

Downtown Boulder Partnership - City Council Candidate Scorecard

QUESTIONS	BENJAMIN	BUDD	BURTON	BYRNE	CARLISLE	CASAS	GERSTLE	GRANO	MCINTYRE	NAGLE	RIGLER	SWETLIK	WEAVER	YOUNG
Do you support Ballot Question 2L - <i>Extension and increase in the existing Utility Occupation Tax that funds the municipalization effort</i>	N	N	N	N	Y		Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Do you support Ballot Question 2M - <i>Renewal of the Community, Culture and Safety Tax for Capital Improvements?</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Do you favor raising the Commercial Development Affordable Housing Linkage Fee?	N	N	N	N	Y		Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Do you support using City resources and funding to help small businesses succeed in Boulder? <i>See detailed answers on pages that follow (where provided)</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y				Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Do you support new housing, retail and office space in downtown Boulder? <i>See detailed answers on pages that follow (where provided)</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y				Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
ENDORSEMENTS AS OF OCTOBER 4, 2017														
Better Boulder		✓	✓					✓	✓		✓			
Boulder Weekly	✓							✓		✓			✓	✓
Daily Camera	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓					
Engage Boulder		✓	✓					✓	✓		✓			
Open Boulder		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Sierra Club					✓		✓	✓		✓			✓	✓
PLAN Boulder					✓		✓			✓			✓	✓
Together 4 Boulder					✓		✓			✓			✓	✓

Y = Yes

N = No

✓ = Has Received Endorsement

Do you support using City resources and funding to help small businesses succeed in Boulder?

Matt Benjamin

Affordability is affecting everyone in Boulder, be it housing or business. We have seen a number of long term Boulder businesses leave town or go close up due to rising costs. Shoring up the loss of good businesses will add confidence to those looking to come and start a business. When it comes to the City's many community goals It may be worth providing resources to business that agree to partner with the city to foster solutions to some of the issues we face. This could come in the way of tax breaks or the use of city property for office and R&D projects. With climate action being a major community goals, I'd like to see us offer a break (tax or fee based) to businesses and property owners that invest in energy efficiencies and clean energy. The city will need to prepare for the electric and autonomous vehicle revolution coming in the next 10-15 years. Business that invest in ride share programs for their employees should qualify for a financial break given that commitment to reduce traffic. Attracting business that will help prepare us for this reality will be mutually beneficial. Looking for synergies between local businesses and the needs of the city is good for Boulder and good for our future.

Eric Budd

Retail businesses across our country and worldwide are transforming rapidly due to the internet and ease of receiving goods and services to your door within minutes or hours. At the same time, there's large demand for commercial space in Boulder and particularly downtown, putting pressure on businesses with ever-smaller margins. The city should invest some resources into keeping downtown vibrant and a place that supports not only retail, but public gathering spaces, community centers, and the arts.

The best ways the city council could help: look at the results of the permanently affordable retail space proposed for Boulder Junction to see if this model could work elsewhere. Raise the threshold for site review, especially on small sites, to try to reduce the entitlement cost for smaller development projects. Parking could certainly be eased-up for smaller store spaces, and sharing parking could be made easier. The city council could work with local businesses to opt-in for more bike parking for those who want to make it easier to get downtown by bike.

Jan Burton

As a small business owner myself, I am very aware of the difficulty with rising occupancy costs as well as rising property taxes and other taxes. The first thing I would do, and AM doing, is advocate for small business in our budget discussions. The City needs to look at getting more efficient with its dollars and freeze property taxes over the cost of living index. The second thing would be to encourage shoppers and those looking for entertainment to go downtown, perhaps with an extension of the UBER program from the holidays. Thirdly, I would like to listen to Downtown Boulder and small businesses about their ideas and then I would advocate for them.

Do you support using City resources and funding to help small businesses succeed in Boulder?

Ed Byrne	<p>While I agree that affordable work force housing is a high priority, affordable commercial space, particularly for service businesses and non-profits, is also a critical need. I recommend we have a conversation with landlords who own properties in Boulder that were acquired years ago for a fixed price, but who are charging what the market will bear, regardless of what their capital investment might have been. Obviously, costs have increased as well, but do they explain all of the non-residential (and residential) rent increases we are seeing in Boulder? Perhaps, we can tie property tax relief to voluntary rent increase restraint. The appraisal process does allow for market-based valuation adjustments, but we don't praise the landlords who hold the line by choosing not to charge their tenants current market rates.</p> <p>My ethical question is whether the choice to maximize rents charged without consideration of the original cost of acquisition is "fair" or "reasonable" under our current circumstances. The increased value of rental properties, whether residential or non-residential, is based, at least in part, on value added by other investments the community has made to make Boulder more appealing. What does a landowner owe the community for value Boulder has added to their original investment? We don't need more City ordinances requiring "discounts," but the issue deserves more discussion. If we don't ask landowners to share the wealth, have we abrogated the responsibility we have to protect the wider community's legitimate interest in value added through public investment?</p> <p>It is related to the "windfall" realized by governmental taxing entities who accept higher property tax revenues flowing from valuation increases without making appropriate adjustments to mill levies. Everyone looks the other way, but it is fair to question who the "enemy" really is. Isn't it US?</p>
Cindy Carlisle	<i>A written response was not provided.</i>
Camilo Casas	<i>A written response was not provided.</i>
John Gerstle	<i>A written response was not provided.</i>

Do you support using City resources and funding to help small businesses succeed in Boulder?

Jill Grano

As Boulder welcomes large companies, it's more important than ever to take care of our small businesses. Most of us can name a handful of our favorite mom-and-pop shops that have shut down in recent years. In talking with dozens of small business owners throughout Boulder, there are two major themes which emerge repeatedly as challenges:

1. Increasing Cost; 2. Lack of Affordable Employee Housing. I have written extensively about affordable housing on my website (www.JillforCityCouncil.com), so I will focus on ways that we can help alleviate the cost burden.

1. Extend the City's Flexible Rebate Program to small businesses, not just high impact primary employees. Through our flexible rebate program, "the city manager can approve rebates for building permit taxes and fees paid to the city, as well as city sales and use taxes paid on fixed asset purchases." Right now this program is only for primary employers... I would like to extend this to small businesses as well!

2. Create a real estate tax rebate program for small businesses. Because of the prevalence of triple net leases in Boulder, whether a small business owns or rents, they pay real estate taxes. Boulder's real estate taxes are significantly higher for commercial than they are for residential. I have talked with small businesses who pay \$10,000 a month in real estate taxes alone (and that's before rent, improvements, fees etc). I would like to see a rebate program for real estate taxes put in place for small businesses.

3. Help create opportunities for smaller, more affordable commercial spaces in Downtown Boulder. I would love to see the City of Boulder work with Downtown Boulder to encourage business owners to cut large spaces in half in order to create smaller front spaces that are more suitable for smaller companies AND back, alley entrance spaces that will be naturally lower cost due to their location. Think of the alley culture in New Orleans, Venice, or other incredible cities. The City of Boulder could help with this by working with business owners on trash collection and some alley clean-up. These alley spaces that are more affordable would be perfect for art galleries, small funky shops, and more!

4. Explore the possibility of permanently affordable commercial space. Our permanently affordable housing program helps keep low income individuals in Boulder, and a permanently affordable commercial program could help keep lower income businesses in Boulder. I would like to further explore this possibility - possible funding mechanisms, timeframe, feasibility, effect, etc. This could become part of the current talks about "community benefit".

Do you support using City resources and funding to help small businesses succeed in Boulder?

Mark McIntyre

In a short answer – yes. I love to personally support local merchants. I am a frequent shopper at The Arts and Crafts Co-op. I take my grandkids to Into the Wind. The Peppercorn, The Map Gallery, Savory Spice, and Momentum are great places for buying gifts. There are many other examples of excellent merchants downtown. However, the logistics of how the city would actually support small businesses in a fair and equitable way while still letting the market do its work are daunting. Housing our citizens based on low income makes the criteria for selection relatively easy and non-discriminatory. Conversely, it gets complex if the city is becoming an arbiter of retailers' business plans.

We do have a model for a successful partnership with a city owned asset, The Tea House, and a contractor/partner, Three Leaf, working together to make a great community asset for the benefit of tourists and locals. How do we spread this to retailing? I would ask you, an expert collection of retailers and business owners, for your ideas and input. Do you want to actually be in business with the city? How could the city work with downtown businesses in a way that was not only fair to other business outside of downtown but in fact could be replicated on The Hill or other areas that are not as successful as downtown?

Mirabai Nagle

I understand, and share, this concern at a very personal level. I'm a small business owner. My family owns a small business. I worked for a small business on the Pearl Street Mall. I get it. I can't emphasize this strongly enough. I was born in Boulder, and have lived my entire life here. I've grown very attached to Boulder's iconic downtown businesses. They are businesses I grew up with. I take the loss of each of these small businesses personally – every time we lose a Starr's Clothing, or a Perry's Shoe Store, or a Boulder Army Store, or a Boulder Café, or Boulder Running Co., Robb's Music, and Ras Kassas. That might seem like a strange thing to say. Over time, a person starts to regard such businesses as a part of what Boulder is. The problem facing small local retailers, that you so effectively describe, is a very real one. It's a complicated challenge. One of the problems is the "one size fits all" approach to business fees and such.

Solutions: 1) I believe the City should explore "carve outs" or certain types of exemptions, in terms of certain fees and taxes, for small local businesses and startups, below a certain size. What is tenable for a large corporation locating in Boulder (one that may be one of the biggest and wealthiest in the U.S.) is probably not tenable for a small local business. I really want to prioritize the retention of local small businesses, and would be eager to work with you all on a strategy to do that. 2) I do favor investing city resources into programs to help small retailers succeed in Boulder. I'm in the process of learning exactly what resources exist, and how we might be able to best leverage them for this purpose. Please know that I'm fully in favor of this, from a policy standpoint. 3) One of the big challenges facing small Boulder retailers is that they're competing against the backdrop of the lease rates that property owners and developers can get for Class A office space. These per-square-foot lease rates for Class A office space are often double what retailers can afford. So, taking into account this factor, it's not just taxes and fees. It's also the competing lease rates that can be netted through leasing office space. My concern is that if current trends continue, Boulder could end up with an oversupply of Class A office space, and nowhere to shop. This issue is much more difficult to address, but I want to put some creative minds together to see what we can do about it. I believe it is absolutely in the community's interest to make sure we don't lose local retail.

Do you support using City resources and funding to help small businesses succeed in Boulder?

Bill Rigler

We need to allow for development of more co-working spaces and smaller units. We need to allow for people to create spaces that allow them to work downtown efficiently, and by limiting restrictions, and to allow for creative re-use of existing buildings so we can get more density downtown.

We need to continue to adopt programs that create incentives (like rebates) for small businesses that we do for some of the bigger businesses.

The City invests so little in economic vitality, and right now it may not seem important because the economy is good, but we have to be prepared for downturns. And we need to be really forward-looking here and put more resources into this so that we're prepared. We need to be continuously investing in our innovation economy. And, cutting the Economic Vitality position was a step in the wrong direction.

Finally, I have been a huge proponent of the Door-to-Downtown pilot project. Through this project, which was created and implemented through the leadership of the DBP and included collaboration with the Rocky Mountain Institute, the City of Boulder, and the Transportation Advisory Board, the D2D pilot program demonstrated that it is possible to creatively approach issues of parking, transportation innovation, and economic vitality for our local businesses. I strongly support additional investments by the City in such innovative programs, and will work to promote enhanced collaboration.

Adam Swetlik

I do think that small businesses need additional help to survive in Boulder. A perfect storm has been created where large companies with many jobs have come into the City, but few additional people can live here since our housing has not kept up. This means rising rents but no additional revenue. The best way to balance this is to get more people to live in Boulder. We can look into special provisions to reduce taxes on small business, but that is just a band-aid and doesn't solve the main problem. Until we either have far more revenue from customers or a larger supply of places for small businesses to exist, nothing will change.

Sam Weaver

Small business preservation is quite important to me. Some ideas for preserving retail and office affordability include land-banking and deed-restricted retail rents in exchange for allowing height and floor area coverage that go beyond by-right entitlements. The land-banking the City did at the Pollard site has produced a lot of planned affordable housing, as well as 20,000 sq. ft of affordable retail and office. The City selected the application to develop the property because of the high level of business affordability enabled by the land donation. Another idea is to allow deed-restricted affordable business space to qualify as a community benefit once we have better definitions of that concept in the site plan review criteria.

Do you support using City resources and funding to help small businesses succeed in Boulder?

Mary Young

Some quick research yielded the following:

-1237 Pearl has increased 24.3% since 2010, to \$280.24, pays no rent

-1421 Pearl has decreased 24% since 2010, to \$618.36, pays \$17,500/month rent to Unico.

It is safe to say that rent increases (in at least these two cases) are not because of property taxes. So, the first thing I would do is get to the bottom of why rent is crushing small businesses to understand what policy options might make sense.

As an example of what might make sense, San Francisco has a “Formula Business Policy,” this is a proven policy that has worked well in a lot of communities. It works by making "formula retail," i.e., chain stores, a different type of use in city zoning. It has a track record of success in empowering communities and promoting commercial diversity and has a lot of side benefits too — like landlords and developers being more willing and able to work with locally owned businesses because it's a little harder to bring in a chain.

Do you support new housing, retail and office space in downtown Boulder?

Matt Benjamin

I do not oppose such efforts. I will focus on making sure any such development be done in a way that is consistent with the character of Boulder and Downtown. We will need to be careful not too over develop. Creative thinking will need to be encouraged in order to meet our current and future needs will preserving our historical characteristics. I don't think anyone wants to lose sight of the Flatirons walking along Pearl from 17th to 9th. Some of our building codes need to be revised. Without directly changing our height limits we can tweak the codes to create more usefulness from new and existing buildings. Roofing for renewable energy, accessibility for green roofs, restaurant and outdoor use of rooftops are just a few of the ways we can leverage the assets we have without sacrificing historical enjoyment of Downtown Boulder.

Eric Budd

I favor new projects. As the chair of Boulder's Landmarks Board, I see a huge value in the city's historic district and having a walkable, welcoming downtown for a variety of people. That being said, I recognize and embrace that downtown will continue to evolve. We need to think about and be ready for drastic changes in transportation like autonomous cars, improved bus routes, and bike accessibility that will reduce the need for car parking. The Pearl Street Mall is a center of walkable development and should be a staple of the district. Continuing the model of supporting retail uses on the ground floor, with the upper floors for office space and potentially some housing, should be a focus for new development downtown.

Jan Burton

I am in favor of density, especially in areas like downtown. I would love to see more housing for downtown workers. Of course, we need to balance density with the all-important mountain views.

Ed Byrne

I favor new projects that will add to the district's inventory, but we need to do a better job communicating the style of architecture we feel represents Boulder best: charming incrementalism using natural materials. By this I mean exterior "skins" that reflect the historic architecture established at the turn of the last century when 25'-side platted town lots were the essential building blocks downtown. A new project might fill half a city block, although that seems unlikely any time soon, but they should be designed as though it took 30 years to create them, without assuming the risk that a particular style favorite today could appear quite dated a decade or two later. Long term, I anticipate that Boulder will evolve into a point guard for our interdependent northwest metro economic region, dishing off company and employment opportunities to our neighbors that we can't accommodate in Boulder.

Cindy Carlisle

A written response was not provided.

Camilo Casas

A written response was not provided.

John Gerstle

A written response was not provided.

Do you support new housing, retail and office space in downtown Boulder?

Jill Grano

In areas where it's possible, I would like to see more housing added to the Downtown district. I think that this will benefit the community by reducing commutes to downtown, plus it will add to our affordable housing stock (whether on-site or cash in lieu is chosen by the housing provider). Adding more housing Downtown will also benefit nearby businesses. With the increase of mixed-use projects throughout Boulder, there are more local retail and restaurant options in other locations than their used to be. Many Peloton residents dine at Pizzeria Basta rather than commuting downtown, for example. This trend towards mixed-use "15 min neighborhoods" will only continue, so adding residents near Downtown will be important for the vibrancy of Downtown in the future.

Mark McIntyre

I favor Downtown being lively and not becoming stagnant. Within the constraints of our height ordinance and historic preservation goals and rules, we can and should continue to innovate and evolve. The Mall itself is the product of innovation, good design, and risk taking. When you talk about increasing inventory of various types of property, I think one area that needs real focus is workforce housing.

A spot that has great potential is the parking lot at the northwest corner of Broadway and Spruce. Rather than parking 30-40 cars at grade, we could house 30-50 people in a mix of permanently affordable and market units combined with ground floor retail and as much or more underground parking. We would have to make allowance for less resident parking and increased density. This could be a real model showing the benefits of people living with a car share program, on a transit line within easy walking distance of our major transit hub, and within walking distance of their jobs. This is a win-win possibility with more affordable housing, fewer cars, less in-commuting, a healthier community, reduced carbon production, and an increase of the year-round customer base for downtown businesses.

Do you support new housing, retail and office space in downtown Boulder?

Mirabai Nagle

I would support projects that would add to the district's inventory of small local businesses, particularly retail and housing, to provide community benefit. I've heard from many voters their concerns about losing the small local retail businesses that I've named in my answer to Question 1. above. Good planning begins with an assessment of what are the greatest particular needs for the given situation. Then, it enacts solutions to address those particular needs or lacks. The biggest needs I'm seeing, and hearing from voters, are; 1) lack of affordable housing and 2) concerns over the loss of community-serving local retail. Local retail helps us reduce vehicle miles traveled, and lower our carbon footprint.

In terms of office space, we seem to be doing okay on large office space, for large companies. But affordable small office space seems to be the greater challenge. My emphasis would be on affordable small office space. It would seem that continuing to add large office spaces for large companies may significantly increase our numbers of in-commuting office workers, above the current 60,000. That will increase traffic, vehicle miles traveled, and CO2. So, there's a concern there.

A worry that I have, that may also be of concern to downtown Boulder retailers, is that I'm increasingly hearing from people I know in other Colorado cities that they just won't come to Boulder anymore, because of the traffic. I also hear from people in Gunbarrel and south Boulder that trying to get downtown is so challenging, that they're increasingly opting for shopping outside of Boulder.

This really worries me, because an increasing trend in that direction could hurt the businesses you represent, that I also care about. I want to make sure that we pay attention to some of the macro level surrounding factors that affect the attractiveness of Boulder as a shopping destination.

It's challenging to find responsible and equitable solutions for these issues, but I would be eager and happy to meet with you all, to get your ideas on these challenges. One of the greatest things about Boulder is the number of smart, educated, innovative people we have. I fundamentally believe that Council serves the people of Boulder, so in all cases, I want to spend a lot more time listening, before embarking on policy.

Bill Rigler

I favor a mix. We need more creative space that can evolve and meet the needs of smaller businesses, so we can have more affordable offices. We need to allow for flexibility for redevelopment of some of our older buildings, and we also want a mix of uses (it's not all about offices—we need to allow for certain amount of residential, other retail uses, etc. so that we have a vibrant mixed-use area).

Adam Swetlik

I am in favor of rezoning and coming up with creative solutions to implement more density and create additional multi-use spaces. I think that the housing component is most important, but the downtown area may not be the best place to develop additional housing as is would be inaccessible for low and middle-income people. One main focus should be making downtown as friendly as possible to travel to with public transit or biking. Right now, the area is poorly built to accommodate traffic, so we must make it as easy as possible to access downtown without a vehicle. This will both reduce carbon emissions and stop deterring people from coming downtown since they cannot park. Utilizing our space as best as possible is just as important as expanding upon it.

Do you support new housing, retail and office space in downtown Boulder?

Sam Weaver

I definitely favor more housing and retail downtown, but not as much office with the limited opportunities we have to develop. In a housing affordability crisis, I think fancy office spaces can find other places to locate in Boulder, but vibrant retail and affordable housing are much needed.

Mary Young

It is hard to favor or oppose a building without having the proposal before me. Downtown has a historic district that buildings must conform to, outside of that they must meet design guidelines. Part of my favoring would depend on the building aesthetic, keeping in mind that density is different from bulk and mass. The other factor in favoring would depend on the following: If it were housing, I would want density not two or three 3,000 sqft luxury condominiums; If it were commercial space, I would want to apply an appropriate linkage fee for affordable housing and/or require “community benefit” in exchange for any height exception beyond what is allowed by right. Community benefit could consist of either affordable housing or set aside space for small local businesses.