



Understanding Noise Pollution in Boulder

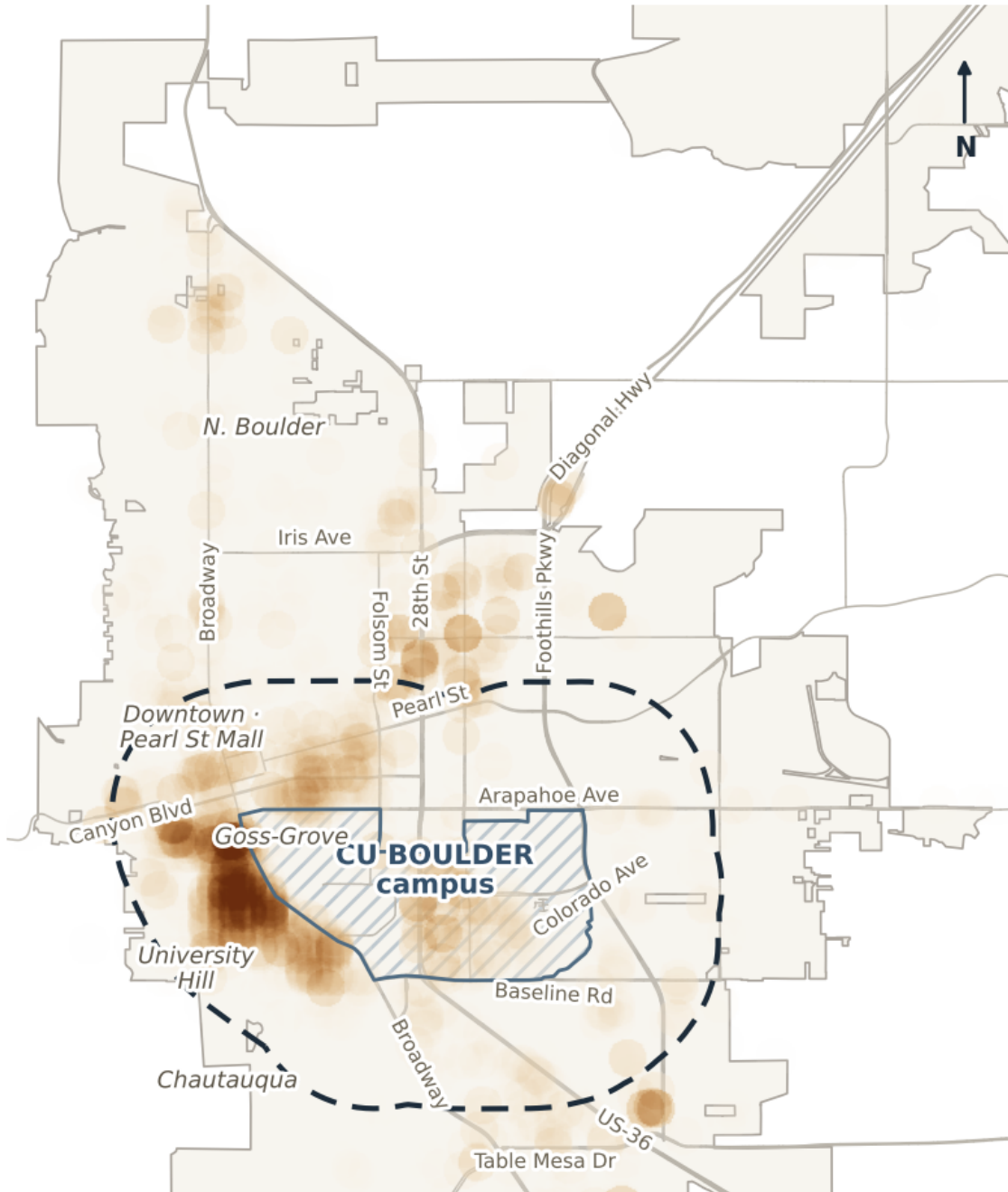
Where it is, where it comes from, and who bears it

September 2026

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Noise complaints, 2023-2026



70% of Boulder's noise complaints come from the CU walkshed

6,297

of Boulder's 9,011 noise complaints since January 2023

26%

of Boulder's people — 28,010 permanent residents, including 3,957 children — absorb 70% of the city's noise

4.1×

the complaint rate borne by permanent residents anywhere else in Boulder

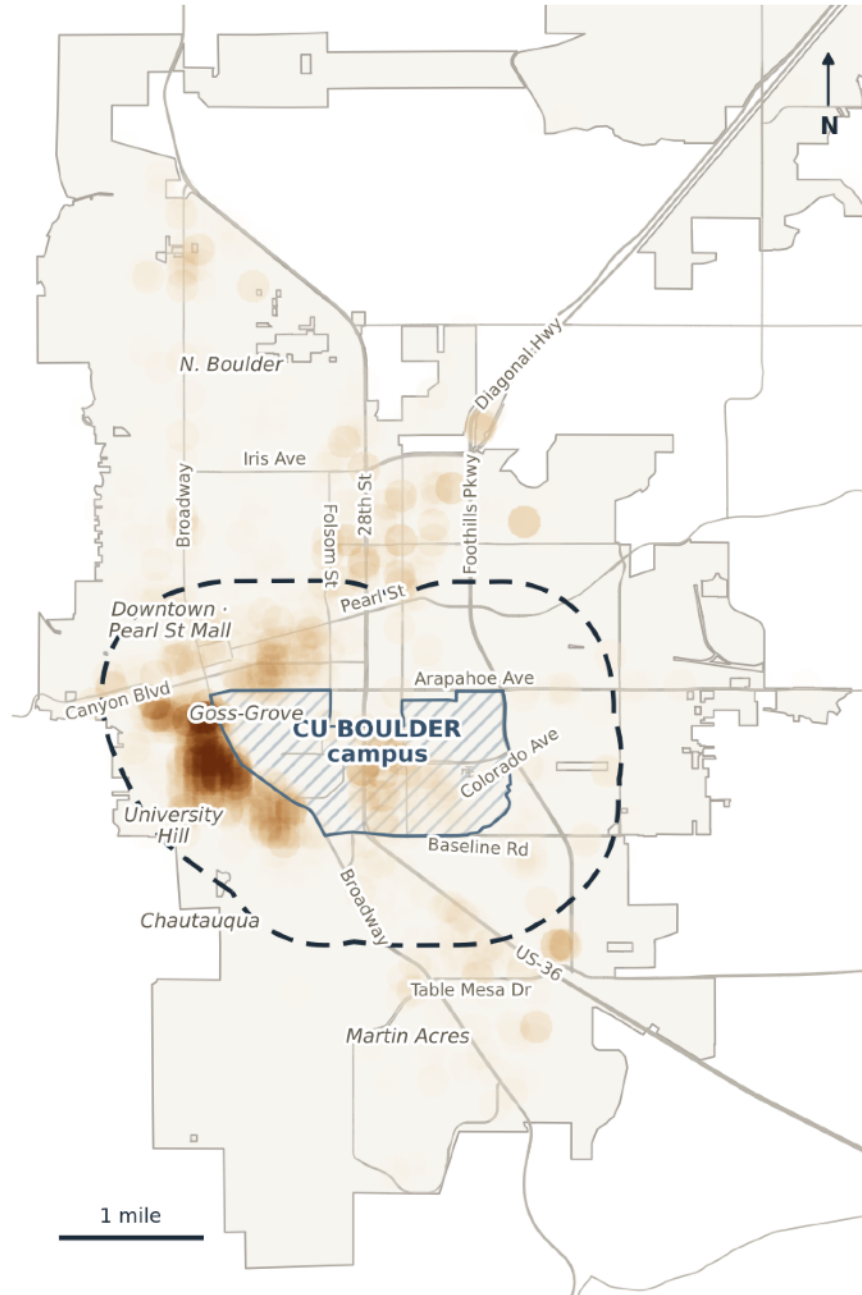
The walkshed is a 15-minute walk from the university district. Boulder Police calls for service, Jan 2023 – Aug 2026 · data and code published at quietenjoymentproject.org/data

The noise pollution keeps CU's calendar

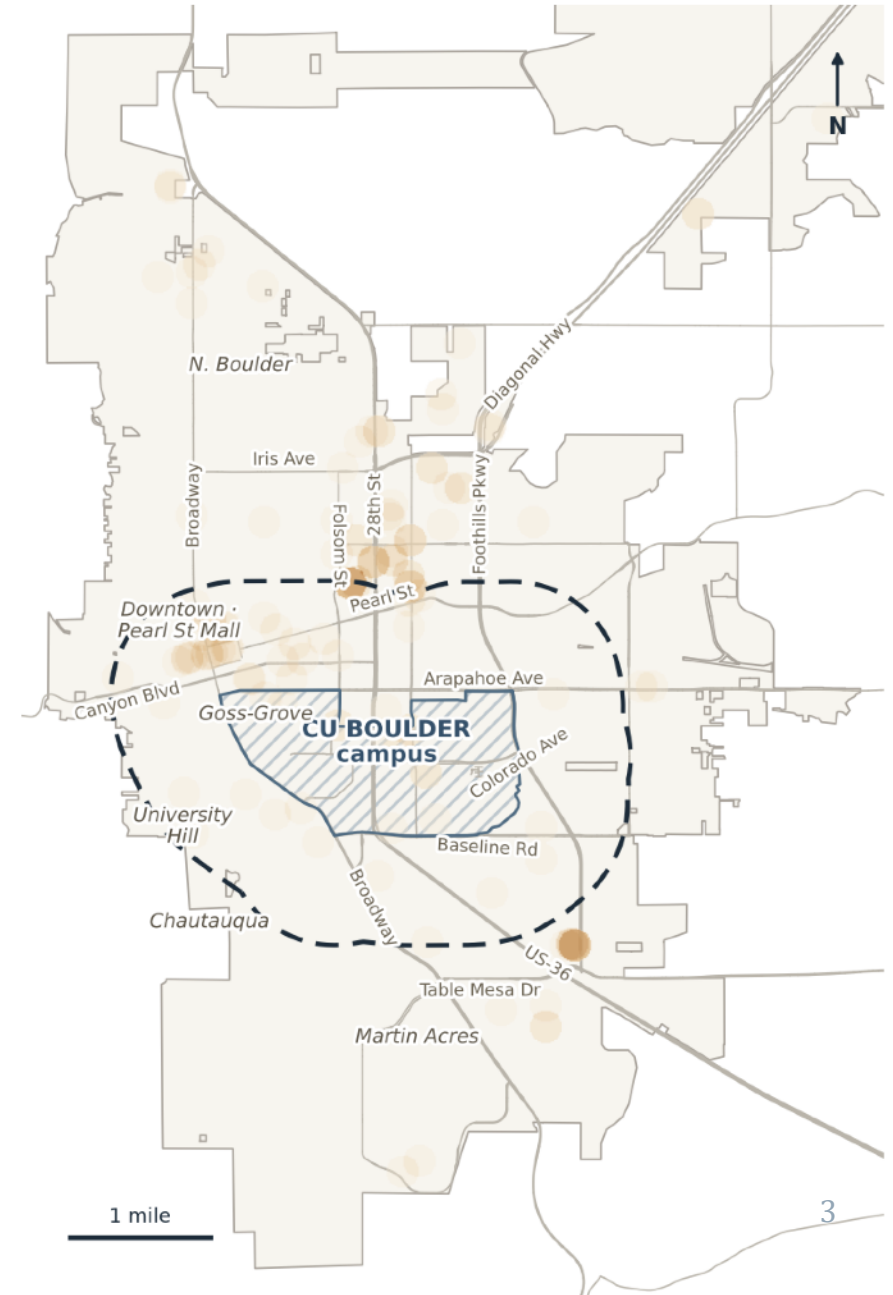
It collapses when students leave and returns when they come back

(Maps show noise complaints per night, identical zero-based colour scale; dashed line is the CU walkshed.)

School in session



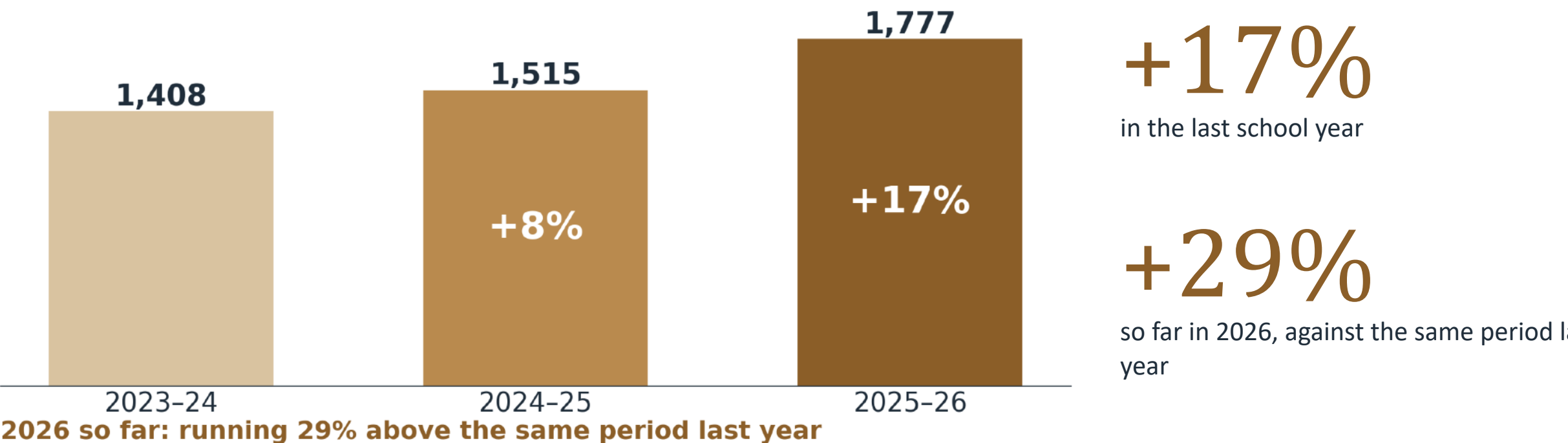
Winter break — students gone



And the pollution is getting worse

Boulder Police increased enforcement. Complaints rose anyway.

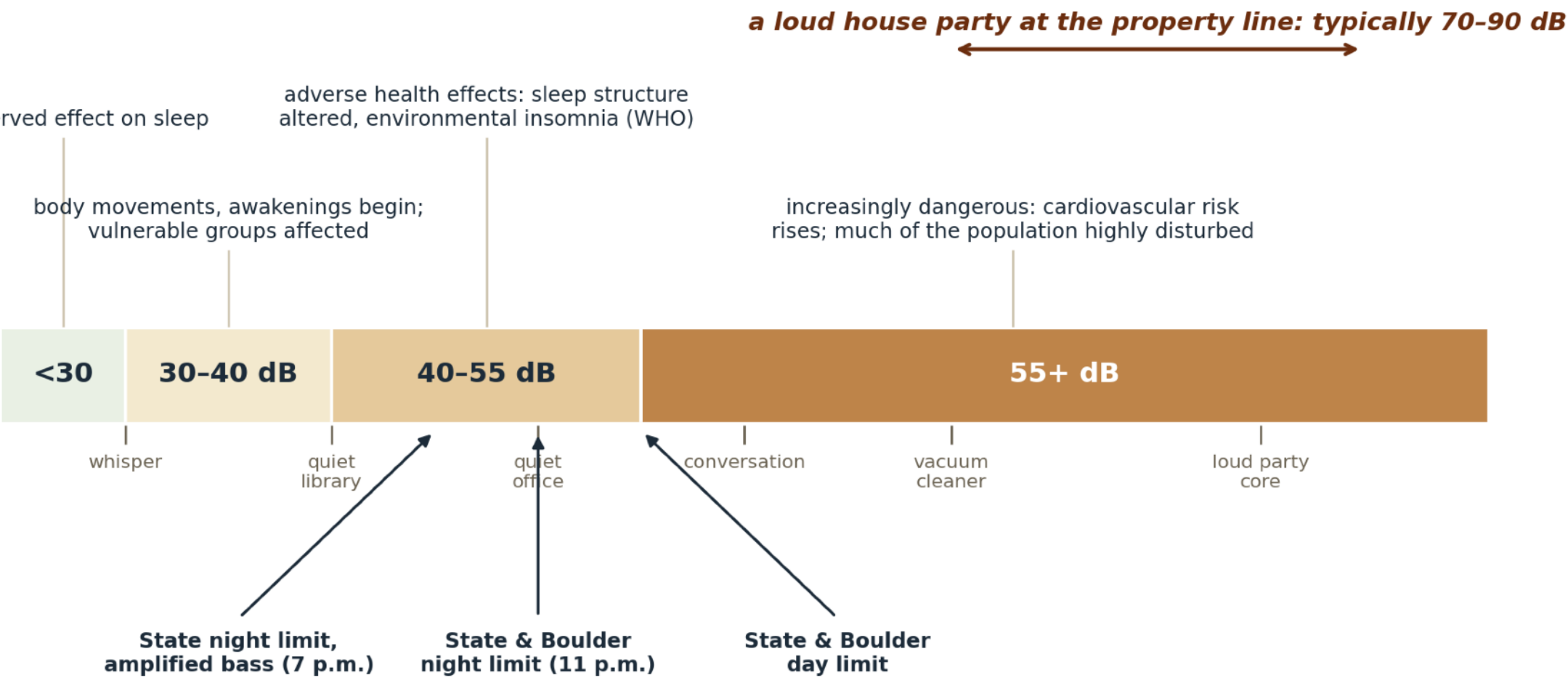
Noise complaints in the CU walkshed, by school year



Source: Boulder Police calls for service, Jan 2023 – Aug 2026 · data and code published at quietenjoymentproject.org/data

Noise pollution is a health problem, not an annoyance

What the volume does — the WHO night-noise dose bands



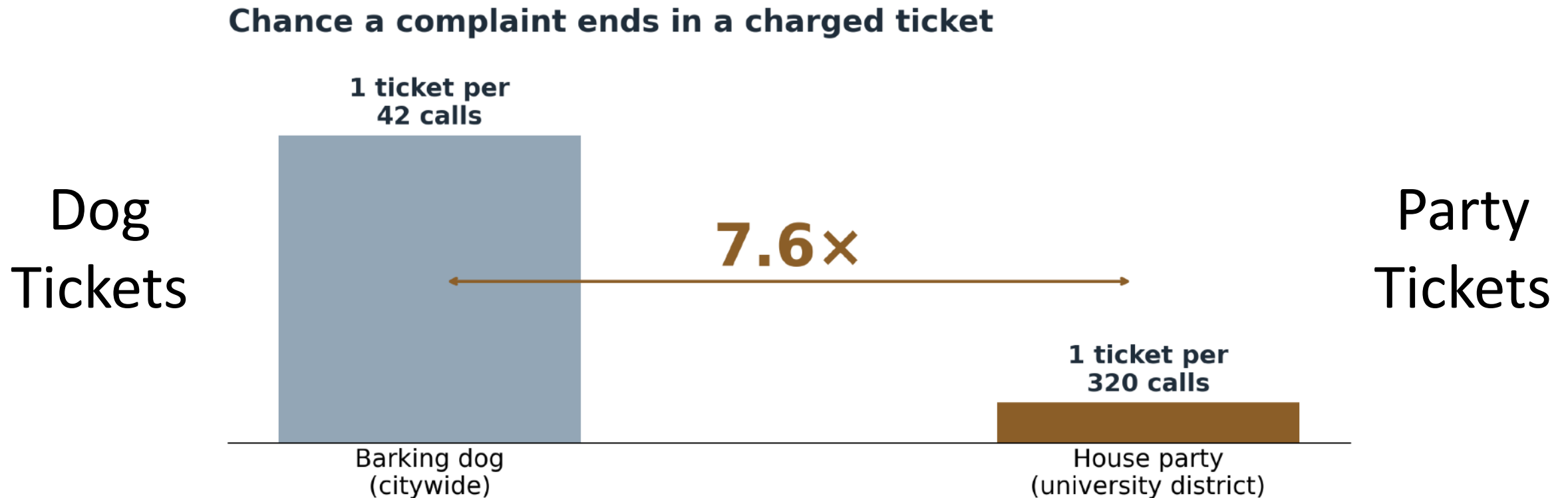
Bands: WHO Night Noise Guidelines (nighttime outdoor levels). Party range illustrative — Boulder deploys no noise monitoring, so no measured record exists.

Boulder's night starts last, and nobody measures the bass

State of Colorado	7 p.m.	45 dB if periodic, impulsive, or shrill (50 dB general)
Fort Collins	8 p.m.	50 dB residential
	.	
	.	
	.	
City of Boulder	11 p.m.	50 dB · 55 dB allowed until 11pm

All three measure in dB(A), which barely hears bass; none of them sets a limit for it. 55dB is 2x as loud as 45 dB.

A barking dog is seven times more likely to draw a ticket than a house party in the university district



Charged citations only, from BPD's charge file. Dogs: 312 citations against 13,065 animal calls citywide, one per 42. Parties in the university district: one charged citation per 320 complaints; citywide the party rate is 67 citations against 8,192 complaints, one per 122, which is 2.9x the dog rate. Unmatched call categories, so this is a screening comparison.

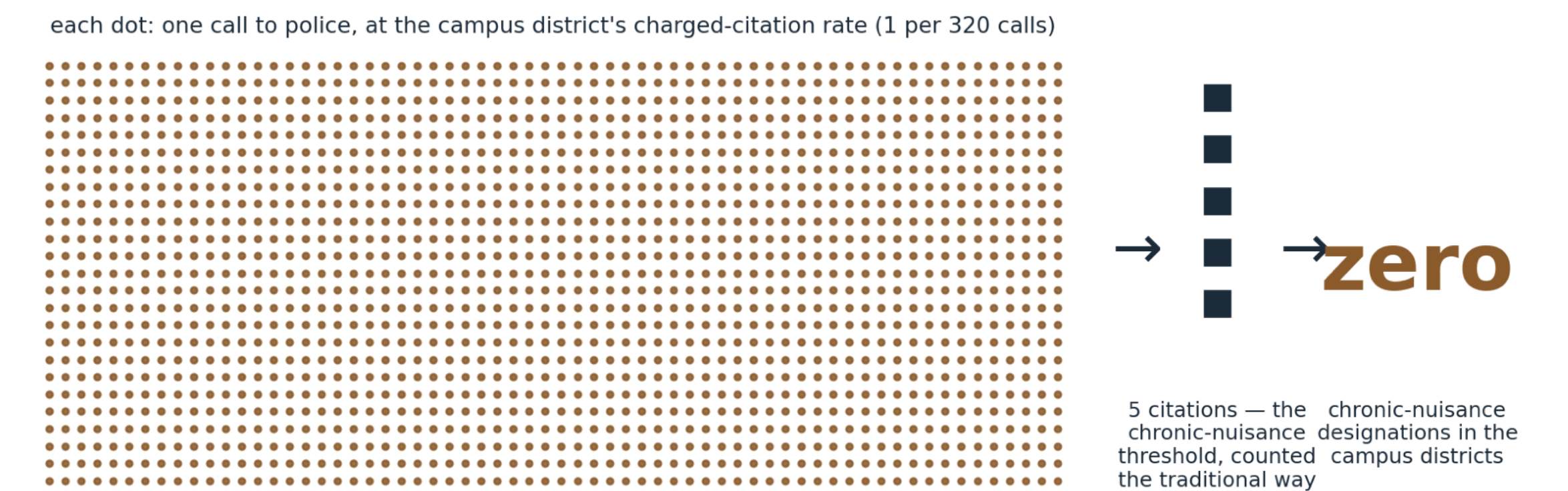
It takes 122 complaints to produce one ticket

In the university district it takes 320

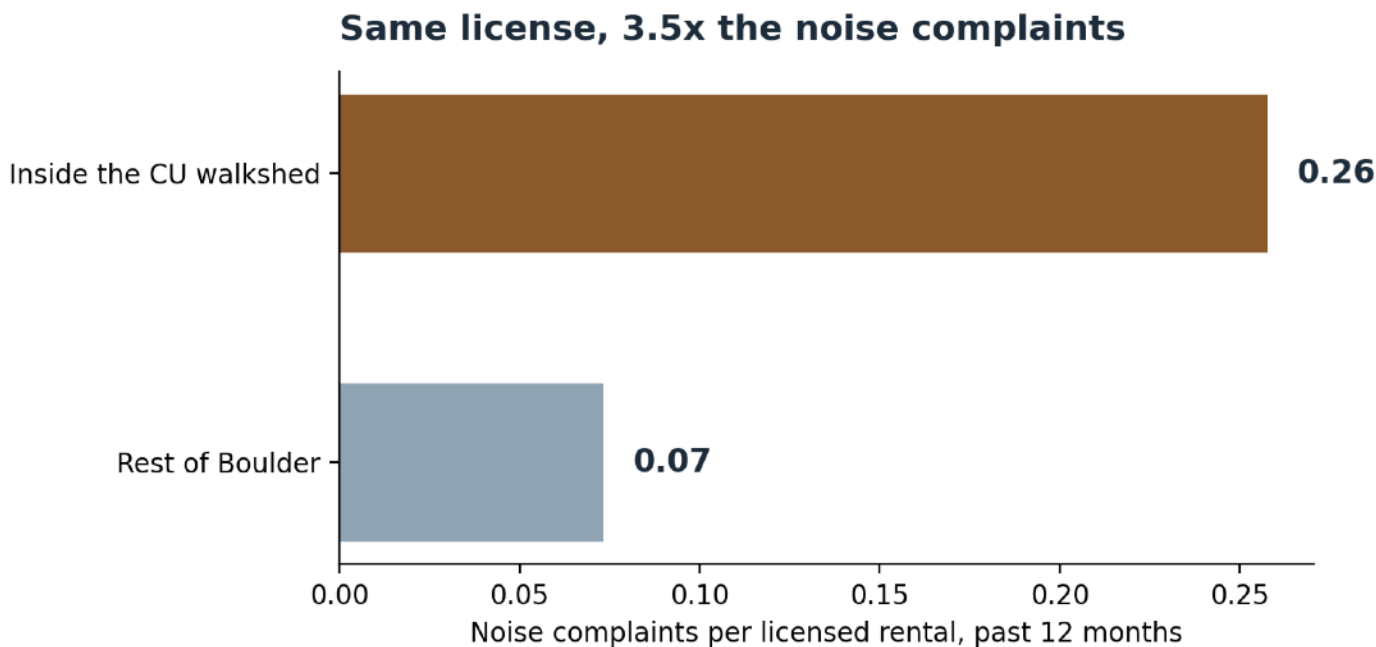


Reaching Boulder's nuisance threshold takes 1,600 phone calls

Five tickets in twelve months puts a rental license in jeopardy. At the university district's rate of ticketing, this is what is required from residents to meet that threshold. And in practice, ZERO rental licenses have been pulled due to chronic noise.



It is a rental problem, and the City already holds the lever



6 in 10

noise complaints citywide come from licensed rental properties

Half

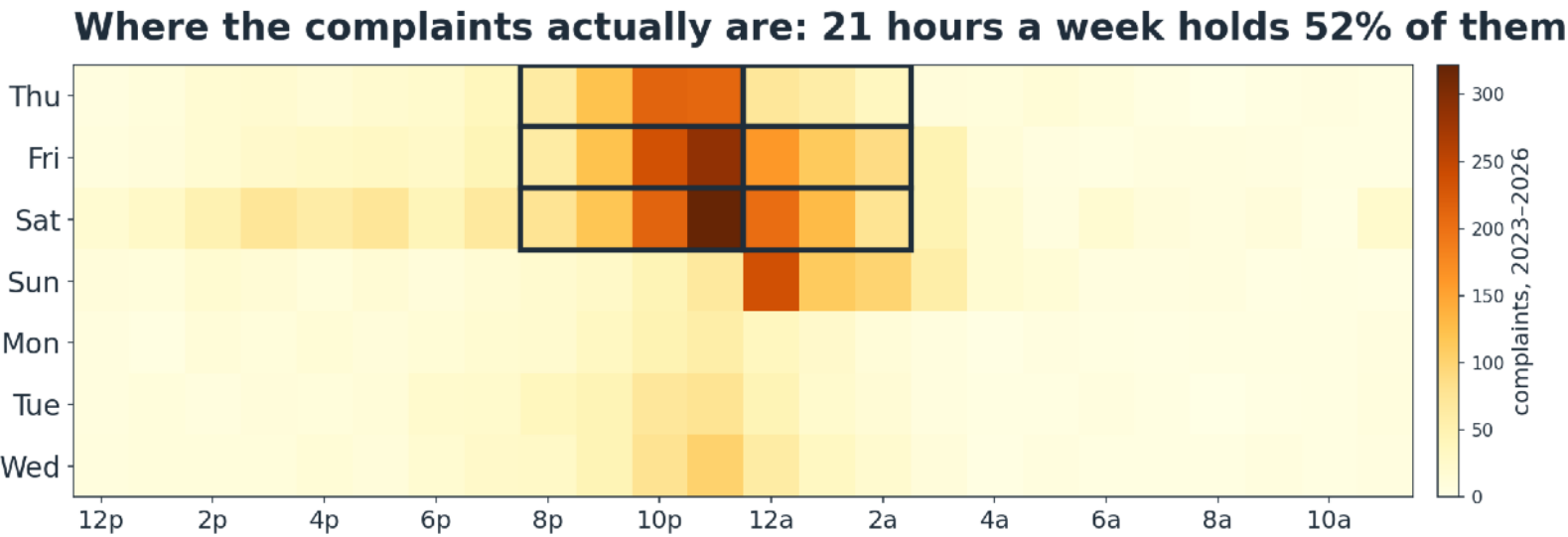
of Boulder's 10,830 rental licenses sit inside the walkshed

0

ZERO rental licenses have ever been pulled, and zero properties designated a chronic nuisance, since the ordinance took effect in September 2024

21 hours a week covers half the problem

Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 8 p.m. to 3 a.m. — 12.5% of the week, 52% of the complaints



21

hours a week

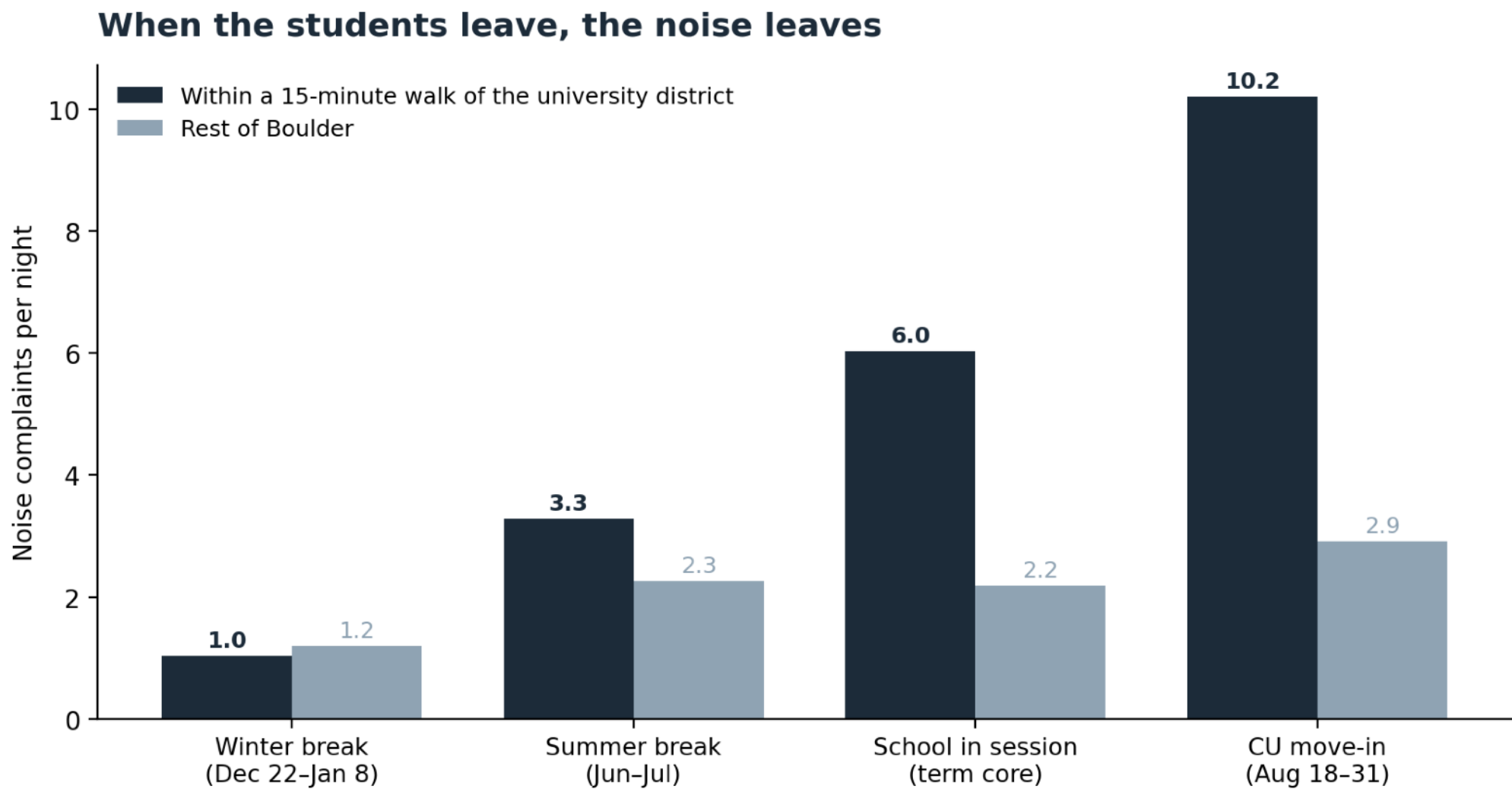
52%

of all CU walkshed complaints
fall inside them

Outlined: Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 8 p.m. to 3 a.m. — 12.5% of the week

The noise has a season, and the season is CU's

Complaints per night inside the walkshed, from winter break to move-in. The rest of Boulder barely moves.



Rates are per night, so unequal window lengths compare like for like: roughly 140 term-core nights a year against 17 deep-winter nights. From winter break to term, complaints outside the walkshed rise about 80%. Inside the walkshed, they rise nearly 500%.

To be sure

The four objections we hear, and our answers

“Of course the Hill is loud. It’s next to a university.”

It is, and has been for a century. Proximity does not explain a 17% rise in one year, or enforcement at a seventh of South Boulder’s rate.

“Students party everywhere. Boys will be boys.”

They do, and City and State laws apply to them anyway. The point is not that students hold parties. It is that the City’s response is weakest where it is needed most.

“This is an anti-student report.”

The data names a place and a calendar, never a person. Students live in the walkshed too and lose the same sleep. The top tenth of complained-about rental addresses produce 37% of rental complaint calls.

“Complaints aren’t noise. One angry neighbor can call fifty times.”

True. The one address that did exactly that, 950 calls from a single dispute, is removed from every figure and disclosed on page one. The pattern survives it. We believe the problem is severely undercounted because filing a report requires being willing to make a call at 1am, which rarely results in any police action anyway.

We request that City Council:

- ➊ Direct staff to write to every rental owner, property manager and tenant in the CU walkshed, stating that noise violations can put a rental license in jeopardy.
- ➋ Direct staff to send a warning letter to the owner, manager and tenants whenever a property receives a warning.
- ➌ Direct Boulder Police to enforce more aggressively. Parties should be ticketed as readily as barking dogs, and all neighborhoods should be policed equally.
- ➍ Lower the nuisance threshold from five tickets to two in any twelve-month period.

And that Council fix the standard itself:

- 5 Adopt the state's night: the residential limit should start at 7 p.m., as Colorado's does, not 11 p.m.
- 6 Tighten B.R.C. 5-9-6: in residential zones, outdoor amplified sound should be a violation when audible beyond the property line, not 100 or 200 feet past it. Add a C-weighted limit to B.R.C. 5-9-3. The chapter measures only in dB(A), which discounts bass by about 26 dB at 63 Hz.
- 7 Direct Code Enforcement to acquire noise meters and use them in the evening, during the hours the data identifies.
- 8 Ask CU what it is doing with its problem students. *We will soon publish the findings of an open-records request on that question, and in our view they are shocking.*

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Everything above is checkable

We publish the data and the code. Corrections are made publicly.

The report	quietenjoymentproject.org/understanding-noise-pollution.html
The interactive map	quietenjoymentproject.org/noise-map.html
Data and code	quietenjoymentproject.org/data
Methods FAQ	quietenjoymentproject.org/methods-faq.html
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Appendix: the numbers behind each slide

For the record. Full method, limitations and sensitivity ranges are in the published report.

- Slide 2** 9,011 analysed complaint records; 6,297 inside the walkshed (70%). Walkshed = 0.75-mile buffer around the university district. Permanent population 28,010 = 26% of Boulder, 36% of its permanent residents; 3,957 children. Rate 62 vs 15 calls per 1,000 permanent residents per year.
- Slide 3** Term-core nights average 6.0 complaints a night in the walkshed (73% of citywide); deep winter break 1.0. School-year Thursday to Saturday: 10.9 a night. September Fridays and Saturdays: 19. Busiest night 38 calls, Thursday 30 October 2025.
- Slide 4** School-year walkshed complaints: 1,408 (2023–24), 1,515 (2024–25, +8%), 1,777 (2025–26, +17%). 1 January to 15 August 2026 ran 29% above the same period of 2025.
- Slide 5** WHO night-noise guideline 40 dB(A) annual average outdoors; EPA 1974 indoor sleep level 45 dB(A). 154,000 resident-nights a year within 600 ft of a nighttime call (43,000 at 300 ft; 306,000 at 900 ft); 54,000 fall before a school day.
- Slide 6** Colorado: nights begin 7 p.m.; 50 dB(A) general, 45 dB(A) for periodic, impulsive or shrill noise, measured 25 ft past the property line (C.R.S. 25-12). Boulder: 11 p.m., 50 dB(A), no bass standard (B.R.C. 5-9). Fort Collins: 8 p.m., 50 dB(A).

Appendix, continued

- Slide 7** Charged citations only. Dogs: 312 citations against 13,065 animal-related calls, one per 42. Parties: 67 citations against 8,192 noise complaints citywide, one per 122, a ratio of 2.9×; against the university district's one-per-320 rate the ratio is 7.6×, which is the figure on the slide. Unmatched call categories, so this is a screening comparison; the party figure may be understated because the nuisance-party code is absent from the records production, which we have formally requested.
- Slide 8** One charged citation per 46 complaints in South Boulder; per 111 on University Hill; per 122 citywide; per 320 in the university district. BPD's charge file also holds 47 party-code rows where a report was taken and no one charged; those are excluded.
- Slide 9** Five citations at the university district's rate implies roughly 1,600 complaint calls at one address inside twelve months; roughly 550 at University Hill's rate; roughly 610 citywide. Chronic-nuisance designations to date: zero.
- Slide 10** Six in ten citywide noise complaints come from licensed rentals, which hold about half of Boulder's dwelling units. The top tenth of complained-about rental addresses accounts for 37% of rental complaint calls. Walkshed rentals draw complaints at 3.5× the rate of rentals elsewhere per licence (3.3× per parcel, 2.8× per dwelling unit).
- Slide 11** Walkshed complaints by weekday and hour, 2023–2026 (n = 6,297). Thursday, Friday and Saturday 8 p.m.–3 a.m. = 21 hours, 12.5% of the week, 51.9% of complaints. 10 p.m.–3 a.m. on the same three nights = 15 hours, 8.9%, 43.0%. The tightest contiguous block reaching half is Friday noon to Sunday 6 a.m.: 42 hours, 25% of the week, 50.1%.
- Excluded** One block is excluded from every figure: the 4500 block of 19th Street generated 950 calls from a single ongoing dispute unrelated to this subject. It sits outside the walkshed, so including it would put the walkshed share at 63% rather than 70%. Both figures are published.

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