



FairFAR 2009 Boulder City Council Endorsements

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FairFAR (<http://FairFAR.org>) has endorsed 5 candidates for the 2009 Boulder City Council elections. We urge you to vote in the upcoming election—you will receive a mail ballot sometime after 13 October 2009. While we give details and rank all of the candidates below, the five candidates we endorse (listed in the order in which we have ranked them) are:

- Fenno Hoffman
- Suzy Ageton
- KC Becker
- Barry Siff
- George Karakehian

Cream of the Crop:

Fenno Hoffman stands head and shoulders above the other candidates running for election this year. Fenno is the only candidate who consistently points out that our current zoning and building codes have “suburban DNA” in them that prevents us from achieving our other environmental goals: reducing carbon footprints by housing more of our workforce, creating a walkable city with nodes of density along its transportation corridors, and revitalizing and rezoning the city’s neighborhoods and commercial centers to be more humane. At the neighborhood forums FairFAR attended, we were also impressed that Fenno is also the fastest candidate to leave the podium to sit down at the table with the voters—and actually listen to them.

Suzy Ageton is the cream of the crop among the three incumbents running for reelection. Suzy is a tireless champion of good government who asks the hard questions that too many other council members would prefer not to have raised. True to form, Suzy has been a consistent voice of reason and moderation in the compatible neighborhoods debate. In particular, we share Suzy’s views on redevelopment and density: “Done appropriately where services and transit are available, and utilizing the most current green-building technology, we can achieve more energy-efficient, compact structures with transportation needs being met significantly by foot, bike or transit.”

Worth not just your Vote, but Volunteering for:

KC Becker would come to council with impeccable environmental credentials, but what FairFAR finds most encouraging is that she is someone who understands the difficulties that the compatible development ordinance would pose on ordinary families who struggle to buy and stay living in the city. That’s important because families stay in their homes an average of 2.5 times as long as other homeowners do (according to US census bureau data). We agree with KC: Whatever else Boulder should be doing about its housing issues, reducing the number of families in single-family housing is not one of them.

Barry Siff is a dynamo. FairFAR is drawn to Barry’s pragmatism on all the issues, but particularly on the compatible development issue. He has noted publicly that the compatible development ordinance affects far too many ordinary-sized homes, and will discourage families from moving to distinctive neighborhoods like University Hill. We feel that he will bring a level of energy, dedication, and expertise to council work that will rival Suzy Ageton’s. As a candidate, he has immersed himself in the last year of council work, regularly attending hearings to hear from the general public and examining the budget line by line. This proficiency and attention to detail will be particularly valuable during the fiscally constrained period in which Boulder finds itself.

George Karakehian reminds us of the voice we see missing from council debates—Tom Eldridge. That’s not just because George owns a business downtown, but because George is always asking whether our priorities are sensible priorities. George is smart enough to see compatible development for what it is and call its advocates out on it—a misplaced priority at a time the economy is falling apart and our libraries, parks and even public safety funding is being cut.

Didn't Make the Cut:

Matt Appelbaum is a dedicated and intelligent public servant who wants Boulder's example to lead on a national and international stage. We respect that Matt brokered a transition in the compatible development which moved it out of the "terrible" category and into the "merely bad" category—and the difference between "terrible" and "bad" is always a much sharper line than that between a "good" and "bad" regulation. Ultimately, and unlike Matt, we do not share the PLAN-Boulder vision for Boulder that the compatibility ordinance is designed to produce: middle-class neighborhoods divided on a block-by-block basis between run-down rentals and owner-occupied starter homes.

Valerie Mitchell's candidacy doesn't have a strong enough voice yet. While she positioned herself first as an advocate for renters and later for landlord-renter relations, we never heard a clear position emerge on the compatible development ordinance, let alone many other issues in the city. She did say that compatible development ordinance was perhaps appropriate for some neighborhoods and not others, which is a position for which we have some support. We look forward to hearing more from her in future elections.

Serious Deficiencies:

Tim Plass has represented Mapleton Hill citizens on the Landmarks Board and has consistently voted for the smallest FAR and building coverage numbers on the table. We like Tim's even tone and statesman-like qualities, but we think that he suffers from a myopic vision of the city that does not include South Boulder, East Boulder, densification or city-wide concerns. Tim strikes us as a candidate who is interested in protecting the status quo, and the fact that his strongest supporters include the city's political elites does nothing to dissuade us of that fact. Ultimately, we see Tim as continuing the trend of well-intended but devastating housing policies that will continue to drive working families out of the city and into the surrounding communities, ironically creating an ever-larger carbon footprint for Boulder.

Jyotsna Raj is likeable enough, but has neither the experience nor the fiscal tough-mindedness for FairFAR to consider her as a serious candidate. This was particularly true with respect to the compatible development ordinance, where Jyotsna on one hand supports tighter FAR and building limits than were in the ordinance that passed, but also called for more Accessory Development Units (e.g. alley houses and garage apartments) to house the "artists" and other young people who make our city so vibrant. But the latter cannot be built without city codes that allow their construction, and the compatible development limits will make small alley houses a relic of Boulder's past. To us, Raj's candidacy represents what has gone terribly wrong with the present leadership at PLAN-Boulder and the Sierra Club Indian Peaks Group: these groups say they want livable, walkable cities with appropriate levels of density, but they promulgate policies that are diametrically opposed to bringing about livable and walkable city blocks anywhere but in Central West Boulder.

Macon Cowles has consistently been among city council's two most extreme advocates of the compatible development ordinance, so it should come as no surprise that FairFAR cannot support his re-election bid. Macon has repeatedly failed to listen to divergent points of view, at one point even declaring that the city was already so polarized that he saw no use in listening to others. While we respect Macon's boundless energy and do not question his intelligence or his deep commitment to council work, Macon's priorities are just backwards. Great cities are not built by council members with misguided but good intentions; they are built by the citizens on a solid foundation of good libraries, good schools, good jobs, good neighborhoods and good government.

We have no comment on the Seth Brigham or Rob Smoke candidacies.

Our endorsement process:

FairFAR evaluated the candidates by attending and/or watching several candidate forums, council meetings, neighborhood candidate-meet-and-greet parties, corresponding and/or speaking personally with the candidates, and listening to the [audio interviews](#) that David Thielen made with each candidate. We were primarily interested in their positions on the compatible development ordinance and its relation to other city policies, such as increased population density along transportation corridors, a walkable and bikeable city built to a human scale rather than an automobile scale, and reducing our carbon footprints. However other issues, especially our sense of the candidate's budgetary priorities and prowess, were also factored into our decisions due to the severe economic challenges the next city council will face.

Tim Rohrer and Chris Grasso
for the FairFAR steering committee