



## CITY OF BOULDER OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

Dear Council and Community Members,

The development of the city's recommended budget is one of the most important, challenging, and exciting responsibilities of the city manager. The annual budget is our largest and most significant policy document. It demonstrates our organization's commitment to top community priorities and shared values. The process leading up to its creation invites honest conversations about the critical functions we perform, areas of desired improvement or expansion, opportunities to achieve equity, and the role of local government.

I could not be more honored to present you with the [2023 Recommended Budget](#). This spending plan reflects strong collaboration, thoughtful consideration, and some tough choices, with a goal of best supporting our community in the year ahead. Most of all, it centers the needs of the many types of people who make Boulder so special.

### [The numbers at a glance](#)

The overall budget, subject to review and approval by City Council, is \$513.5 million across all funds, an 11% increase over the 2022 Approved Budget. The General Fund is the portion of the budget that covers many of the city's other function areas, including the maintenance of facilities, paths and parks, housing and human service programs, public safety, libraries, communications and more. The recommended General Fund budget for 2023 is \$188 million, a 14.2% increase over 2022.

The year-over-year increase reflects strong local sales and use tax revenues, incorporates mid-year additions made in 2022 to meet community demand, and advances innovative programs, projects, and services to meet our community's goals. The recommended budget emphasizes priorities that are critical to Boulder, including new investments in wildfire risk mitigation, behavioral health, including a non-law enforcement response pilot program, initial operations for a day services center for the unhoused, extends and expands community court and outreach services, and continues programs to effectively manage safe and welcoming public spaces.

### [Key priorities](#)

This budget supports the many core services our community relies upon, such as clean drinking water, public safety, transportation, affordable housing, parks and other outdoor spaces to enjoy, recreation facilities, libraries, and more, while recognizing that challenges remain to maintaining service levels and meeting our community's high expectations.

At the same time, Boulder, like many communities across the country, faces complex challenges that require bold and innovative solutions. The 2023 Recommended Budget prioritizes the city's limited resources with the following goals in mind:

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- **Wildfire Risk Mitigation and Emergency Response.** The budget enhances the urban-wildland interface management on city open space land that has proven to be so critical as we wrestle with climate change and invests in three new firefighters. Voters will also consider a new Climate Tax in November that would further bolster risk mitigation efforts through cross-departmental, leading-edge strategies.
- **Non-Law Enforcement Response.** This budget continues to innovate around alternative responses for those experiencing behavioral health challenges by piloting a non-law enforcement response to behavioral health-related calls and other circumstances better suited for medical and/or clinician response.
- **Homelessness Services & Case Management.** The budget advances funding for a new day center services for the unhoused and expands a human-centered community court model to ensure that individuals most at risk in our community have connections to resources and services that help them avoid continued contact with the criminal justice system.
- **Safe & Managed Public Spaces.** The budget continues investments in making our public spaces safe, clean, and welcoming for all, including expanded unsanctioned camping management, extending the downtown ambassador program, and fully implementing an urban parks ranger program.
- **Key Infrastructure Investments.** This budget addresses key infrastructure needs, including Community, Culture, Resilience, and Safety Tax investments, such as the acquisition of Xcel Energy’s streetlights and conversion to energy efficient bulbs and the completion of Fire Station 3.

### Investing in city staff

There is nothing more fundamental to the ability of a municipal organization to provide basic services than the city employees doing the work. It is imperative that we continue to invest in the city’s most important asset – the public servants who work day in and day out to ensure the delivery of community services.

The Recommended 2023 Budget meets this commitment through continued investment in competitive pay; full restoration of staffing, especially in areas of high community demand; citywide activities to promote staff retention and competitive recruitment; and annual investments in employee professional development.

The overall budget, across all funds, adds 48.38 FTEs to the workforce, including the additional staffing necessary to address demand in Planning & Development Services, open the new North Boulder Library Branch once construction is completed, and staffing to reopen the East Age Well Center. This brings the total FTE count to 1,540, which is 65 FTEs above pre-pandemic staffing. This staffing is necessary to meet the community’s expectations as services are restored, as well as innovative direction and new priorities from City Council.

### Centering Equity

As we considered the city budget, we carefully considered opportunities to be true to the [City of Boulder’s Racial Equity Plan](#), adopted by council in February 2021, Where resources go is a fundamental measurement of whether an organization is living up to its ideals, and I believe this budget shows we are.

The plan includes a six-step process is helpful when allocating resources, identifying workplan priorities, and evaluating both existing and proposed policies and practices. For the first time in the city’s budget process, we leaned into the six-step process outlined in the plan.

Department directors, in every proposal, were asked to establish and describe desired outcomes. While some outcomes were related to operational objectives, the strongest proposals identified outcomes that contribute to racial equity.

In cases where there was available data, it was included. In cases that lacked this, staff began to brainstorm ways it could be collected in the future. These departments will have an opportunity to collaborate with a talented new data analysis team recently hired in the city.

The Executive Budget Team had meaningful conversations about the impact of the proposals on Boulder’s communities of color and others who have been historically excluded from local government. The team intentionally sought to lift those that increased access to services, resources, and participation in decision-making for these populations.

As new programs are implemented, departments will be expected to evaluate whether they are achieving the outcomes and to share these findings when requesting funding for 2024.

### Changes in design and process

In previous years, the city has produced a lengthy budget document, created through a manual and time-intensive process. Frankly, the finished product was not generally accessible or interesting to the public. To address this challenge – and as a first step to increasing transparency and community participation – the city purchased industry-leading budgeting software, called OpenGov.

Both the 2023 Recommended Budget and 2023-2028 Capital Improvement Program were developed within this new online platform. As you will see, information is organized by the [Sustainability, Equity and Resilience Framework goals](#); program and project areas; funding source; and accompanied, when possible, by photographs to help community members understand the significance of the work. Staff views this budgeting improvement as a three-year project. While significant steps were taken this year to improve, the process to accurately measure our intended outcomes and understand the true community impact of all our investments will continue over the next two or three budget cycles, so you will continue to see evolution over the next couple of budget cycles. As always, we appreciate your feedback as you become more familiar with this new online tool.

The other area of improvement involves how we made decisions. This year’s recommended budget is one of the most holistic the city has prepared. Reflecting our commitment to continuous improvement, we worked intentionally across departments, often bringing leaders of diverse function areas to the table to discuss ways to collaborate and achieve complex, multi-departmental goals. This helped us become more aligned around citywide objectives and priorities. We also asked departments to describe their desired outputs and outcomes and to start establishing meaningful measurements that will help us determine whether projects and programs are achieving desired results.

## Conclusion

A city's budget – how government chooses to spend limited resources – matters. Recommendations about how to allocate funding must always demonstrate fiscal stewardship. But the best recommendations also reflect shared values, advance community priorities, address critical and emerging needs, build resilience, and improve the quality of life for all. I am confident the 2023 Recommended Budget achieves each of these goals. I look forward to the thoughtful consideration of council and our community.

Regards,  
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