

BACK TO BASICS *Mayor Phil Lund, Cañon City*

Cañon City is a good place. Real character. Genuine community. Enormous untapped potential. That is the starting point — and it is a strong one.

A city faces choices just like a person does. Thrive or drift. Open doors or build walls without ever meaning to. Those choices accumulate quietly, in processes and habits that nobody intended to be obstacles but became them anyway. Naming them honestly is the first step toward something better. This is the moment — and this community is ready.

What I have observed.

In my first months as mayor I have visited with residents almost every day. What I have observed is a city with genuine will to thrive and real friction standing between that will and the outcome.

We say we need more housing — then make building it so expensive and difficult that developers walk away before they break ground. We say we want more businesses — then pile on requirements that add hundreds of thousands of dollars before a single customer walks through the door. Timelines that should take days stretch into weeks. Weeks become months. Good people with real investment to offer look at what it takes to build here and choose somewhere else. We never see them leave. But the cost is real — in housing not built, in jobs not created, in dreams that went somewhere else.

Here is a core problem: citizens and businesses are made to justify why they should get a yes. It should work the other way around. The burden belongs on city government to justify no. Yes is the starting position. No requires a genuine public interest serious enough to earn it.

More will choose somewhere else unless we change — both the reality and the reputation. That decision is ours. Right now.

Revisit codes and timelines. Ask at every step whether a process is serving citizens or adding weight. Build a culture where the city's job is helping people get to yes. And do the basics well — fill the potholes, keep the community safe, show up for the people who live here. That is the foundation everything else is built on.

Planning for a world that no longer exists.

A twenty-year plan is largely a fiction. Two years is now a long time. The way we build, the way we move, the technology reshaping American communities — it all moves faster than any planning committee can track. And yet cities produce these documents and treat them as more binding than the living community they were meant to serve.

Worth being honest about why: grant eligibility. Outside funding requires a comprehensive plan, so cities produce one. Then it governs decisions for years, carrying the values and conditions of funders far from Cañon City who will never live with the consequences. Grants are not free money. They come with strings.

The real city is the one with real people in it right now. That city deserves a government flexible enough to serve it — not one managing it against a plan built for a world that no longer exists. And underneath all of it — the codes, the timelines, the plans, the decisions — the point is freedom. The ability of citizens to live, build, and raise families without government as the primary obstacle. The Constitution, the Colorado Constitution, the Cañon City Charter all exist to protect exactly that. This year the United States turns 250. Colorado turns 150. That principle is not new. It just needs to be lived out in how this city operates every single day.

Saying yes and saying no.

Cañon City gets to decide what it accepts and what it does not. That is not a government decision. It is a community decision.

Every person has worth — unconditional, complete worth. That does not change. But the self-destructive choices of individuals do not become the values of the community. A city that loses its footing absorbing chaos fails the very citizens it is trying to help. The community says no to:

- Disrupting businesses and driving away customers and visitors
- Making residents and visitors feel unsafe on our streets, in our parks, in our downtown
- Aggressive panhandling that intimidates individuals and families
- Encampments creating health and safety hazards in public spaces
- Open drug use and drug distribution — we will report it every time
- Criminal behavior of any kind going unreported

Compassion and standards are not opposites. Real compassion means pointing people toward real help — and holding the line so the community stays capable of providing it.

Leave the past behind.

Past conflicts produce nothing. Not one job. Not one unit of housing. Not one business opened or road repaired. They consume exactly the energy that building something requires — and return nothing. The people of Cañon City share more in their hopes for this place than they have ever lost in their disagreements. The future is worth more than the argument.

The work ahead.

The city council and citizen-populated committees are actively engaged in economic development, public safety, and infrastructure. Real people doing real work. The challenge is simple: do it with urgency. Not the urgency of panic — the urgency of people who see what is possible and refuse to leave it on the table.

To the city staff: change is not easy. But you are central to whether this works. The citizens you serve are counting on a city that moves, that answers, that starts from yes. That is the job. Let us do it together.

Citizens — demand it. Not someday. Now. The status quo has a cost and this community deserves better.

This is who we are becoming.

What does better actually look like in Cañon City? A permit that comes back in days not months. A family that can afford to build a home here. A shop that opens on Main Street because the process did not break the person trying to open it. A neighborhood where people feel safe enough to walk at night. Roads that get fixed. A city that answers the phone. Those are not grand ambitions. They are the basics — and when a city gets the basics right, everything else becomes possible.

From that foundation, citizens of Cañon City get to decide what this community becomes. A place that takes freedom seriously. That values education, starting a business, and hard work. That acknowledges its challenges and tackles them directly. That reinvents itself while honoring its history. That welcomes the builder, the family putting down roots, anyone with an idea and the guts to try it. A city government that serves its citizens — gets the basics right and gets out of the way so people can build their lives.

We are not there yet. But we can be.. I openly ask for your voices to be so strong on this that the change is inevitable.

Cañon City Forward — Together.

Mayor Phil Lund serves as Mayor of Cañon City, Colorado.