

THE OPPORTUNITY OF SELF-GOVERNANCE

Organizations. Governments. They shape our daily lives in profound ways. At their best, they create the structure that allows us to thrive—the roads we drive on, the water we drink, the safety we count on, the stability that lets businesses grow and families flourish. They can be instruments of tremendous good when designed well and operated with integrity.

And that's the opportunity we have right now.

We live on a spectrum. On one end: chaos, where the strong dominate the weak and there's no reliable structure to build a life on. On the other end: rigid control, where bureaucracy stifles freedom and individual dignity gets lost in the machinery.

But there's a sweet spot in the middle—a place where we have enough organization to function, enough structure to plan, enough stability to invest in our future, but not so much control that we lose our freedom to dream, to build, to choose our own path.

That's where the best communities live. And that's where Cañon City can live.

Here's the key: That sweet spot doesn't maintain itself. It requires constant attention. It requires citizens who care enough to stay engaged. It requires transparency that lets everyone see how decisions get made. It requires leaders who remember they work FOR you, not over you.

When citizens step back, when apathy sets in, when "someone else will handle it" becomes the default—that's when systems drift. Not because people are evil, but because human nature is human nature. Power concentrates where attention fades. Decisions get made in closed rooms when no one's watching. Good intentions get replaced by institutional inertia.

But the opposite is also true:

When citizens engage, everything changes. When people show up, ask questions, serve on committees, hold leaders accountable—the system stays healthy. When transparency is the norm, cynicism has nowhere to hide. When diverse voices are at the table, better decisions get made.

This isn't abstract philosophy. This is practical governance.

The risk we face isn't tyranny—it's drift. It's accepting "good enough" when we could have "excellent." It's letting decisions happen TO us instead of WITH us. It's governance by autopilot when we need governance by intention.

Here's what I believe: Cañon City has an extraordinary opportunity right now to build something special—a community where:

- **Transparency is the standard.** Where you can see how decisions get made, ask tough questions, and get real answers.
- **Citizen voices matter.** Where governance isn't something done to you, but something you participate in—through Forward Talks, advisory committees, charter review, public input that actually shapes outcomes.
- **Structure serves people.** Where we have systems that work—infrastructure, codes, processes—but they're tools for human flourishing, not obstacles to it.
- **Freedom and order coexist.** Where you have the stability to build a business or raise a family, AND the freedom to pursue your own vision without unnecessary interference.
- **Character and culture drive decisions.** Where wisdom, kindness, and integrity aren't just nice words but practiced values. Where we uplift the good in human nature instead of defaulting to its worst.

This requires something from all of us:

It requires citizens who show up—not just to complain, but to contribute. Who ask "How can I help?" before asking "What's wrong?"

It requires transparency at every level—livestreamed meetings, open data, honest communication about challenges and opportunities.

It requires the courage to say "no" when something's not right, and the wisdom to say "yes" when it serves the common good.

It requires cultural commitment—a shared belief that Cañon City deserves governance that empowers rather than controls, that serves rather than dominates.

This is not easy work. It's cultural. It's about character. And yes, it's even spiritual—about how we treat each other, how we steward what's been given to us, how we build something worthy of the next generation.

But here's the good news: **We get to choose.**

We're not victims of some inevitable slide toward dysfunction or control. We're not passive observers of our own future. We're citizens of Cañon City in 2026, and we have the power to build exactly the kind of community we want to live in.

The question isn't whether it's possible. It's whether we're willing to do the work.

I believe we are.

I believe in the power of engaged citizens. I believe in the strength of communities that value both freedom and responsibility. I believe in governance that serves human dignity, not bureaucratic convenience.

And I believe Cañon City can be a model—a place where local government works the way it's supposed to: transparent, accountable, empowering, and focused relentlessly on creating conditions where every person can thrive.

That's the opportunity. That's the work. That's what we're building together.

Cañon City Forward—all of us, together.

Phil Lund
Mayor of Canon City