

MINUTES  
REGULAR MEETING LA JUNTA CITY COUNCIL  
LA JUNTA, CO  
SEPTEMBER 8, 2026  
6:00 PM  
COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
601 COLORADO AVENUE

**INVOCATION (Mayor Ayala)**

Mayor Ayala gave the invocation.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE (Mayor Ayala)**

Mayor Ayala led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**CALL TO ORDER (Mayor Ayala)**

The Regular Meeting of the City Council of the City of La Junta, Colorado, was called to order by Mayor Ayala on Tuesday, September 8, 2026, at 6:01 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building.

**ROLL CALL (City Clerk)**

Present: Paul Velasquez, Ward 1  
Scott Copley, Ward 2  
Joe Ayala, Mayor  
Lisa Pantoya, Ward 3  
Maureen Rikhof, Ward 3

Absent: Damon Ramirez, Ward 1  
Chandra Ochoa, Ward 2

Also Present: Michael Hart (City Manager), Clay Buchner—via Zoom (City Attorney), Melanie Scofield (City Clerk), Aliza Libby (Director of Finance), Tom Seaba (Director of Water Utilities), Pam Denahy (Director of Tourism), Dawn Block (Personnel Director), Paula Mahoney (Admin. Asst.), Kasey Miehke (La Junta), Gary Reed (Rocky Ford), Brittany Baylor (Inspiration Field), CaSandra Thomas (La Junta), Elaine McIntyre (La Junta), Lisa Doney

**PROCLAMATION**

A. 9/11 Proclamation

Mayor Ayala proclaimed September 11 as Patriot Day and National Day of Service and Remembrance.

**INFORMATION**

A. Second Cycle Utility Billing (Aliza Libby)

Aliza Libby, Director of Finance, spoke about the issues of the Cycle 2 Utility Billing. There were communication issues with her department and the electric and water departments. She reiterated that the reads are correct and all the meters are working

properly. If it's a hardship economically for anyone affected, please come in to the office for assistance.

**B. Presentation on the Pueblo Sewage Spill (Tom Seaba)**

On August 26–27, a bypass line failed during work on a 108-inch pipe that caused a major raw sewage spill in Pueblo, entering the river near Confluence Park (where Fountain Creek joins the Arkansas River). Areas upstream of Pueblo Reservoir are unaffected, but downstream communities are impacted. Guidelines from the CDPHE, Pueblo City-County Health Department, Otero County Health Department and other agencies recommend that people avoid contact with the river downstream. Safety guidelines we are following are do not swim, wade, tube, kayak or fish in the Arkansas River. Do not drink or use untreated river water for any kind of food preparation. Keep children, pets and livestock away from the river as best you can. Do not use untreated river water in any way to prepare raw fruits or vegetables. The contaminated water will contain bacteria, and potential viruses or other parasites that can cause diarrhea, vomiting, stomach cramps, fever or other illnesses. Anyone who comes into contact with river water and begins to experience any of these symptoms should immediately wash their hands or any other exposed skin with soap and clean water. Remove any wet clothing and wash it separately and thoroughly or perhaps consider throwing it away. Contact your personal health care provider if any of these symptoms persist or develop more strongly, especially if it is somebody who is very young, older, pregnant or has a weakened immune system. Local drinking water is completely safe. The Water Treatment Plant is functioning properly, and subsequent testing shows the water quality remains identical to what it was before the incident. The river will naturally clean itself through aeration and settling basins and UV light from abundant local sunlight. While current drought conditions mean low river flows are slowing down dilution, Pueblo Reservoir recently increased releases to 60 cubic feet per second, which will help flush the contamination downstream.

**C. Auggie's Market (Nolan Brown)**

Nolan Brown was unable to make it to the meeting tonight. This item will be rescheduled.

**CITIZEN PARTICIPATION (5-minute time limit per person)**

Lisa Doney: Shared concerns with the council regarding a council member getting in her face in public, Officer Zgorzynski being on FMLA and whether he'll be required to complete a fit-for-duty and should he be required to leave departmental property at the police department, the La Junta Mayor in reference to the little girl that drowned, and Brian Lovato's about needing to get over it and move on in reference to the child's death.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

A. Regular Meeting Minutes August 17, 2026

B. Special Meeting Minutes August 31, 2026

- C. Application for a Special Events Permit by La Junta Chamber of Commerce, Christina Tozzie, Event Manager. The event is the 9/11 Gala, a 25th Anniversary Commemoration Fundraiser for Local Responders to be held September 12, 2026 from 4:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m. at 612 Adams Avenue
- D. Application for a Special Events Permit by La Junta Chamber of Commerce, Christina Tozzie, Event Manager. The event is the 5th Annual Tarantula Fest to be held September 25, 2026 from 12:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m. at 316 Santa Fe Avenue (Live Well Park)
- E. Application for a Special Events Permit by Inspiration Field, Brittany Baylor, Event Manager. The event is their Hall of Fame Dinner to be held October 10, 2026 from 12:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. at 612 Adams Avenue
- F. Application for a Special Events Permit by Inspiration Field, Brittany Baylor, Event Manager. The event is their 15th Annual Monster Bash to be held October 24, 2026 from 7:00 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. at 612 Adams Avenue
- G. Application for a Special Events Permit by Inspiration Field, Brittany Baylor, Event Manager. The event is their 5th Annual Holiday Craft Show Sip 'N Shop to be held November 7, 2026 from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at 612 Adams Avenue
- H. Application for Renewal of a Fermented Malt Beverage and Wine Liquor License by Tran & Yen LLC, d/b/a Asian Cafe, 414 W. 1st Street

MOTION TO APPROVE THE SEPTEMBER 8, 2026 CONSENT AGENDA: Rikhof

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 4-0 (Ramirez and Ochoa absent; Pantoya abstained)

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

- A. Present the 2027 Budget (Aliza Libby) (Information)

Finance Director Aliza Libby delivered the 2027 budget. A public budget hearing is scheduled for Monday, September 21, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.

- B. City Manager Semi-Annual Review (Mayor Ayala)

At the beginning of the year, we did an annual review and gave Michael some specific tasks. One of those tasks was to have a workforce analysis conducted by a third party to see if we were staffed correctly. This would show us if we had the proper number of staff for each department. When those numbers came back the first time, it was almost \$30,000. Now we're being told maybe \$50,000 to \$70,000. So council came to a consensus that we want Michael to do that himself. Michael agreed to that, and he would be switching from the third party and doing it to himself. We also talked about ways where he can communicate with the public and make himself available. Just get with Paula to set up an appointment.

C. First Reading/A TEMPORARY EVENT ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING THE LIMITED OPERATION OF GOLF CARTS, UTILITY TASK VEHICLES (UTVs), SIDE-BY-SIDES, AND OTHER APPROVED LOW-SPEED VEHICLES DURING THE ANNUAL LA JUNTA TARANTULA FEST (City Attorney) (Action)

Main Street and Urban Renewal had a tour with the Electric Department, and it was discussed that this event might be a good way to start. These vehicles are used by committee members for Tarantula Fest and Early Settlers Day. The police chief was also spoken to about this, and he felt like this would be a great trial run. If it works for this event, it could work for other events, and maybe it could be something that the City Council takes on for the community in the future. (Discussion continued regarding different aspects of the ordinance and concerns to keep in mind.)

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON FIRST READING: Rikhof

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: It was suggested to get a report back on how this went, what worked, what didn't work, so if we continued, we'd have some data.

VOTE: The motion carried 5-0 (Ramirez and Ochoa absent)

D. Committee/Board Report

Senior Center Advisory Board (Council Member Velasquez):

- Increasing the prices for their senior breakfasts and lunches to \$5.00.

Economic Development (City Manager Hart):

- Have finalized all the documentation and have sent the suggested ordinance to the city attorney.

E. City Manager Report

- Police Department: Total of 1,803 calls for service. They had 84 arrests, 165 traffic stops, and 17 traffic collisions.
- Code Enforcement: There were 201 calls for service, with 127 muni code violations and 74 animal complaints.
- Fire Department: There were 194 calls for service, 128 were EMS, 45 were for miscellaneous calls, 13 motor vehicle collisions, four structure fires, two wild land fires, one vehicle fire, and one search and rescue.
- Street Department: Have been a little short on staff. Work will begin tomorrow at 9th Street between Santa Fe and Belleview Avenue. This will include the intersection of 9th and Santa Fe. After that, they're going over to the 100 block of Lincoln and the 100 block of Belleview. Last for the season, they'll be replacing the intersection at 5th and Colorado as a joint venture with TLM.
- Sanitation Department: Free curbside recycling should be up and going, hopefully by the end of the year.

- Human Resources: Has one position as a bus driver at the Senior Center.
- Parks Department: Youth football is starting on Saturday. Youth volleyball starts next week. All the heavy-duty stainless steel toilets are finally in, and we're waiting to schedule the plumbers.
- Airport: That project is about one to two days behind schedule. They have started coming in at midnight and working overnight to catch up. They're still going to be done with that by September 21st.
- Library: Lego Club on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday, Teen Activity Group on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday, Friday Story Time at 10:00 a.m. on Fridays, and Friday Fillers for kindergarten through 6th grade at 1:00 p.m. on Fridays.

#### F. Community Events/Council Report

- Fahrenheit 451 at the Picketwire will be starting Thursday night.
- 9-11 Ceremony will start off with a parade at 10:00 a.m. on Friday morning. Then we'll have a football game that night. We'll have our American Legion post-night presenting the colors before the kickoff and then the Chamber will have a halftime presentation. On Saturday, there are 13 service projects.
- Tarantula Fest at the end of the month on the 25th and 26th.

#### G. Governing Body Report

##### Council Member Velasquez:

- Attended the Keeping Colorado Competitive Listening and Breakout Sessions held at the college.

##### Mayor Ayala

- Senator Hickenlooper was in La Junta at the Masonic Lodge and Temple.

##### Council Member Rikhof:

- The Attorney General's office was also in La Junta for a nine-county listening tour.

Potential conflict of interest during the Otero College motion at the last meeting: The town administrator made a comment regarding the possible or apparent conflict of interest with someone voting on transferring property to Otero College when that person was an employee of the college. There was the appearance of a by-pass decision because if you're getting paid by an entity, and then you are also providing something of value to that entity, it just has the appearance of impropriety or conflict and, ultimately, it's up to the council member to determine and or make that decision to recuse

themselves. It would be a lot cleaner to not participate and for the council member to not have participated in that particular vote. It was suggested to either go forward with the understanding of the advice that staff has given, or you could vacate the decision and make a motion with the council member having recused themselves, so that it wouldn't be challenged in the future. After further discussion, it was decided to place the item on the next agenda to readopt the resolution with recusals.

**ADJOURN**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF LA JUNTA

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Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

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Joseph Ayala, Mayor