

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – February 17, 2026

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 Tuesday, February 17, 2026, 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
Carly Johnson, Ward 2
Joe Ayala, Mayor
Chandra Ochoa, Ward 2
Lisa Pantoya, Ward 3
Maureen Rikhof, Ward 3

Absent: Paul Velasquez, Ward 1

Also present: Michael Hart, City Manager
Melanie Scofield, City Clerk
Pam Denahy, Econ. Dev.
Jennifer Hinkhouse, Purchasing
Todd Quick, Police
Elaine McIntyre, La Junta
Michael Yerman, SECRHA
Teale Hemphill, SECRHA
Jaclyn Wendland, La Junta
Vivian Herrera, La Junta
Tom Seaba, Water
Casey Weber, Water
Meghan Wike, Water
Gary Reed, Rocky Ford
Adrian Hart, SECO News
Nancy Harrington, SECO News
Bette McFarren, RF Gazette


Subject to approval at the
March 2, 2026
City Council Meeting


EMPLOYEE SERVICE AWARDS

A. February 2026

1. Casey Weber, Water – 5 years

- 8 years seasonal at Pool
- Hired full-time 2/2/21 at Airport/Aviation
- Transferred 1/16/23 to Water Plant
- Successfully obtained Class D Water Treatment and Class 1 Water Distribution certificates

2. Todd Quick, Police – 25 years

- Patrolman 2/16/2001
- Corporal 6/1/2004
- Sergeant 1/16/2005
- Captain 12/01/2005
- Chief of Operations 05/16/2006
- Police Chief 01/01/2013

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – February 17, 2026**CITIZEN PARTICIPATION (5-minute time limit per person):**

1. Vivianna Herrera, La Junta Jr/Sr High School Tiger Theatre: Invited everyone to their performance of the Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon to be held on Thursday, February 19th and Friday, February 20th at 7:00 p.m. and Saturday, February 21st at 2:00 p.m. Tickets are \$10.00 each and doors open thirty minutes prior to the show.
2. Jaclyn Wendland, Community Outreach & Partnership Coordinator, Airborne ABA: Introduced Airborne ABA as a community partner and resource for families across the region. It provides applied behavior analysis or ABA therapy. It is designed to teach meaningful skills and reduce behaviors that interfere with learning, safety, and independence. It focuses on building communication, daily living skills, social interactions, and self-regulation through structured teaching and real-life practices. ABA is partnered with CDS across the Valley along with Lamar and Crowley County School Districts. Services are funded through medical insurance for eligible children.

PRESENTATION

- A. **Southeast Colorado Regional Housing Authority (SECRHA), Teale Hemphill, Program Director**: SECRHA has completed 117 units since 2022 in the six-county region and is completing the required Housing Needs Assessment for the entire region and the City of La Junta this year. Also, during that time, MY Rural Planner (MYRP) worked with 17 local governments, who had already opted in to Prop 123, to adopt expedited review resolutions, making them eligible to receive \$50,000 Incentive Grant awards from DOLA, including La Junta. Many of the communities in the region are committing the \$50,000 award back to the SECRHA to continue housing efforts in the region. The City of La Junta has recently removed two blighted homes at 1214 Rice Avenue and 618 Colorado Avenue. The SECRHA is requesting the Council to consider donating these lots to the program for potential new home sites within the program.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. **Regular Meeting Minutes February 2, 2026**
- B. **Application for a Special Events Permit by Our Lady of Guadalupe/St. Patrick Parish, Kim Hanagan, Event Manager. The event is their Annual Dinner Auction to be held March 14, 2026 from 8:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. at 202 Lincoln Avenue**
- C. **Application for Renewal of a Tavern Liquor License by Ronald Hall, d/b/a The Railyard, 114 Colorado Avenue**
- D. **Application for Renewal of a Lodging & Entertainment Liquor License by Yak & Yeti Hotel Inc. d/b/a Yak and Yeti, 1325 E. 3rd Street**

MOTION TO APPROVE THE FEBRUARY 17, 2026 CONSENT AGENDA: Ramirez

SECOND: Ochoa

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 6-0 (Velasquez absent)

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- A. **Second Reading/AN ORDINANCE CREATING A NEW CHAPTER 9.10 OF TITLE 9 OF THE LA JUNTA MUNICIPAL CODE, ENTITLED "GAMBLING DEVICES"**. The ordinance was introduced by title only, there being copies available to those in attendance.

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON SECOND READING: Ochoa

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: The City Council of the City of La Junta finds and declares that gambling activities and gambling devices, when not expressly authorized by state law, pose risks to the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the community, including increased criminal activity, public nuisance conditions, and consumer deception.

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VOTE: The motion carried 6-0 (Velasquez absent)

- B. Second Reading/AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LA JUNTA, COLORADO ADOPTING CHAPTER 9.14 OF THE LA JUNTA MUNICIPAL CODE REGARDING ADMINISTRATIVE CLOSURE OF PREMISES ENGAGED IN UNLAWFUL ACTIVITY.** The ordinance was introduced by title only, there being copies available to those in attendance.

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON SECOND READING: Pantoya

SECOND: Ramirez

DISCUSSION: The City Council of the City of La Junta finds and declares that certain unlawful activities conducted on commercial or nonresidential premises, including but not limited to illegal gambling operations, constitute a threat to the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the community.

VOTE: The motion carried 6-0 (Velasquez absent)

- C. Second Reading/AN ORDINANCE ADOPTING CHAPTER 8.14 OF THE LA JUNTA MUNICIPAL CODE ENTITLED “PUBLIC NUISANCE ABATEMENT, INJUNCTIONS, AND RELATED REMEDIES”.** The ordinance was introduced by title only, there being copies available to those in attendance.

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON SECOND READING: Pantoya

SECOND: Ochoa

DISCUSSION: The City Council finds and declares that certain conditions, activities, and uses of property may constitute public nuisances when they threaten the public, safety, morals, or general welfare of the community.

VOTE: The motion carried 6-0 (Velasquez absent)

- D. Second Reading/AN ORDINANCE CREATING A NEW ARTICLE WITHIN CHAPTER 9.08 OF TITLE 9 OF THE LA JUNTA MUNICIPAL CODE PROHIBITING GAMBLING AND SIMULATED GAMBLING DEVICES, PROVIDING DEFINITIONS, ESTABLISHING PENALTIES, DECLARING GAMBLING PREMISES A PUBLIC NUISANCE, AND AUTHORIZING SEIZURE AND FORFEITURE OF GAMBLING DEVICES AND PROCEEDS.** The ordinance was introduced by title only, there being copies available to those in attendance.

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON SECOND READING: Ramirez

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: Authorizes the seizure and forfeiture of gambling devices and proceeds.

VOTE: The motion carried 6-0 (Velasquez absent)

NEW BUSINESS

A. Board Appointments

1. Senior Citizens Advisory Board

a. Mitch Cruz (term to expire 12/31/2028)

MOTION TO APPOINT MITCH CRUZ TO THE SENIOR CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD:
Pantoya

SECOND: Johnson

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 6-0 (Velasquez absent)

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – February 17, 2026**b. Hollis Goodwin (term to expire 12/31/2026)**

MOTION TO APPOINT HOLLIS GOODWIN TO THE SENIOR CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD: Ochoa

SECOND: Ramirez

DISCUSSION: Although board appointments were recently approved, two additional members turned in their letters of resignation since then.

VOTE: The motion carried 6-0 (Velasquez absent)

B. First Reading/AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE 2026 BUDGET FOR THE CITY OF LA JUNTA, COLORADO, WATER FUND, AND MAKING A SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION. The ordinance was introduced by title only, there being copies available to those in attendance.

Tom Seaba, Director of Water Utilities: The supplemental is to replace the delivery pipes and headgates at our Holbrook Farms. This past summer, Holbrook did a survey of every headgate in their system and we weren't notified until later when they provided us with the letter and the results of which basically stated every one of our headgates required replacement due to significant water loss when in use. We knew that at some point in our future, these would need to be replaced, we just didn't know it was now.

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON FIRST READING: Rikhof

SECOND: Ramirez

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 6-0 (Velasquez absent)

C. Committee/Board Reports

1. Planning Commission (Council Member Rikhof):
 - Meeting will be this Thursday.

D. City Manager Report

- HB26-1001 – “Housing Development On Qualifying Properties.” It is basically a preemptive bill that the state is pushing through that would permit schools, institutions of higher learning, public housing authorities, and a plethora of nonprofits to be able to circumvent proper planning and zoning in building housing on properties that they own. It is now sitting on the Senate side. It will be in committee on March 4th, 2026. This is a bill that is opposed by the Municipal League as well as Action Colorado.
- SB26-097 – “Decriminalization Adult Commercial Sexual Activity.” So far, it's not been assigned to a committee yet. If it does start to catch some steam, that'll be another one a bunch of us will be going to Denver to testify against.
- Will be going to CML for their annual Legislative Workshop on Thursday and then the CML Legislative Committee will be meeting on Friday.
- The new grocery store is progressing. They are looking to hire 40 full-time employees. Right now, they've received over 200 applications. They are looking to start the hiring process in April. Check their Facebook page for updates. They also have a Google survey out they would like for people to take. They're hoping to open by early May.

E. Community Events/Council Report

Council Member Rikhof:

- Appreciated the presentation that Lewis gave us in June. Recently had Cameron Salzbrenner from Inspiration Field do a similar type presentation. I appreciate when we've had community organizations do that for the council and I would like to encourage that we do more of those.
- Congratulations to Michael for being here a year. Thank you for your service and we appreciate having you in La Junta.

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- I want to follow up on a couple of things to that effect. I think that part of what we had talked about when we were interviewing and bringing a city manager here is a strong commitment to supporting the city manager with an annual review and feedback. I'm asking what we're going to be doing publicly. I think people would like to know how they can let Michael know what he's done that they've appreciated and what's working well for La Junta in the past year and what we'd like to see more of going forward.
- Carly, thank you. We appreciate your service and I believe this is your last meeting. So, we do have an open seat and just wanted to discuss as a council how we're going to be filling that.
 - As part of that conversation, I would like to suggest that we open up a conversation about what it would look like to move away from ward representation to at-large representation for all seven council seats instead of just the mayor's seat.

F. Governing Body Reports

1. Mayor Ayala: When we did the evaluation of a previous city manager, we couldn't even find the last one that was done. I think they said maybe seven years prior. Those that took part in that review know it was very long and there was a lot of questions and it was a scoring system basically. When I reached out to CML, they said, Michael is a member of ICMA. I also called Lamar. Mayor Crespín said they just redid there's and they used ICMA. What they did was mix three of them and just did it to their own liking. Michael will be here a year officially tomorrow but I want to make sure we do this right so it is easy, simple, and giving him a vision of where we want him to be. I want you guys to all feel comfortable with it. I want there to be a place, maybe online, for a public comment or something like that to where we take that into consideration. It'll be done hopefully before the end of March. This will be a special work session on how we want to do it and then another session to actually do it. I feel like we owe it to the council to do this the right way this time and make sure that what we have lasts for a long time.

For the wards and at-large, that would have to be something that we change in the charter. To change a charter, it has to go out to a vote of the people. We can start doing this to see what the process looks like. We'll make sure we get that going so everyone understands that side of it.

City Clerk Scofield: Per Carly's letter, she stated March 1st would be her end of term for this seat. The vacancy can't be opened until she's vacated it. Then it will be published in the paper, put on our Facebook page and the city website that we have this vacancy open and what the qualifications are. We'll take letters for a certain amount of time that way the council has time to review them. Then at the next council meeting, interviews can be done and the council can make a decision.

Thank you, Michael, for your time and working with me for a whole year. Michael broke some news on Auggies. We've known about this for quite some time but we were making sure that we were being fair to Auggies. It wasn't about keeping the community in the dark. We wanted them to know that they could trust us with this information. When we heard about Safeway potentially closing and then, yes, it is closing, myself, Michael, and Pam Denahy worked around the clock to make sure we had something to go in there. Mayor Crespín in Lamar who also a big part of why this all got done in conjunction with Lamar. He helped us make sure that we all stayed on the same page and in partnership with the Browns. We look forward to celebrating a ribbon cutting or something.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

ATTEST:**CITY OF LA JUNTA**

 Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

 Joseph Ayala, Mayor