criteria rerun against current climate science and current hydrology, with the assumptions and results published, and then applied consistently to annexations, the Planning Reserve and our own capital plans. If the answer is that our existing portfolio still meets the standard comfortably, excellent. If the margin is tighter than we have assumed, I would rather know that before we commit than after.

GOVERNANCE

> **5. How do you see your responsibility as a council member versus the responsibilities of the City Manager and city staff?**

Council is a board of directors. The City Manager is the CEO. Council hires and evaluates three people, the City Manager, the City Attorney, and the Municipal Judge, and everyone else in the building works for the Manager. I would like to see a City Auditor added to that short list, but the structure itself is right and I would not change it.

A board does not tell staff how to do their jobs, I know this because I sit on a public board. I have never worked a day inside our city government, and the people who have know things I do not. Directing staff from the dais is how a council makes itself feel useful while making the organization slower.

What a board absolutely does do is set expectations about what comes back to it and in what shape, and that is where I think council has been too passive. We are entitled to say clearly, and in advance, how we expect programs and projects to be run and reported to us: success criteria stated up front, milestones with dates attached, and measurement of the impact of the work against the goal we said we were pursuing. Not activity counts. Sessions held, plans published, and outreach conducted are not results. They are evidence that somebody was busy, and we accept them far too often because we never said what we wanted instead. Whether that reporting actually shows up is a fair thing to weigh in the Manager's evaluation, which is the main lever council holds.

None of this is micromanagement. It is closer to the opposite. When council is specific about the goal and the measure, staff get more room to decide the how, not less, because everyone can see whether it is working. And when the answer comes back that something is not working, that becomes useful information rather than an embarrassment. That is the culture I would push for, and it starts with council being clear about what it is asking for.

> **6. As a council member, what basic considerations will you apply to your appointments to city Boards and Commissions? And what value would you place on advice to the council from those boards and commissions?**

Three considerations. Competence in the actual subject matter, first and always. Willingness to disagree with me, second, because an appointee who tells me what I want to hear is worth nothing to the city and not much to me. And third, diversity in neighborhood and phase of life, because parents in Fraiser Meadows look at problems differently than retirees in Newlands.

I would also refuse to appoint someone who is actively advocating on a matter that board is about to review. Not because their views are wrong, but because it costs the board the credibility it will need when the decision lands.

On the value of the advice: high, if the board meets the above criteria. Otherwise it simply comes off as the advocacy of one group or neighborhood.

CITY FINANCES

> **7. How do you see the Council's responsibility in setting and reviewing the budget? What changes in process or budget allocations would you actively pursue if you were elected and explain why?**

Council appropriates reliably and oversees poorly, full stop.

Budgeting for Resilience and Equity was the right start. The problem is that departments were never given a standard for what a useful measure looks like, so what came back is activity. Tickets closed, sessions held, outreach conducted. Just reading the PowerBI shows how many departments cannot state in their own words what they are for. That is not laziness on their part. Nobody told them what a good answer looks like.

Two changes I would actively pursue: first, quarterly success criteria and progress reporting attached to funded work, starting with wildfire. BRE actuals move once a year, which is far too slow to steer anything. Quarterly, in public, measuring completions rather than effort.

Second, project level capital accounting published by default rather than by records request. Spent and committed, by source, by year, by phase, with financing shown. And a threshold: if a project's all-in number moves materially, it returns automatically to a council agenda with a decision to continue, restructure, or stop. Alpine-Balsam ran twelve years without a compiled table that a resident could read. That is a governance failure rather than a contracting one, and it is ours, not staff's.

> **8. A citizen group has developed a proposal for the city to hire a Performance Auditor (different than a financial auditor) plus a small supporting staff and an Audit Committee that would report to City Council, with funding in the 2027 budget. Do you support this proposal? Would you make it a high priority for 2027?**

To the surprise of absolutely no one, as an auditor I wholeheartedly support the appointment of a Performance Auditor and the creation of an Audit Committee. I'll even help draft the charter and ordinance language.

Currently Boulder's internal audit function reports functionally to an internal audit committee made up of city leadership, and administratively to the CFO. All of it sits inside the City Manager's chain of command, and the governing policy was revised and approved by the City Manager on June 11, 2026. Set the individuals aside entirely: the executive approving the policy that governs the people who examine the executive is a control weakness in any organization. I would flag it in a client engagement without a second thought, and I will flag it here.

Four things have to be true or the office is decorative rather than useful:

- It reports to an audit committee made up of councilmembers and qualified citizens, is appointed by council, and can be removed only by a supermajority.
- It can self-initiate work off a council approved annual audit plan, meaning they can pivot from a defined calendar of audits to investigate issues which have recently surfaced.
- Its budget is approved directly by council rather than routed through the organization it audits.
- It publishes everything, including a standing tracker of prior findings which are marked as implemented, in progress, or declined with the reasons stated. Closing that gap should feed the City Manager's performance evaluation, which is where the loop finally closes.

On the resident Audit Committee, I support it with a real skills bar, meaning audit, finance, or large project delivery experience, and I would keep it advisory on the annual audit plan rather than approving individual reports. An advisory committee strengthens independence. A committee with a veto over reports becomes a second political filter, which is precisely the thing we are trying to avoid.

> **9. Do you support the $400 million tax measure and associated bond issuance that will total $650 million, known as the Recreation and Safety Bond, to address deferred maintenance of seven city buildings that will be on the ballot in November? Why or why not?**

No. My answer is not never. It is not yet, and I want to be precise about why.

Our closest analogue for the projects we are discussing with this bond is Alpine-Balsam and the Western City Campus.

In early 2019, council was shown a Pavilion renovation preliminarily estimated at $48 to $58 million. Within months the broader financing picture had reached roughly $90 to $120 million once debt repayment and the larger costs surrounding the project were counted. The construction estimate didn't simply explode. It was never the whole number in the first place. Cost growth on that site has several distinct causes that need different fixes: scope growth council itself approved, estimating error, market escalation, and incomplete accounting of what was in the number. Four problems wearing one coat.

Today, using publicly available figures, you can construct a number north of $300 million: roughly $40 million for acquisition, $16 million for deconstruction, the $140 million appropriated in 2025, and projected debt-service costs. But the fact that citizens have to construct that number themselves is exactly the problem. The city now says the Western City Campus itself is closer to $128 million and acknowledges that some infrastructure and other costs span both the campus and housing portions of the site. There is still no single public table showing the full project from acquisition forward: budget versus actual, spent and committed, by year, phase and funding source.

The city argues, fairly, that consolidation will avoid millions in maintenance on failing buildings and eventually generate proceeds from surplus property. Those offsets belong in the accounting too. My objection is that voters still don't have that accounting.

Now look at what Ordinance 8758 carries. The ordinance itself contains no quarterly variance-reporting requirement, no threshold that automatically returns a materially drifting project to council, and no independent project-audit requirement. The ballot language authorizes $400 million in borrowing with a maximum repayment cost of $650 million, while describing the proposed projects as things the money could fund "such as" the facilities listed. We would be approving the largest bond authorization in the city's history without first putting stronger project-management rails around it.

I am voting no, and I want these buildings. South Boulder deserves a high quality rec center. Our police deserve to work in a facility that doesn't have tarps all over in case a water pipe breaks.

The path back is short. Publish the consolidated Alpine-Balsam accounting before November: spent and committed, by source, by year and by phase, including debt service and projected offsets. If we can produce that in eight weeks, it tells voters something real. If we cannot, that tells them something too. Then come back with a binding project list, regular public variance reporting, automatic council review when projects materially exceed budget, and independent oversight.

I will help make the case for that bond. We should prove to taxpayers that we can account for project spending before we ask them to guarantee a generation of debt against it.

PUBLIC SAFETY

> **10. How do you view the city's current state of public safety? What 2 or 3 specific things do you think council needs to change?**

Two things are true at once, and any answer that holds only one of them is wrong. Boulder is, by most measures, a safe city. And a lot of residents do not feel safe in specific places at specific times, mostly along stretches of the Creek path, around the Bandshell, and on parts of the mall. Telling people their experience contradicts a dashboard is not a public safety strategy, it just erodes confidence in both our Council and in our police.

Three changes.

First, finish Reimagine Policing and account for it publicly. I support full implementation and full staffing. I also want a published, per element accounting: what was the goal, what is the measure, what was the result. We adopted a master plan and then largely stopped reporting against it. If parts of it are not working, I would much rather learn that from our own numbers than from an incident.

Second, hold bright lines in shared public space and fund the other half of the sentence. Camping and open drug use along the Creek and at the Bandshell are not sharing a public space responsibly, they are claiming it, and it is a minority of people making a public asset unusable for everyone else. Period. That said, enforcement with nowhere to send anyone is just moving a problem around at public expense. If we move services out of parks, we owe those services a place to land. Both halves, or neither.

Third, treat evacuation as public safety rather than as a wildfire subtopic. It rebuilds trust in our LEOs and ensures they are a core part of real emergency preparedness conversations. Completing and stress testing the Urban Conflagration Plan was real progress. What most residents still cannot tell you is which way they leave, on what notice, and what happens if Broadway or Canyon fails. That is a communications and drill problem, and it is cheap compared to everything else on this list.

BUSINESS

> **11. What is your view of the issues facing downtown and what would you advocate to address these issues?**

Two problems that look like one. Getting a door open costs too much and takes too long, and rents are too high. They are connected, and the connection is the part the city does not say out loud: a tenant pays rent from day one and then waits through our review process. 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 deliver, and it costs us nothing.

On the landlord side I'll state the unpleasant reality: lots of downtown commercial real estate is financialized, and valuations run off rent rolls, so a landlord who writes rents down to market triggers a covenant problem and possibly a default. What follows a default is worse for Pearl Street than high rents are. I cannot throw stones at landlords about empty storefronts while the city's own processes are part of the reason they are empty, and I can't advocate for a vacancy tax until the city's gotten itself out of the way.

What I would advocate now is mostly code rather than money: change of use by right, updates that renovating part of a building does not force the whole building up to current code, broadly shift from mandates to incentives for current requirements that aren't safety-related, plain language permit guides paired with published quarterly median review times, an easier path for pop-ups (especially around Sundance), and the city acting as a tenant where we need the space anyway. The June 2024 minor use

review change took median business approval from nearly seven months down to weeks. That is proof this works, and it was one change.

I supported the DDA and I still do. It is not on the ballot, so the real questions are what we do in the interim and how a second attempt gets built. Early consultation with the library district, the county, the school district, and neighborhoods and the most likely first five projects with estimated costs and timelines attached.

TRANSPORTATION

> **12. What would you advocate for to address the huge number of in-commuters driving in to Boulder to access their jobs?**

Start by describing the problem accurately. Boulder has roughly 98,000 jobs against about 107,000 residents, and something like 70 to 80% of the people who work here live somewhere else. This is a direct result of our four decades of land use policy. We approved the jobs but not the housing, and now we're upset at the result of that bargain.

So the honest ordering starts with housing, and the honest caveat is that housing is slow. What I mean by it is targeted, permanently affordable and middle income housing for the people who actually run this city: teachers, firefighters, police officers, nurses, and city staff, who earn too much to qualify for the affordable programs and too little for what gets built. That means community land trusts and city owned parcels, where the public captures the value it creates rather than handing the uplift to whoever happens to own the dirt. I would rather add homes that stay reachable for those households than add units and hope.

Second, defend the transit programs where Boulder has direct leverage and stop paying twice. Boulder already pays the 1.1% RTD district sales tax, including the FasTracks tax voters approved in 2004. I am not in favor of backfilling RTD's budget with Boulder money after more than twenty years of FasTracks without the promised Northwest Rail service to Boulder and Longmont. I am strongly in favor of protecting the HOP, the Community Transit Network and Neighborhood EcoPass, and of spending real political capital on RTD governance, which is where much of the regional leverage actually sits.

Third, give the people who will continue commuting into Boulder a realistic alternative to driving alone. That means pushing the regional BRT corridors on the Diagonal, East Arapahoe, Broadway and other major commuter routes; first- and last-mile connections; employer EcoPasses; vanpools and carpools; and parking policies that reward people who don't drive alone. Housing reduces how many people have to commute long distances. Regional transit changes how the people who still do commute get here.

And a caveat, because I would rather be believed than impressive. None of this moves in-commuting much inside a single term. What it does is stop us making it worse, and it puts the city in a position where the next council has something to build on.