

John Tayer: Collaborate!

By John Tayer

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Mara Abbott captured my sentiments precisely in the final piece for her series on the local political environment ("[Aging leadership poses a challenge.](#)" Daily Camera, Feb. 26) — "Boulder Chamber's John Tayer is clear on his strategy: 'We must collectively engage.'" She also referred to the Boulder Chamber as the "good cop" that is capable of building broad coalitions in its efforts to best represent business interests in our community.

We wear both those characterizations proudly . . . and urge others to consider the same approach.

I know many are repulsed by the state of national political affairs where governance has been replaced by obstructionism in the name of absolutist control. Decisions on everything from judicial appointments to major budget deals now await final hour brinkmanship, leaving critical government services and the fate of those who rely on them in limbo. I won't dare to assign blame, as I am sure each of us has our favorite bogeyman in this outrageous display of civic discourse, but I hope you agree we must avoid anything like that behavior from taking shape here in Boulder.

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That doesn't mean we can't disagree strongly on the range of local issues we regularly wrestle with in our work together. The Boulder Chamber, for one, has a responsibility to advocate for policies that sustain the health of our economy and support business success. That is how we best represent the interest of our 1,200 business members, including many non-profit organizations. However, as Mara aptly noted, we work to balance our advocacy for economic vitality, "while respecting our community's commitment to environmental and social sustainability."

Others might object to the balance we strike on some of the issues we follow, and that's a fair criticism. It's amidst the public policy debate over the right balance that we often find the best solutions to our community challenges and set the best path forward. To that end, I want to dispel the common misperception that the Boulder Chamber is an opponent of PLAN Boulder County or any other advocacy group that has tangled with us in the policy arena. We respect all who contribute to the public discourse and share our deep commitment to the long-term welfare of our community. We are partners in the effort to get things right in Boulder.

There are times when our community has strayed from its tradition of robust public discourse into the realm of bare-knuckle politics — which we would prefer to avoid, though we recognize it as the periodic consequence of strongly held conviction. The most recent example was last fall's clash over ballot issues 300 and 301. The Boulder Chamber fielded criticism throughout a highly contentious campaign for its role in helping to defeat what we believed were wrong-headed approaches to development planning. We did not ask for that fight, but we were compelled to do our best to defeat those measures.

We were fortunate to partner in the campaign with a broad coalition of interests that shared our concern about the terrible imbalance 300 and 301 would create between preserving community character and the opportunity to continue evolving. Ironically, that's exactly the way we strive to advance our advocacy positions. Anything worth doing in this town is best done in collaboration with the broadest balance of interests. Without that strong foundation, you can expect to lose ground in getting closer towards our community vision, as strong-armed policy agendas eventually suffer the backlash of residents and businesses who feel their valid concerns have been ignored.

Going forward, there are a number of issues we expect to address in the year ahead that will challenge our collective will to arrive at sustainable decisions. Two, in particular, will test the same principles we

debated through the election box last fall, the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan Update and the Development Fees Analysis. With respect to those two issues, we know the November results did not end debate over the pace and character of development in our community. You can expect us to champion sustained forward progress in our community's approach to appropriate infill and redevelopment and accurate accounting for the wide-ranging benefits of development investment in Boulder. We believe that is the right direction forward for our economy, as well as the other environmental and social values we cherish.

However, the Boulder Chamber isn't interested in fleeting policy victories. In that regard, you can be assured that we will always return to the formula that works best in this community: respect for our differences while collaborating to make a positive impact.

John Tayer is president and CEO of the Boulder Chamber.

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