

A PRIVATE GUIDE

# The Boulder Homeowner's Sundance GAZETTE



Vol. I · First Edition

Boulder, Colorado

April 2026

*What's coming to our town. What Boulder's new rules allow. What Park City learned the hard way — and what it all means for your home in January 2027.*

· Published by Joel Ripmaster · Broker, Boulder, Colorado ·

PART ONE

## What's coming to Boulder

*In March 2025, the Sundance Institute announced that its flagship festival — held in Park City for forty years — would relocate to Boulder beginning in 2027. The agreement runs ten years.*

WHAT TO KNOW

Sundance is the largest independent film festival in the United States. For four decades it was synonymous with Main Street Park City in late January, drawing tens of thousands of in-person attendees each year and well over \$100 million in annual economic activity into a small mountain town. That's all now headed here.

THE 2027 FESTIVAL

- **Dates:** January 21–31, 2027 (eleven days)
- **Venues:** 15 confirmed across downtown Boulder, the CU campus, University Hill, and Chautauqua Park
- **Footprint:** a walkable eight square miles — far more concentrated than Park City's, where venues stretched across Park City, Salt Lake City, and the Sundance Mountain Resort

WHERE THIS SHOWS UP FOR YOU

The festival isn't really about films. It's about what happens to a small town for

eleven days when a city-sized audience arrives. Pearl Street will be the center of gravity. The closer your home is to Pearl or CU, the more it matters during the festival window.

THE SCALE, IN NUMBERS

From the festival's final Park City year (2025):

Metric	Figure
In-person attendance	85,472
Out-of-state visitors	27,997 (≈33%)
Total economic impact	\$196.1 million
Out-of-state spending	\$162.4 million
Utah jobs supported	2,697
Wages generated	\$103.3 million
Utah tax revenue (2024)	\$13.8 million
Park City Jan STR share	~80%

Colorado projects more than **\$2.4 billion in cumulative economic impact** across the ten-year Boulder agreement.

JOEL'S PICKS

### Sundance Classics

**Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid**

— 1969

George Roy Hill's elegiac Western pairs Newman and Redford as two affable Wyoming outlaws outrun by an unshakable posse, fleeing south to Bolivia for one last stand. William Goldman's Oscar-winning screenplay gives the genre a wry, modern voice.

*Why it matters.* Redford carried the role with him — the name passed first to his Utah ranch, then to the Institute, and now to the festival arriving in Boulder.

**Ordinary People** — 1980

Redford's first film as director: a hushed, devastating study of an upper-middle-class family fractured by grief. Best Picture, Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay.

*Why it matters.* The pivot from actor to filmmaker led Redford, the next year, to found the Sundance Institute. The picture's small-canvas, character-first instincts became the festival's editorial DNA.

*“The festival isn't really about films. It's about what happens to a small town for eleven days when a city-sized audience arrives.”*

CHAPTER 2

# Who's coming — and what to expect

**THE PEOPLE**

Sundance attendees fall into a few groups, all of whom need somewhere to sleep.

- **Industry** — agents, producers, distributors, executives. First to book, last to leave.
- **Press** — trade and national film press. Travel light, stay central, file nightly.
- **Filmmakers and talent** — directors, writers, actors, and their teams.
- **Sponsors and brands** — running activations and hospitality lounges.
- **Pass-holders** — film fans from around the country, often staying longer.

The biggest demand category is short-to-mid stays — four to ten nights — by industry and press, concentrated in the first week. **Full-home rentals walking distance to Pearl or CU will book first.**

**WHAT THE CITY IS DOING**

Boulder has approved a roughly \$2.1 million annual support package: free HOP transit along the Pearl corridor, up to 5,000 free e-bike passes, \$500,000 in free parking at designated lots, public-safety staffing, renewable energy credits, a blanket festival license, and a full-time City liaison to the festival. Regional shuttles are organizing from

DEN, the Denver metro (Flatiron Flyer), Longmont (BOLT), and Brighton.

**LEADERSHIP**

David Linde — former Co-Chairman of Universal Pictures and CEO of Participant Media — was named CEO of the Sundance Institute in January 2026 and is leading the Boulder transition. The festival has hired a dedicated Boulder Managing Director.

**WHERE THIS SHOWS UP FOR YOU**

Pearl Street stays pedestrian — but expect pressure on Broadway, Canyon, Arapahoe, and Baseline near Chautauqua, plus any route to a CU venue. Plan your January around it, whether you rent or not.

PART TWO

## Should you rent your home?

*If you read nothing else in this guide, read this section. Boulder's short-term rental rules just changed in a way that opens the door for a lot of homeowners who were locked out before.*

**THE STANDARD BOULDER RULE**

Boulder has one of the stricter STR regimes in Colorado. Under the standard **Short-Term Rental License**, the property must be your principal residence — where you live more than half the year. Ownership has to be held by a natural person, trust, or non-profit, with at least 50% ownership. That has effectively cut out investor-owned properties, second homes, and most ADUs — a large share of Boulder's housing stock.

**THE NEW FESTIVAL LODGING LICENSE**

In September 2025, the Boulder City Council approved a **Festival Lodging License** built specifically for Sundance. It is a real departure from the standard rule.

**WHAT THE FESTIVAL LODGING LICENSE ALLOWS**

- Eliminates the owner-occupancy requirement
- Allows ADUs to be rented
- Allows affordable-housing units to participate (per program rules)
- Permits up to 29 days of rental per year, tied to qualifying events
- 10-day pre-festival and 9-day post-festival buffer around the official 11 days
- Applications opened December 1, 2025

City staff estimate the license could add **more than 1,000 festival rentals** to Boulder's

current inventory of about 600 standard STR licenses.

**IF YOU RENT — NOT OWN — YOUR HOME**

In April 2026, the Council went further. Tenants can now sublease their homes during Sundance with **written landlord permission** under a companion ordinance. Tenant licensing begins May 2026.

**WHERE THIS SHOWS UP FOR YOU**

If you own a Boulder home that wasn't eligible to rent short-term under the standard rules, you may be eligible now — for this festival, for this window. If you rent, you may still be able to participate if your landlord signs off. Either way, this is a one-time door that wasn't open last year.

*“If you read nothing else in this guide, read the next two pages.”*

CHAPTER 4

# Is it a fit for you?

*A short framework. Reasonable answers vary by household.*

**STRONG FIT**

- Your primary residence is in Mapleton Hill, Newlands, downtown, University Hill, Chautauqua, North Boulder, or anywhere walkable to Pearl Street or CU.
- You can comfortably leave town for ten to fourteen days in late January.
- Your home presents well, is reliably heated, and has solid Wi-Fi.
- You own a property the standard rule had locked out (second home, ADU, investor-owned) and want to use the new window.

**PROBABLE MISMATCH**

- Your HOA prohibits STR (common in condos and townhomes — check first).
- You can't leave the home and don't have a guest suite that locks off.
- Unresolved heating, roof, or plumbing issues that could become emergencies in January.
- A new or anxious pet, valuable art, or one-of-a-kind collections you can't stow.
- You're not willing to pay for proper STR insurance — don't rent without it.

**THE HONEST MATH**

Park City homeowners have, for forty years, reported earning **three to five times their**

**normal off-season rate** during Sundance — and at the high end, covering six to twelve months of mortgage in a single festival week.

Boulder won't match Park City's ceiling in year one. Our market is newer to the festival, guests will be more exploratory, and the early-year premium tends to normalize by year three or four.

What's realistic for 2027: a central, well-presented three- or four-bedroom home commanding multi-thousand-dollar nightly rates over the peak weekend, a seven-night minimum, with shoulder nights priced more flexibly. I'll update this estimate as listings start to fill in.

*“Park City homeowners have, for forty years, reported earning three to five times their normal off-season rate during Sundance.”*

PART THREE

## The rules, in plain terms

*Licensing, taxes, HOAs, insurance, occupancy. The full procedural depth lives in the city's documentation — here's the practical version, what most homeowners actually need to decide.*

**LICENSING**

Most owners will choose between the standard **Short-Term Rental License** (if your home is your primary residence) or the **Festival Lodging License** (if it isn't, or if you have an ADU, or if your property was previously ineligible). Tenants use the sublease pathway approved in April 2026.

- Application fee: \$190
- Business license fee: \$25
- License duration: four years (annual affidavit and fee required)
- Allow several weeks for approval — don't plan to apply in January

One detail people miss: every listing on Airbnb, Vrbo, or anywhere else **must include**

**the maximum allowed occupancy and your city-issued Rental Housing License (RHL) number.** Listings missing either are in violation the moment they go live.

**TAXES**

*This is where well-intentioned homeowners most often end up out of compliance — not by intent, but because the stack is confusing.*

Tax	Rate / Notes
City of Boulder accommodations tax	7.50%
Colorado state sales tax	2.90% on listing price + cleaning fees
Boulder County lodging tax	Varies (typically 0.9–2.0%)
Boulder affordable-housing impact fee	2.00% on all STR bookings
Colorado state income tax (on profit)	4.40% flat

Airbnb and Vrbo collect and remit some of these in many Colorado jurisdictions — but coverage isn't uniform. You're still responsible for registering with the Colorado Department of Revenue, getting a sales tax license, and filing returns. **Even in months with no bookings, you must file a zero return.** Colorado's late-filing penalty starts at 10% and can reach up to 18%, plus interest.

A practical rule: assume **13 to 15% of your gross nightly rate** flows through to taxes before you see a dollar. Set up the accounts before your first booking, not after.

**THE 14-DAY FEDERAL RULE**

If your home is your primary residence and you rent it for **14 days or fewer per year**, the income isn't taxable at the federal level and

doesn't need to be reported. The Sundance window — eleven festival days plus the buffer — can push you past 14 days quickly. Stay inside it and you may have a meaningful tax-free year. Cross it and the entire year's rental income becomes reportable. Talk to a CPA before your first booking.

## CHAPTER 6

# HOA, insurance, occupancy

## HOA — CHECK FIRST

City licensing approval doesn't override your HOA's covenants. Many Boulder-area HOAs restrict or prohibit STR — especially in condo and townhome developments. Read your declaration, CC&Rs, and bylaws before you apply for a license. If the documents are silent, write the board and ask for clarification in writing, not in a hallway.

Detached single-family homes in Mapleton Hill, Newlands, University Hill, Chautauqua, and much of North and South Boulder are generally not under restrictive HOAs. Most condo and townhome developments are. Don't assume.

## INSURANCE — THE MOST EXPENSIVE THING TO MISS

*Of everything in this guide, insurance is where I've seen the worst mistakes. It's also the easiest to fix.*

A standard homeowner's policy was not written for short-term rentals. Most policies **exclude** guest-caused theft, vandalism, malicious damage, and any claim related to business use. If a guest is injured and your only coverage is a homeowner's policy, the claim can be denied entirely — leaving you

personally liable for medical, legal, and any judgment.

### WHAT YOU ACTUALLY NEED

- A dedicated STR policy, or a written STR endorsement from your insurer
- Coverage for guest-caused damage and theft
- General liability for guest injuries
- Amenity liability if you have a hot tub, pool, or fireplace
- Loss-of-income coverage for covered events

Airbnb's \$3 million Host Damage Guarantee and Vrbo's host protection programs are **not** substitutes for a real policy. They're reimbursement programs with conditions and exclusions. Treat them as a backstop.

Boulder-area sources: Proper Insurance (national STR specialist), Schomburg Insurance Agency (Boulder local), and your existing carrier — ask specifically for a written STR endorsement, not a verbal assurance.

### OCCUPANCY, NOISE, PARKING

Colorado HB24-1007 (signed April 2024) prohibited local occupancy caps based on the

number of unrelated people living together, and Boulder ceased enforcement of its prior "5 or 6" rule pending an ordinance update. Health-and-safety-based limits — building code, fire code, septic capacity — still apply. Boulder County allows up to 8 or septic limit, whichever is lower.

**List and contract to a defensible occupancy your home can actually handle, not how many mattresses you can fit.** Overcrowded listings still draw complaints, and a guest who later complains about overcrowding becomes your problem, not theirs.

Parking varies by zone in the city; in the county, two spaces minimum or one per four occupants, whichever is fewer — all on-site. Street parking during Sundance will be scarce. Make instructions impossible to miss.

Boulder enforces its noise ordinance actively. Industry and press guests tend to be well-behaved; lottery and public-pass guests in larger groups can be less predictable. Write quiet-hours rules into the listing, the guest packet, and a printed card at the house. If you use a noise monitor (Minut, NoiseAware), disclose it.

*“Of everything in this guide, insurance is where I've seen the worst mistakes. It's also the easiest to fix.”*

## PART FOUR

## What Park City learned in 40 years

*Park City's final decade gives the clearest picture available of what festival-period rentals actually look like in practice. Worth taking seriously.*

### NIGHTLY RATES

Festival-period rates have typically run **three to five times off-season** for equivalent properties, with the biggest premiums on the opening weekend and the first full week. Well-located four- and five-bedroom homes in Old Town or Deer Valley have commanded nightly rates in the low thousands during peak days. Entry-level condos in outer neighborhoods saw smaller, but still meaningful, premiums.

**Location relative to walkable festival venues is the single strongest rate driver — more than size, more than finish.**

### MINIMUMS AND CONTRACT NORMS

- Seven-night minimums for the peak festival week; three-night for shoulder nights
- Security deposit: 25–50% of total rental, refundable on clean check-out

- Non-refundable cleaning fee billed upfront
- Cancellation: typical schedule — full refund 60+ days out, 50% 30–60, nothing inside 30
- Strict check-in windows on peak turnover weekends
- Lockbox or keypad access, instructions sent 48 hours ahead
- Written house rules packet — quiet hours, occupancy, parking, emergency contacts

*“Location relative to walkable festival venues is the single strongest rate driver — more than size, more than finish.”*

CHAPTER 8

# What works — and what doesn't

THE RENTALS THAT WORK

- Accurate, well-lit photography — no fisheye, no staging lies
- Honest listing description, including what the home isn't
- Fast, warm guest communication (most disputes are preventable with a prompt reply)
- Transparent fees — no surprises at checkout
- Reliable parking, clearly explained, with visual aids
- Wi-Fi at the speeds your listing claims
- House rules delivered in advance and at the house

THE RENTALS THAT FAIL

- Heating or hot water failure during festival week — the most common disaster, and the most expensive
- Listing an occupancy the home can't reasonably handle
- Hidden or ambiguous parking instructions
- Slow or absent host communication during the stay
- Wi-Fi too slow for guests on deadline
- Missing essentials (coffee maker, towels, trash bags)
- Cancellation terms that surprise a guest

PRE-FESTIVAL CHECKLIST — DO THIS IN OCTOBER

- Furnace serviced, filter replaced
- Hot water heater inspected
- Roof and gutters checked before the first snow
- Wi-Fi upgraded to business-grade if needed
- Smoke and CO detectors — fresh batteries, test all
- Emergency plumber, electrician, HVAC on speed dial
- A neighbor or manager who can walk in within 30 minutes

CHAPTER 9

# Property manager vs. self-managed

*A property manager typically charges 20–40% of gross bookings for festival rentals — in exchange for listing optimization, guest comms, check-in/out, cleaning coordination, maintenance dispatch, and payment handling.*

WHEN A MANAGER IS WORTH IT

- You'll be out of town or unreachable during the festival
- You've never run an STR and don't want your first to be a high-stakes, concentrated period
- You own more than one property in play
- 11 p.m. guest calls during a snowstorm aren't worth your time

WHEN SELF-MANAGING MAKES SENSE

- You're in town, available, and want to keep 80%+ of the gross
- You've hosted before and have a trusted cleaner, handyman, and backup contact
- Your home is simple — one unit, straightforward parking, no unusual systems
- You're renting for one festival, not building an ongoing STR business

FIVE QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU SIGN WITH A MANAGER

- What's your commission, and what does it cover?
- What's your festival-period occupancy track record?
- Who handles guest issues at 2 a.m.?
- How do you price during peak vs. shoulder?
- How do you handle damage disputes?

PART FIVE

# The Boulder opportunity

*Because the Boulder festival map is walkable across eight square miles, geography matters more than it would at a spread-out resort.*

TIER ONE — INSIDE THE WALKABLE CORE

Mapleton Hill, Newlands, Whittier, downtown condos, Pearl-adjacent blocks, near University Hill. Walk to Boulder Theater, eTown, the Dairy, and Chautauqua shuttle pickups. Industry and press will prioritize these blocks. **The rate ceiling lands here first.**

TIER TWO — SHORT DRIVE OR HOP BUS

North Boulder (north of Iris), Martin Acres, Table Mesa, South Boulder, parts of East

**Boulder.** A 5–12 minute drive or a reliable HOP ride to the core. Filmmakers and longer-stay pass-holders will look here for quieter bases. Volume and rate both strong, especially for larger group homes.

TIER THREE — REGIONAL

**Gunbarrel, Niwot, Louisville, Lafayette, Longmont.** Viable for pass-holder tourists and crew on budgets. Modest premiums, more booking friction. Worth a 2027 experiment.

WHAT BOULDER HAS THAT PARK CITY DID NOT

- A university — CU brings dorms, parking, and a secondary social center already inside the footprint
- A pedestrian mall (Pearl) already engineered for foot traffic
- Year-round restaurants, coffee, and retail not tied to ski-season rhythms
- A warmer January, with the occasional chinook
- Fewer slope-side luxury properties — the Boulder high end is different in character

## CHAPTER 11

## Key dates and actions

## TIMELINE — APRIL 2026 → JANUARY 2027

**April – June 2026**

Review HOA documents. Confirm license path. Line up an insurance quote.

**June – August 2026**

Apply for STR or Festival Lodging License. Pre-festival maintenance — roof, furnace, water heater. Photograph in summer light.

**August – October 2026**

List on Airbnb, Vrbo, or via a manager. Set pricing. Open early-bird booking window.

**October 2026**

Final mechanical inspection. Furnace service. Detector batteries. Wi-Fi speed test.

**November – December 2026**

Guest packet complete. House rules, parking instructions, emergency contacts printed at the house.

**December 2026**

Sundance announces programming. Booking spike — secondary inventory fills here.

**Early January 2027**

Final walk-through. Stock consumables. Stow personal and valuable items.

**January 21–31, 2027**

Festival.

*Boulder's trajectory will be its own*

Sundance is not a real estate event. It's a cultural one that has, over four decades, reshaped the real estate character of a small mountain town. Some of that's good — a livelier winter economy, sustained interest from outside buyers, a hospitality trade that exists at scale. Some of it is costly — pricing

pressure, STR saturation, neighborhood change. Park City lived with both.

Boulder's trajectory will be its own. We are not a ski resort. We are a university town, a tech town, an outdoor town, and a dense, civically engaged city that already had a strong identity before the festival arrived.

The question for you, as a homeowner, is narrower and more manageable: **does this one festival, in this one year, fit your plans?** For many of you it will. For some it won't.

If you'd like to walk through your specific situation — your home, your neighborhood, your goals — call me. I'll make the time.

— Joel Ripmaster

## A NOTE FROM JOEL

*Why*

I've spent a long time in Boulder real estate, and I've watched this town reshape itself more than once. But nothing quite like what's coming in January 2027, when the Sundance Film Festival opens its first year here after more than forty in Park City.

I kept getting the same questions from neighbors and past clients. *Should I rent my house? What are the rules? What did Park City*

*homeowners learn the hard way? What's actually going to happen on Pearl Street?* So I put everything I could find in one place.

This guide pulls from Sundance Institute announcements, City of Boulder ordinances, Boulder Reporting Lab coverage, Park City economic impact data, and conversations with colleagues in Utah. It's current as of April 2026. It will need updating before the festival

arrives — some things aren't yet public, and a few will keep changing. When that happens, I'll send a revised copy.

It's free. Share it with a friend. If a question in here points at a real decision you're about to make, call me — I'll come walk through it with you in person.

— Joel Ripmaster

## SOURCES

# Where the numbers come from

*Every figure in this guide is pulled from public reporting or official city and festival documents. Links current as of April 2026.*

Sundance Institute — Boulder announcement  
[sundance.org/blogs](https://sundance.org/blogs)

Sundance Institute — 2027 dates and venues  
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City of Boulder — Short-term rental licensing  
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City of Boulder — Sundance Operations Rules of the Road  
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[bouldercounty.gov](https://bouldercounty.gov)

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[kunc.org](https://kunc.org)

IRS Topic 415 — Renting residential and vacation property  
[irs.gov/taxtopics/tc415](https://irs.gov/taxtopics/tc415)

Proper Insurance — Short-term rental coverage  
[proper.insure](https://proper.insure)

Airbnb — Tax collection in Colorado  
[airbnb.com/help](https://airbnb.com/help)

Hollywood Reporter — Sundance Managing Director hire  
[hollywoodreporter.com](https://hollywoodreporter.com)

Salt Lake Tribune — Park City home price coverage  
[sltrib.com](https://sltrib.com)

IF THIS GUIDE HELPED

# *Share it.*

*Send it to a neighbor, a friend with a second home, a client thinking about Sundance week. If they have questions, I'm the right first call.*



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*First edition — April 2026*

*This guide was built with the assistance of AI research tools and compiled from publicly available sources. Accuracy is not guaranteed. Festival details, municipal regulations, and market conditions will continue to evolve. Projections and estimates — including any reference to rental income, festival demand, or future market performance — are illustrative, not guarantees of outcome. Nothing in this guide is intended as legal, tax, or financial advice. Readers are responsible for independently verifying any and all information before relying on it.*