

*Subject to approval at
the February 5, 2024
City Council Meeting*

STATE OF COLORADO)
COUNTY OF OTERO) SS
CITY OF LA JUNTA)

CALL TO ORDER: A regular meeting of the City Council of the City of La Junta, Colorado, was called to order by Mayor Ayala on Tuesday, January 16, 2024, at 6:04 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building.

INVOCATION: Mayor Ayala gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Mayor Ayala led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL: The following Council Members were present:

Damon Ramirez, Ward 1
Paul Velasquez, Ward 1
Joe Ayala, Mayor
Lisa Pantoya, Ward 3
Maureen Rikhof, Ward 3

Absent: Jeremiah Stoker, Ward 2
Chandra Ochoa, Ward 2

Also present: Bill Jackson, Asst. City Manager
Phil Malouff Jr., City Attorney
Melanie Scofield, City Clerk
Paula Mahoney, Admin. Asst.
Gary Cranson, Utility Board
Tom Seaba, Director of Water/Wastewater
Meghan Yergert, RO Plant ORC
Mike Bourget, Utility Board
Julie Worley, La Junta
Nancy Bennett, La Junta
Connie Shane, La Junta
Cathy Hurd, La Junta
Betty Velasquez, La Junta
Chad Penner, La Junta
Michael Weber, Denver
Ed Vela, La Junta
Adrian Hart, SECO News
Bette McFarren, RF Gazette

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING: Mayor Ayala asked if there were any corrections or additions to the minutes of the Regular City Council Meeting of January 2, 2024. Hearing none, the mayor asked for a motion to approve the minutes as published.

MOTION TO ACCEPT THE JANUARY 2, 2024 MINUTES AS PUBLISHED: Rikhof

SECOND: Ramirez

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

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

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – January 16, 2024

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION FOR NON-AGENDA ITEMS (5-minute time limit per person):

1. Julie Worley, 2417 San Juan Avenue: Otero College will be collaborating with Southeast Colorado Creative Partnership to host a Smithsonian exhibit in Southeast Colorado. “Crossroads: Change in Rural America” will be showcased and exhibited at the Otero College Student Center from Friday, January 26th through Thursday, February 29th. It is being sponsored by Southeast Colorado Creative Partnership, Otero College, and Colorado Humanities. (Event Schedule is attached)
2. Ed Vela, 1101 Russell Avenue: Listed several things that have been on the agenda for several years:
 - Bathroom at City Park for the ladies. The entryway hasn’t been fixed in three years.
 - Conley Road by Wal-Mart. The road needs to be fixed between Highway 50 and the entryway to Village Inn.
 - Tourism Fund. Has a million and a half dollars to work with. Management needs to come up with something that makes it clear what the money will be used for.
 - Interview of City Manager candidates. Wants council to afford the citizenry the opportunity to listen in on the new candidates before a decision is made on who the successor will be.

REPORTS**A. Economic Development.** Cynthia Nieb gave the following report:**Gaps in Downtown Development**

- The second block of Colorado Avenue is losing businesses at a rapid rate. There are a couple of challenges to retaining businesses in that location:
 - Some of the commercial buildings are in a distressed state and need repair
 - Some chosen businesses are not high value, meaning there is not a strong need for them in La Junta or in the immediate area. Most people choose to open business based on their desire to offer a certain product, not on community need or desire. We do need people in who provide needed services as well as goods.
 - I believe that the Opera House Pizzeria is trying to open under new management
- We will focus on finding grants that can allow us to engage a consultant who can produce a more detailed leakage study than our 2016 study that is linked to empty buildings or those that are in blighted/unsafe condition with round rehabilitation numbers attached: we should have a plan. We also need to have Urban Renewal and the City collaborate on how to save our downtown building stock before it is too late.

New Businesses

- Kava Bar on the 2nd Block of Colorado Avenue, Carly Johnson
- Reinvention of Yak and Yeti into a lounge
- Ruiz Dance Studio on 2nd Block of Santa Fe
- K Lunchbox at Midtown Inn & Suites, Korean and Greek food
- Bocca Felice/The Barista reopened on the 2nd Block of Colorado Avenue
- Sutherlands is scheduled to open in March and is interviewing for positions now
- Soco Froyo is hosting vendors in its space as well as Karaoke on Wednesday evenings
- Jake Pruyn, Kate Pruyn, Damon Nichols and Celeste Nichols have started a new venture called Strength Under Stress. They sell clothing to raise funds to combat domestic violence.

City Park Tennis Courts

- We applied for a National Park Service *Save America’s Treasures* grant on December 19, 2023 in the amount of \$255,700.60. We will apply for a State Historical Fund grant as match in the amount of \$250,000 in April. We’ll figure out a way to obtain the remaining \$5,700.60 in match.
- We crunched some numbers, and if we do have the anticipated number of meets for tennis and pickleball, our economy could be improved by as much as 1-2 million dollars in local related costs.
- These tennis courts are a historic, rare resource from the WPA/CWA program. They cannot be removed without endangering our status as a National Register resource and access to grants.
- Tennis courts are easy to maintain.
- The Tennis Court Survey stands at 177 replies with 96.6% in favor of rehabilitation. The survey ends on February 15, 2024.

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Grants

- We need to be measured in applying for grants to accommodate our capacity to administer them and complete work. We only have one grant writer and administrator who also has numerous other duties. We also need to be mindful of other City divisions and their grant-related commitments.
- The Colorado Health Foundation representative for our area, Charles Reese, has asked to speak to me about their new direction and how they can help La Junta.
- We have been invited to work with the Colorado Trust. I'll update that information during the next report.

Housing

- I have been asked to speak to officials from THE COLORADO FORUM on housing in southeastern Colorado. I presented on that topic in June 2022 for the Gates Family Foundation board retreat in Wyoming, and Tom Gougeon, GFF Executive Director, suggested my name to The Colorado Forum. That ZOOM call will occur next week.

Boards

- As of December 2023, I am a new board member of the Community Resource Center, which is responsible for Rural Philanthropy Days.

Urban Renewal

- Board Elections will take place on January 25 for the executive committee and one board position. Four applicants will attend the meeting on February 25 to be interviewed:
 - Bethany Bender
 - Carly Boudreau
 - Ben Mason
 - Randall Roberson
- SBrand (Sheryl Trent) created a Strategic Plan for the LJ URA over the last half year. We held a retreat and several work sessions to get to the point where we are having a final work session on Thursday, January 18 in the Power Board Room at 4pm. The final vote on the plan will take place at the regularly scheduled meeting on the 25th. The components of the plan include:
 - The Mission
 - LJ URA Discovery Report and Brand Guide
 - Guiding Principles
 - Strategic Plan
 - Financial Application Review
 - We discovered that most of the community does not understand LJ URA
 - Our mission is to address blight and safety issues in the district by creating public and private partnerships and leveraging funding sources

Certified Local Government

- Last Friday, we turned in a \$25,000 Certified Local Government grant application to perform a Historic Survey of East 1st & 2nd Streets. Preliminary investigation has suggested that there are significant Hispanic, railroad, and Green Book resources in the area. With the potential to be listed as a Historic District, there would be the opportunity to apply for historic tax credits and State Historical Fund grants for buildings in the area.
- The First United Methodist Church is seeking designation for their church to capture its history and become eligible for historic tax credits and State Historical Fund grants.
- Board member Toni Madrid approached the La Junta Rotary to develop a program that captures the local histories of businesses and their buildings (already available from our last Downtown Historic Survey) and provides access to that information via a QR Code that will be exhibited in the individual storefront windows.

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- La Junta RISE was contacted by The COLORADO SUN to provide information pertaining to cultural events and programs in La Junta.
- La Junta RISE staff attended a planning session for the Otero College Facilities Master Plan and offered suggestions on funding.
- THE AGE OF A LOBSTER, a novel by Stephen Mathews about coming of age was a finalist in the 2023 Best Indie Books Awards.
- Kleinmaker Space is receiving an award on Tuesday, March 12, 2024 from the Colorado Business Committee for the Arts for fostering creativity and innovation for the betterment of their entire community through education, tourism, economic development, inspiration and local pride.

Note: I would like to take this opportunity to thank Rick Klein for believing in me by hiring me over six years ago. I've been inspired by your leadership, vision (at least five years ahead of everyone else), broad range of skills, ability to plan and execute, and willingness to give anyone a second chance. Your kindness is legendary, starting with the phrase "Let's not" when you don't want to move forward with an item to pushing endless wheelchairs of residents so that you can get an update on their lives. Your love for La Junta is unquestioned, and, although most residents don't know it, you are the nexus of forward momentum at the regional, state and federal levels: your expertise and ability to "get 'er done" no matter what the challenges has made all the difference in La Junta receiving programs, projects, businesses, and money. Thank you for always putting La Junta first and your ego second. We will miss you more than you know, Rick.

Mayor Ayala: The mayor read City Manager Rick Klein's resignation letter. It will be effective February 29, 2024. There are a lot of things that need to be done. As soon as the council knows more, they will let everyone else know.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Application for a Special Event Permit by La Junta Chamber of Commerce, Event Manager, Jessica LaPage. The event is their Annual Banquet to be held January 29, 2024 from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at 2001 San Juan Avenue. The application is in order and has been reviewed by City supervisors for compliance with City and State codes. The appropriate fee has been tendered and the premises have been posted. The City Attorney recommends approval.

MOTION TO GRANT A SPECIAL EVENT PERMIT TO LA JUNTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOR THEIR ANNUAL BANQUET TO BE HELD JANUARY 29, 2024 FROM 6:00 P.M. TO 9:00 P.M. AT 2001 SAN JUAN AVENUE: Rikhof

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 4-0 (Stoker and Ochoa absent, Pantoya abstained)

B. Committee/Board Reports

1. Senior Center Advisory Board (Council Member Velasquez):
 - Offering a trip to San Antonio in May.
 - Looking at reinstituting the dances in May.
2. Utility Board (Council Member Velasquez):
 - There was a main leak at 1900 San Juan that affected the water service to Otero College.
 - They assisted contractors on the new Sheriff's office buildings.
 - Replaced several leaking meter setters.
 - Assisted plumbers in removing a clog out by one of our businesses caused by a fat, oil, grease and flushable wipes that don't disintegrate.
 - There's going to be continued work on the lead and copper survey of the city.

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- Cheraw High School had students that toured the RO Plant and it was educational.
- There were damaged cross arms replaced at 2209 Carson Avenue and at the Airport.
- Three power poles were removed from 501 Barnes Avenue, 1322 W. 5th Street and 2909 San Juan Avenue. The poles have been abandoned with no services attached.
- Several of the high pressurized sodium lights, which are the old lights, were replaced with LEDs throughout town.
- Bidding process will begin for electric substation equipment testing. It's been some time since it was last tested and the equipment is old.
- Discussion is in the beginning stages of replacing the trash trucks. They are quite expensive.

Director of Water/Wastewater Tom Seaba: We've retained the firm Hazen and Sawyer on January 2nd. They're going to assist us going over information and data requests concerning the Arkansas Valley Conduit. Tonight, Mr. Mike Weber, who works for Hazen and Sawyer, wanted to be present to see if anyone had questions. We've already began trying to fill data requests. We're hoping to see this initial report from them completed in early March. It'll definitely be completed before the Utility Board meeting the third week in March and it should resolve a lot of questions that we have concerning volume of water that the city could use, the volumes of water that will help us meet permit compliance, especially concerning selenium, manganese and all of the PFAS elements.

D. Governing Body Comments

1. Council Member Rikhof:
 - Have questions about the process for filling the city manager's position. This business needs to be done in public and people in the city should be part of the process and know as soon as possible what their part is. The people of La Junta deserve to have some sort of statement from the council on what to expect for the process.
2. Council Member Pantoya:
 - The La Junta Chamber of Commerce Banquet is Monday the 29th. If anybody wants to buy any tables or tickets, they can contact the Chamber.
3. Council Member Velasquez:
 - Glad to see that there was a contingency plan to get people that would be exposed to the cold temperatures to a shelter. Thanked Marty Lee, United Methodist Church of Rocky Ford, which was the shelter. Also thanked Sheriff Shawn Mobley, Mr. Rick Ritter from the Otero County Health Department, La Junta Fire Chief Brad Davidson and Chief of Police Todd Quick.
4. Mayor Ayala:
 - Representative Ty Winter urged the governor to disperse more funds to rural communities when they declare a state of emergency.

There being no further business, the regular meeting adjourned at 6:46 p.m.

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MOTION TO GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR DISCUSSION OF A PERSONNEL MATTER UNDER C.R.S. §24-6-402(4)(f) AND NOT INVOLVING: ANY SPECIFIC EMPLOYEES WHO HAVE REQUESTED DISCUSSION OF THE MATTER IN OPEN SESSION; ANY MEMBER OF THIS BODY OR ANY ELECTED OFFICIAL; THE APPOINTMENT OF ANY PERSON TO FILL AN OFFICE OF THIS BODY OR OF AN ELECTED OFFICIAL; OR PERSONNEL POLICIES THAT DO NOT REQUIRE THE DISCUSSION OF MATTERS PERSONAL TO PARTICULAR EMPLOYEES: Velasquez

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: Purpose of the executive meeting is to devise a plan regarding the search for a city manager.

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

ATTEST:

CITY OF LA JUNTA

Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

Joe Ayala, Mayor

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
Museum on Main Street (MoMS) Exhibition

EVENT SCHEDULE

“CROSSROADS: Change in Rural America”
Otero College Student Center/2001 San Juan Avenue – La Junta
Friday – January 26, 2024 – Thursday – February 29, 2024

Sponsored & Hosted by:
Southeast Colorado Creative Partnership (SECCP)
Otero College (OC)
Colorado Humanities

Exhibition and all companion events free and open to the public.
Exhibition schedule is subject to change depending on weather.
For updates, please listen to La Junta Radio, Lightning AM 1400 or Thunder Country 92.1 FM

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| <i>Friday, January 26, 2024</i> | <p><i>Exhibition Opening Reception – 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.</i>
Otero College Student Center Banquet Room
Public Invited to Attend
All attendees to the opening reception receive a free ticket to the OC men's basketball game at 7:00 p.m. Friday evening.</p> <p>Showing of Colorado Humanities Documentary Film
“5 States of Colorado” – 5:00 p.m./Banquet Room.
Facilitator from Colorado Humanities will be present.</p> |
| <i>Saturday, January 27, 2024</i> | <p><i>Exhibition Open – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.</i>
Showing of “5 States of Colorado” – 1:00 p.m.
Otero College Student Center</p> |
| <i>Thursday, February 1, 2024</i> | <p><i>Exhibition Open – 12:00 noon – 8:00 p.m.</i>
Otero College Student Center</p> <p>Companion Presentation – “History of La Junta”
Presenter: Bob Fowler
Presentation at 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.
Otero College Student Center – Room 120</p> |
| <i>Saturday, February 3, 2024</i> | <p><i>Exhibition Open – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.</i>
Showing of “5 States of Colorado” – 1:00 p.m.
Otero College Student Center – Room 120</p> |
| <i>Thursday, February 8, 2024</i> | <p><i>Exhibition Open – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.</i>
Otero College Student Center</p> |
| <i>Saturday, February 10, 2024</i> | <p><i>Exhibition Open – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.</i>
Showing of “5 States of Colorado” – 1:00 p.m.
Otero College Student Center – Room 120</p> |
| <i>Thursday, February 12, 2024</i> | <p><i>Exhibition Open – 12:00 noon – 8:00 p.m.</i>
Otero College Student Center</p> <p>Companion Presentation – “My Vision/The Manzanola Dry Settlement”
Presenter: Darlene Derbigny
Presentation at 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.
Otero College Student Center – Room 120</p> |

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Saturday, February 17, 2024 **Exhibition Open – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.**
Showing of “5 States of Colorado” – 1:00 p.m.
Otero College Student Center

Thursday, February 22, 2024 **Exhibition Open – 12:00 noon – 8:00 p.m.**
Otero College Student Center

Companion Presentation
“Holly/Swink Railroad Company Helped Grow the Arkansas Valley”
Presenter: Chuck Hanagan
Presentation at 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.
Otero College Student Center – Room 120

Saturday, February 24, 2024 **Exhibition Open – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.**
Showing of “5 States of Colorado” – 1:00 p.m.
Otero College Student Center

Thursday, February 29, 2024 **Exhibition Open – 12:00 noon – 4:00 p.m.**
Otero College Student Center
(LAST DAY EXHIBIT IS OPEN)