
Macon Cowles' 2023 election recommendations

This memo explains my recommendations in voting for Boulder candidates and election issues. For a deeper dive into each candidate and issues, there is no better reporting and in-depth presentation of candidates and issues than independent journalist Shay Castle's accessible articles in the online journal, [Boulder Beat](#).

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THE CONTEXT FOR THIS ELECTION—TWO VIEWS

Two views are competing against each other for votes in the city of Boulder elections this year. Turn the page to see two charts with mid-summer polling data on these issues.

- A few candidates view three linked issues as having primacy: more housing, protected bike lanes, and progress on reducing carbon emissions. Aaron Brockett, Nicole Speer, Ryan Schuchard, Tara Winer, Waylon Lewis, Taishya Adams, Aaron Neyer, and Silas Atkins are of this view.
- Other candidates view the top issue as “public safety,” and rally support for Ballot Question 302 that calls for a sweep of homeless people from within 50 feet of any sidewalk in the city. The PLAN Boulder candidates—Bob Yates, Jenny Robbins, Karen Brncic, Tina Marquis and Tara Winer (yes, she is of two minds)—work within this frame, and draw energy and support from supporters of the sweep.

SIERRA CLUB ENDORSEMENTS

While I arrive at my recommendations for the reasons explained below, my candidate recommendations were also endorsed by the Sierra Club:

For Mayor: Aaron Brockett

For Boulder City Council:

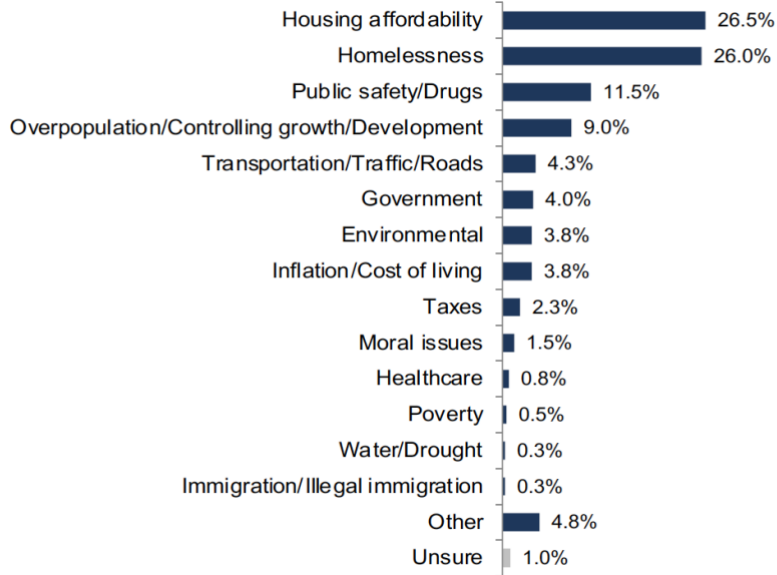
**Ryan Schuchard
Tara Winer**

**Waylon Lewis
Taishya Adams**

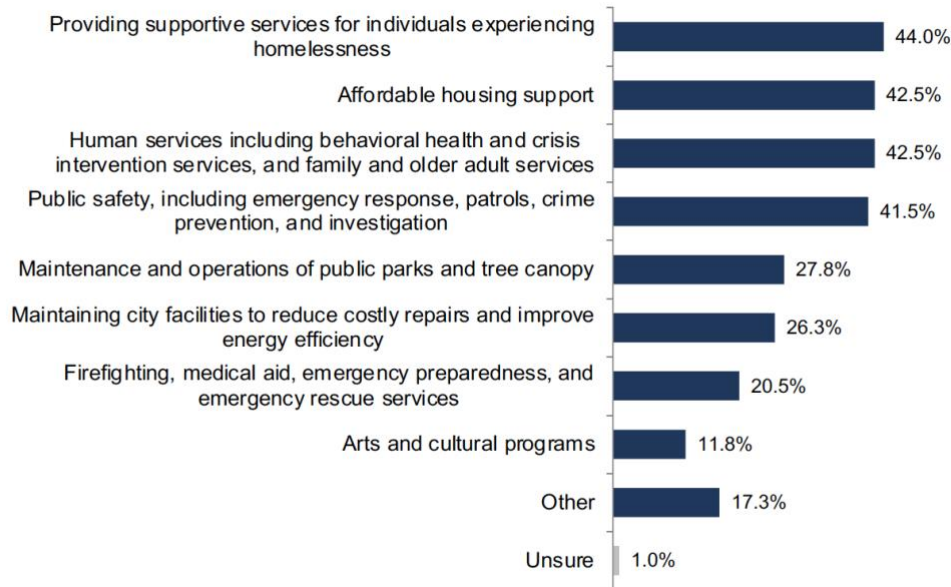


CITY OF BOULDER POLLING RESULTS JULY 2023

A [July 2023 poll](#) performed by Probolsky Research asked Boulder residents an open ended question: **what is the most important issue facing Boulder today.** The responses are tallied in the bar chart below



The poll asked another question: **list three things on which the City of Boulder should increase funding.** The responses are tallied below:



Housing, transportation and the environment are inextricably linked

My perspective on housing, transportation and the environment is shaped by five years on Planning Board, eight on City Council and five years as an advocate for more housing for young people, working people and people of color in Boulder. I have seen the many housing opportunities that have been lost or severely restricted because of NIMBY opposition under the guise of protecting neighborhood character.

A recent example. A developer offered to build 50 affordable and middle income units at the old People’s Clinic site on Broadway at Iris. While housing is a city wide need, a relatively small number of parochial voices beat back and beat down the project until the developer, after holding the property for six years, is now completing a “by right” project of 13 units priced at over \$2 million each. Neighborhood opponents without exception accept large expensive units, but are hostile to smaller units with greater density. This hostility is always accompanied by loud declarations that “We support affordable housing, just not at this location!”

And so Boulder is becoming older, richer, whiter and more exclusive, while environmental catastrophe accelerates—an indictment of business as usual that cries out for leadership that can stand up for housing, a goal that is widely shared across our community, against the clamor of a few, “Not here!”

Norther European cities have succeeded in reclaiming their cities from the crush and danger of cars. Courageous city leaders held firm against loud, hyperlocal voices and made decisions that transformed Copenhagen from car-centered to people-centered. Opponents of change howled, but city leaders stood strong. Below left is a photo of Nytorv Square in the 1960’s. Below right is the transformed Nytorv Square today.



Nytorv Square, Copenhagen, in the 1960s



Nytorv Square from the same camera view today.

We need Boulder city leaders to stand for widely shared values against persistent but loud opposition of a small number of neighbors to change. The candidates whom I endorse support creating more housing. They are also the ones most likely to create protected bike lanes to break free of the car-dependent transportation system that now exists.

Homelessness and public safety

My perspective on homelessness and public safety: Homelessness and public safety, in addition to housing, are the most intractable and difficult problems faced by City Council. We have failed to deal with these well, and as a result our public spaces have become degraded and less safe. This is not a uniquely Boulder problem, but rather one faced by cities across the United States. I do not support allowing camping in our watersheds and parks. I do support Housing First, which recognizes the primacy of supportive housing for the homeless. But the City of Boulder already spends more per capita to provide services to homeless people than any other city in Colorado except Denver, which unlike Boulder has the resources of both a county and a city!

The candidates whom I recommend below are all committed to solving the issues attendant on homelessness in a way that is consistent with our values and which promises to be effective, not just—as Ballot Question 302 seeks to do—enshrining the priority of sweeping away homeless people adjacent to every sidewalk in the City. Most of these people, after all, lost their homes while living or working in Boulder! I want a Council that will continue to seek solutions for this difficult set of problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAYOR

Remember that with rank choice voting that begins this year, you can rank your preferences on the ballot for the four candidates for mayor.

Rank candidates in the order of your preference by filling in the oval as follows:

	1 st Choice	2 nd Choice	3 rd Choice	4 th Choice
Candidate A	●	○	○	○
Candidate B	○	○	○	●
Candidate C	○	○	●	○
Candidate D	○	●	○	○

Aaron Brockett will be my first choice. He has led Council to pass ordinances increasing affordable housing, preventing gun violence, and funding flood mitigation. He knows more Boulder's land use regulations than any other council member. He has been a steady proponent of housing during his thirteen years of service on the planning board and city council. He connects with people from diverse backgrounds, including by learning to speak Spanish and frequently attending local events for nonprofits, schools and community groups. He is a proponent of permitting duplexes and triplexes on single family lots as a way of giving property owners alternatives to razing a 1,200 sq. ft. house and rebuilding one huge home on the lot. He supported changes to the affordable housing program that will bring us more affordable housing and reduce some of the impediments to such housing. He is supportive of using the Planning Reserve (300 acres to the northeast of 28th Street and US 36 to create additional affordable and middle income housing opportunities. For a deeper dive: Aaron's views on [housing](#), and; the [Boulder Beat profile](#).





Nicole Speer will be my second choice. Nicole’s polestar is her focus on diversity, equity and inclusion and thus she appreciates the importance of creating housing opportunities for people of color and young people. She has consistently supported expanding housing opportunities. Like Aaron, she voted to increase the allowed occupancy in housing from three unrelated persons to five and to expand the ability of homeowners to create ADUs on their property. Like Aaron, Nicole supported getting the state involved in addressing the housing crisis. And she, too, is eager to see how Boulder’s housing crisis may be eased by the nature of development in the Planning Reserve. For a deeper dive: Aaron’s views on [housing](#), and; the [Boulder Beat profile](#).

Bob Yates will be my third choice for Mayor. Bob has been good on some housing issues, and not so good on others. The city paid \$40 million dollars to acquire the old hospital site for housing that the entire city needs. Bob’s position on the site reflected the demands of a hyperlocal group—the Newlands neighbors—to tamp down density, depriving the community as a whole of many units that are sorely needed. Bob also opposed the increase in occupancy limits. For a deeper dive: Aaron’s views on [housing](#), and; the [Boulder Beat profile](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CITY COUNCIL

Ryan Schuchard is a standout candidate for his knowledge of transportation, climate and housing. His overall focus is making Boulder more affordable, more inclusive, and safer. Ryan would bring to Council something that no other candidate except Tara Winer has: knowledge and experience working with city agencies. Ryan has particular expertise in transportation and energy, two subjects of great importance in what the City needs to do to address climate change and to give priority to protected bike lanes so that Boulder can be more like Nytorv Square today (see photo at p.2 above) rather than the car dependent city that we are now. For a deeper dive: Ryan’s views on [housing](#), and; the [Boulder Beat profile](#).



Tara Winer willingly participates and learns from difficult conversations. I did not support Tara when she ran for Council two years ago. But she has turned out to be hard working, eager to learn and an all-around excellent councilwoman. She does not vote consistently as I would have liked: she voted against increasing the occupancy restriction to five unrelated (she did support increasing it to four unrelated). But her top priorities are housing and homelessness. And she did vote with the unanimous Council last month to reduce barriers to smaller, modest sized homes. For a deeper dive: Tara’s views on [housing](#), and; the [Boulder Beat profile](#).

Waylon Lewis is new to politics, but is well-known person as the founder Elephant Journal. He said, “Most of my friends move away, due to housing costs. Boulder is also bleeding creativity and entrepreneurs, who can’t afford to make a start here. We need to focus not only on increased affordable housing, but the missing middle income housing that is vital to families, teachers, police, other employees who otherwise have to drive in each day or move away and work where they live.” Waylon owns a home, but does not own a car. His personal loss of friends due to the unavailability of housing are likely to give him the courage he needs to withstand the narrow claim of neighbors—“I’m a big supporter of affordable housing, just not here!”—in order to provide housing that the community urgently needs. For a deeper dive: Waylon’s views on [housing](#), and; The [Boulder Beat profile](#).



Taishya Adams has provided leadership and service in groups with an interest in the environment, equity and education. If she is elected, she would be the only renter on City Council—a segment of the population that is [grossly underrepresented](#) in cities across the United States. Taishya would also be one of only two people on Council—the other being Waylon Lewis—who don’t own cars. She wants to change Boulder’s transportation system to allow most people to live car-free. She is the only person of color running and her perspectives and experience are largely absent from the City Council, the rest of whom are white homeowners except for one who is not seeking reelection. For a deeper dive: Taishya’s views on [housing](#), and; The [Boulder Beat profile](#).



STATE BALLOT QUESTIONS

Vote “YES” on Proposition HH. Like all state taxing measures, the text of the proposition is a bit daunting. But the passage of HH will reduce the amount of a property’s value that can be used as a multiplier in computing total property tax. The effect of this is to reduce property taxes. This is a good thing because county assessors are required to assess property as of June 2022 for purposes of assessing property tax payable in 2024 and 2025. But the value of real property was at the absolute zenith last June, and so the General Assembly has put Proposition HH on the ballot to reduce the amount of property tax that most people and businesses will pay through 2031. Proposition HH also equalizes the TABOR refund to be paid to taxpayers in 2023, ensuring that low income households will receive the same amount as high income households.

Vote “YES” on Proposition II. This measure permits the state to spend some \$23 million in taxes on tobacco and vaping products that has already been collected. The money will be used by the state to fund preschool programs.

COUNTY BALLOT QUESTIONS

Vote YES on County Issue 1A. This Issue merely extends a very small (0.05%) existing county sales and use tax. The proceeds of this tax support the County’s open space program.

Vote YES on County Issue 1B. The passage of Issue 1B does not create a new tax, it merely extends an existing 0.185% sales and use tax. The importance of this tax, and the reason I support it is that it will fund additional affordable and attainable housing and related supportive services within the County. The County Commissioners have not done enough in the area of transitional housing and supportive services to help people who have lost their homes. Passage of 1B will provide money for them to increase what they are doing in these areas

CITY BALLOT QUESTIONS

Vote NO on City of Boulder Ballot Issue 2A. This Issue seeks to appropriate half of the money raised from an existing 0.185% tax exclusively for “the arts.” No: this money should continue to be available for all of the things that the city funds. A [July 2023 poll](#) of Boulder residents asked, “In your own words, what do you feel is the most important issue facing Boulder today?” The “arts” did not surface as even one of the fourteen areas of concern for residents. Asked what three areas should receive increased funding from the city, only 11.8% thought that funding should be increased for arts. 44% wanted increased spending on homelessness 42.5% on affordable housing, 42.5% on human services and 41.5% on public safety. These are the very things that are paid from the general fund. By voting NO on 2A, you will voting to continue using the money from this important tax to support the priorities of the community. For a superb analysis of all that is wrong with Issue 2A, see former Councilwoman Mary Young’s OpEd in the Camera, “[Reallocation of tax could risk our city’s financial well-being.](#)”

Vote YES on City of Boulder Ballot Issue 2B. This measure clears up a few ambiguities in the Charter relating to the signing and verification of signatures for qualifying candidates for City office.

Vote No on City of Boulder Ballot Question 302. This Question is called the “Safe Zones 4 Kids” initiative. It would “prioritize” getting rid of homeless encampments 1) not only within 500 feet of schools, but 2) also “within 50 feet of any sidewalk in the city”—which means virtually everywhere in the city. Here is the problem. The city already prioritizes removing homeless encampments within 500 feet of schools. If to the school priority is added the rest of the city, then the current safe zones for schools will have to compete with the entire rest of the city for the money to support the removal of homeless encampments. The sweeps are not working; we must find effective ways of addressing the pressing problems attendant on homelessness, including mental health and support for ending addiction.