

**CITY COUNCIL MEETING – February 3, 2025**

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

**CALL TO ORDER:** The regular meeting of the City Council of the City of La Junta, Colorado, was called to order by Mayor Ayala on Monday, February 3, 2025, at 6:00 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  
Jeremiah Stoker, Ward 2  
Joe Ayala, Mayor  
Chandra Ochoa, Ward 2  
Lisa Pantoya, Ward 3  
Maureen Rikhof, Ward 3




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Subject to approval at the  
February 18, 2025  
City Council Meeting

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Absent: none

Also present: Brad Davidson, Interim City Manager  
Erin Harris, City Attorney  
Melanie Scofield, City Clerk  
Andy Flemer, AVRMC  
Douglas Golding, La Junta  
Josh Harris, La Junta  
Norma Haugen, La Junta  
Steve Elwood, La Junta  
Nancy Harrington, La Junta  
Betty Velasquez, La Junta  
Natalie Ridgwell, La Junta  
Phileanna Brown, La Junta  
Dottie Burnett, La Junta  
Nancy Bennett, La Junta  
Angela Ayala, La Junta  
Bette McFarren, RF Daily Gazette  
Adrian Hart, SECO News



**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 21, 2025.

**MOTION TO ACCEPT THE JANUARY 21, 2025 MINUTES AS PUBLISHED:** Ochoa

**SECOND:** Pantoya

**DISCUSSION:** There was no discussion

**VOTE:** The motion carried 7-0

**RECOGNITION:** Chief Davidson presented Steve Elwood with a certificate of completion for the Paramedic Certification Program.

## CITY COUNCIL MEETING – February 3, 2025

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

1. Douglas Golding, 1316 Lincoln Avenue: Congratulated the City on their website. Thanked and appreciated Councilwoman Maureen Rikhof for giving her time to meet with the constituents from Ward 3.

Regarding the speed trailer, he believes traffic laws and violations are police matters and should be left to them on whether to spend money out of their budget on such a device. Has it been determined that there is uncontrolled speeding in the city resulting in a significant number of accidents on La Junta streets? Has this ticketing solution been proven to address such problems? The only possible positive could be if it changed driver habits, reduced speeds and reduced accidents. Mr. Golding doesn't believe the City of La Junta has enough funds for a \$3,500 a month investment. There's a lot of other problems that should be addressed, if the funds are available, the homeless and drug use. He hasn't found anyone who thinks this is a good idea.

**REPORTS**

- A. **Arkansas Valley Regional Medical Center.** City Attorney Harris explained that the relationship between the City and the hospital is outlined in a 1998 contract called the Consolidated Agreement and this contract creates the trigger points when the hospital is prompted to give information to the City. Back in 1998, the hospital was so important to the city, that the City must have expressed an interest in being kept up-to-date on what the financial circumstances of the hospital was. At that time, there was a multi-ownership going on where the City owned a few things, the Mennonites owned some things and the Community Health Organizations owned some things as well. They consolidated all of that together in 1998. Now, when there are significant financial changes at the hospital, they are prompted to speak formally for the three primary trigger points to the City. Mr. Flemer is here this evening representing the hospital to give us some information that is required for him to share under the contract. The City does not have a duty to take an action. The City merely has an opportunity to get information and then the City is given an increasing opportunity for a role growing to a point where there could be an advisory board created that would be populated by City parties as well as those from the hospital and others within the community. We've not reached that point where it is a compulsory opening for that. It doesn't mean through that we couldn't conclude that we'd like to be able to work together more. The reason for Andy's appearance here this evening is to give us some information in an informal way because we want to know and because by now, there's been a lot out in the community but also the formal information provided to the council that tells the council what has happened with the hospital financials that are required to be shared.

**Andy Flemer, AVRMC CEO:** The hospital board voted at their regular meeting last Tuesday to close the OB services effective April 30<sup>th</sup>. The Medical Director, Dr. Mandy Swanson, who's on the faculty at CU School of Medicine, informed the hospital a week ago Tuesday that she could not safely staff the OB call schedule beyond April 30<sup>th</sup>. The OB Program loses about \$200,000 a month. It's mainly because of high Medicaid and Medicaid only covers 45% of the cost to deliver care in the State of Colorado. One of the reasons for the board voting to close the OB Program is they don't want one service that large a loss per month, that equates out to \$2.4 million annually. That would bring the whole hospital down. They didn't want to take that risk. There was a lot of thoughtful discussion at that board meeting, and it wasn't an easy decision to come to but I think the right decision was made. Unless we can get funding that covers the cost of that very expensive service, we unfortunately need to close that service. Mayor Ayala took the initiative to write a very well-crafted letter to Governor Polis. He then implored all the other mayors and commissioners of other towns in Southeast Colorado because we are a regional medical center. We serve not just Otero, Bent and Crowley Counties, we also serve Springfield, Kim and towns over the border into Oklahoma and Kansas. So, we serve a large area. We've also seen the birth rates in our OB unit drop. When Lamar's program closed about a year ago, we saw our births go up from about 10 a month to about 25. You cannot operate an OB Program and have that low of birth rate per month. It needs to be closer to 20-25. Keep imploring everybody to please utilize your hospital. While we're cutting a service that's significant, we're still looking for solutions and if we're able to find the funding that is necessary to run the program and have it either break even or have a small surplus that would be ideal. We also tried to salvage the doctors that used to work for Valley Wide but that ended up not working. Of the seven

**CITY COUNCIL MEETING – February 3, 2025**

PRN physicians, only three of them are C-section certified. You have to have a C-section trained doctor on call 24/7 and the backup for ones that are not C-section trained. So, we save a little bit of money doing it that way. But one of those three broke ranks with the seven doctors that were all in unity to help us salvage this program and took a job closer to home and for more money. That's what sent the call schedule into a tail spin because Dr. Swanson and Dr. Rittmueller are the other two that can do C-sections and they can't give us any more time. We do have a work group pulled together of hospital staff and people in the community to help us make sure we do this closure correctly and safety. Our lead nurse in the clinic is already in the process of getting all of the known expectant mothers a new doctor. So, we're taking that level of care to ensure people get the care they need. We're not just going to let them go and try to find someone on their own. That nurse is matching up each patient with an appropriate OBGYN. Also, nobody is going to lose a job. Offers have been made to every RN on the on the OB unit. That's sixteen RN's. We have a lot of agency nurses at our hospital and they want to work in a different department. We'll provide the training that they will need and to train a nurse to work takes 9-12 months. We have a need to not let any of these nurses go.

Mr. Flemer answered questions of the City Council.

**NEW BUSINESS****A. Liquor Licenses**

1. **Application for Renewal of a Lodging and Entertainment Liquor License by Yak and Yeti Hotel Inc., d/b/a La Junta Inn, 1325 E. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street.** The application is in order and has been reviewed by City supervisors for compliance with City and State codes. Appropriate fees have been tendered and the City Clerk recommends approval.

MOTION TO GRANT A RENEWAL OF A LODGING AND ENTERTAINMENT LIQUOR LICENSE BY YAK AND YETI HOTEL INC., D/B/A LA JUNTA INN, 1325 E. 3<sup>RD</sup> STREET: Stoker

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

2. **Application for Renewal of a Tavern Liquor License by Ronald E. Hall, d/b/a The Railyard, 114 Colorado Avenue.** The application is in order and has been reviewed by City supervisors for compliance with City and State codes. Appropriate fees have been tendered and the City Clerk recommends approval.

MOTION TO GRANT A RENEWAL OF A TAVERN LIQUOR LICENSE BY RONALD E. HALL, D/B/A THE RAILYARD, 114 COLORADO AVENUE: Stoker

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

- B. First Reading/AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF LA JUNTA AMENDING THE SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS ORIGINALLY ADOPTED AS PART OF THE "ZONING ORDINANCE".** The ordinance was introduced by title only, there being copies available to those in attendance.

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON FIRST READING: Stoker

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: This ordinance is combining some of the language from the building code, fire code and electric code, making sure that all the timing of days coordinates with each other along with some additional language changes.

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

**CITY COUNCIL MEETING – February 3, 2025****C. Board Appointments**

1. **Appoint Carly Johnson to the La Junta Urban Renewal Authority Board – term to expire 12/31/2026.**

MOTION TO APPOINT CARLY JOHNSON TO THE LA JUNTA URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY BOARD: Ochoa

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: There are still currently two vacancies on this Board.

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

2. **Appoint Ben Mason to the La Junta Urban Renewal Authority Board – term to expire 12/31/2029.**

MOTION TO APPOINT BEN MASON TO THE LA JUNTA URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY BOARD: Ochoa

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: There was no further discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

- D. **Bob's Rules of Order for Colorado Local Governments.** Nothing had been found where the Council formally adopted anything. The Charter indicates that the council has the right to adopt any kind of procedure for running meetings that they choose. It seems that current procedures were a practice and not a policy or vote.

MOTION TO ADOPT BOB'S RULES OF ORDER FOR COLORADO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: Stoker

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: The parliamentarian is the mayor.

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

**E. Committee/Board Reports**

1. AVRMC Board (Council Member Velasquez):
  - Andy Flemer will give talking points that Council Member Velasquez may share.
  - If there's anything that needs to be brought to Council's attention, Mr. Flemer will report directly to the Council.

**F. Interim City Manager's Comments**

- Water Department: You'll notice 6<sup>th</sup> and Santa Fe Avenue is still kind of tore up. The reason its tore up is because the instability of the ground that's underneath. The leak is fixed but we will have to wait on fixing the road until the ground dries out.
- Street Department: We're going to start seeing a lot of potholes popping up because when water sits on top of the asphalt then it starts melting and thaws, it starts getting underneath the asphalt then refreezes at night and that's where potholes start. Please report them to the Building Department.
- Electric Department: Has been doing a lot of maintenance lately on power lines.
- Recreation Department: Little kids' basketball is going on now.
- Parks Department: Worked over the weekend at Tippy Martinez Park. They have to install a warning track out in the outfield in the fence and that's per the new rules of the college softball.

**CITY COUNCIL MEETING – February 3, 2025**

- Fire Department: 2024 Year-End Numbers
 

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|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| EMS Calls – 1574        | Structure Fires – 21 | Priorities of Calls     |
| Calls for Service – 829 | Fatalities – 2       | 1) Falls                |
| Total EMS Calls – 2403  | Wildland Fires – 44  | 2) Difficulty Breathing |
|                         |                      | 3) Auto Accidents       |
|                         |                      | 4) Assaults             |
- Police Department: 2024 Year-End Numbers
 

|                                  |
|----------------------------------|
| Total Calls for Service – 22,069 |
| Areas Highlighted:               |
| Arrests – 1108                   |
| Against Property – 369           |
| Burglary – 83                    |
| Shoplifting – 268                |
- Had an emergency standby for a two-person airplane coming in with a mechanical issue. It had lost its alternator. They landed safely.

**G. Governing Body's Comments**

1. Council Member Velasquez:
  - Thanked Brad for all of his work in taking on Interim City Manager.
  - Asked Mr. Golding if he thought it would help to place the radar trailer out by the golf course because it has been an issue in the past with golfers driving their carts with excessive speeds.
2. Council Member Rikhof:
  - Thanked Brad for stepping up and showing real leadership. It was really appreciated. Glad that you love being our Fire Chief.
  - Shout out to the road crews. Reported what looked like a meteor shower on the 500 block of Lincoln Avenue and within twenty minutes they were already out there.
  - Received the year end budget. Think it would be valuable to put that on the next agenda and have the budget director available to answer questions.
  - Ward 3 Listening meeting is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of every month at Casa del Sol at 6:00 p.m. in the Aspen Center. Everyone is invited.
3. Council Member Stoker:
  - Thanked Brad for keeping us afloat while we had no full-time City Manager.
  - While the speed trailer could improve public safety, not a fan of fining our citizens to pay another outside entity as well as the fact that its going to take eighty-seven people to pay tickets to break even on that machine before the city even thinks about making any revenue off of it. Also, the budget, we can't risk paying that.
  - Reminder on public safety, if there are stoplights on a roadway that are not working, treat it as a four-way stop.
4. Mayor Ayala:
  - Question about Property Management, it is an Enterprise Fund but it doesn't report to Utility Board or to Council. Where would it fall?  
  
Interim City Manager Davidson: Since it's not really a utility but more of a revenue for the City, I would encourage a quarterly report to the City Council.
  - Also with Economic Development, I was under the impression that Pam Denahy was going to be filling in for the rest of 2024 and then revisit that in 2025. I saw a signed contract with Denahy Inc. for all of 2025 and it listed a Director of Economic Development. Do we have any options at this point when Michael comes in. I was thinking that Economic Development should go back with Urban Renewal.  
  
Interim City Manager Davidson: Thought it would help to keep going that direction until Michael got in and got his feet going and decided where he wanted to go with that. I should have gotten a little more direction.

**CITY COUNCIL MEETING – February 3, 2025**

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City Attorney Harris: The contract is subject to the needs of the council. All contracts that we draft with the City, mine or anyone else's, are all at will. What is unique about the contract with Denahy Inc. is it has a set of highly detailed factors that the council, at one time or another, believed were important either for Economic Development or for Tourism, the two aspects that Denahy Inc. takes care of right now. Another factor that the council might want to talk about is looking at the factors that are currently in the contract that pertain to Economic Development to decide whether that's a) what the council wants or b) are being met. Tourism is another separate fund with separate funding. They have separate meanings but if Tourism ever were to come speak directly to council, council would want to review the points of that contract to be ready for whatever questions we might have.

- Thanks to all the volunteers who are coaching recreational games.
- Thanks to the Chamber of Commerce for the Chamber Banquet this past Monday.  
Gil Esquibel won the Try Family First Award  
Angela Ayala won Volunteer of the Year  
Steve Ptolemy won the Agricultural Award  
SECOM won Business of the Year  
Pat McGee won Community Service Award  
Thanks to all the winners.
- Thanked Brad again for everything that he does.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

**ATTEST:**

**CITY OF LA JUNTA**

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Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

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Joseph Ayala, Mayor