

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – February 18, 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 18, 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 – arrived at 6:19 p.m.
Paul Velasquez, Ward 1
Jeremiah Stoker, Ward 2
Joe Ayala, Mayor
Chandra Ochoa, Ward 2
Lisa Pantoya, Ward 3
Maureen Rikhof, Ward 3



Subject to approval at the
March 3, 2025
City Council Meeting

Absent: none

Also present: Michael Hart, City Manager
Erin Harris, City Attorney
Melanie Scofield, City Clerk
Brad Davidson, Fire Chief
Bill Jackson, Asst. City Manager
Paula Mahoney, Admin. Asst.
Denise Salas, La Junta
DeAnna Salas, La Junta
Diana Remick, La Junta
Rayann Remick, La Junta
Elaine McIntyre, La Junta
Dottie Burnett, La Junta
CaSandra Thomas, La Junta
Michael Romero, La Junta
Eric Archuleta, La Junta
Derrick Blea, La Junta
Nathan Mendoza, La Junta
Riley Remick, La Junta
Douglas Golding, La Junta
Pamela Denahy, La Junta
Kris Sarlo Koehler, La Junta
Nancy Bennett, La Junta
Betty Velasquez, La Junta
Ron Hall, La Junta
Erika Lively, La Junta
Angela Ayala, La Junta
Bette McFarren, RF Daily Gazette
Nancy Harrington, SECO News



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MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING: Mayor Ayala asked if there were any corrections or additions to the minutes of the Regular City Council Meeting of February 3, 2025.

MOTION TO ACCEPT THE FEBRUARY 3, 2025 MINUTES AS PUBLISHED: Stoker

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

RECOGNITION

Brad Davidson. Mayor Ayala presented Brad Davidson with an appreciation gift. Brad has done a great job at leading us towards the hiring of our new City Manager Michael hart. His time and commitment to the City has not gone unnoticed.

William “Billy” Remick. Billy Remick worked for the City in the Park & Recreation Department. He was the most positive guy. It was a loss for our school district and for us at the City but it was really a loss for our community. Mayor Ayala asked Michael Romero to present the family with a Years of Service award in honor of Billy Remick.

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

1. There was no citizen participation.

REPORTS

- A. **Dawn Block, Personnel Director.** The updated personnel policy was rolled out last Wednesday. Every employee received it digitally on a flash drive along with the safety manual. They all signed acknowledgment saying they received it.

The employment application process is 100% electronic now. We no longer deal with paper applications. We are still working out some kinks. Planning on using the HRIS which is a Human Resource Information System that comes with ADG that will make all of our personnel files electronic.

In the process of working on some public safety grants for the Policy Department. Also working with Pam Denahy on some Economic Development things. Have a couple Zoom meetings scheduled with her and some of her contacts.

All of our complaints, with the exception of a few things, sexual harassment, any type of harassment, retaliation, those types of things, don't have to be in writing as long as we know or should have known. Anything else needs to be in writing. Once we receive a complaint, they are investigated and then appropriate actions are taken based on what the investigation shows. There probably wouldn't be a reason for council to ever know any of those things. Those are all handled in-house. Personnel issues are not handled by the council. We have also hired a thirty party to conduct investigations.

We have three drug policies. An FTA policy which covers the bus drivers and the mechanics. We have a Federal Highway Administration drug policy which covers the CDL drivers. Then we have a general everybody else city employee policy. Every year, we are required to submit our FTA policy to CDOT because we receive federal funds from them. Depending on what happens with that review, then the rest of our policies are updated to match those requirements.

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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- A. Second 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 SECOND READING: Stoker

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

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

NEW BUSINESS**A. Liquor Licenses**

- 1. Application for a Special Events Permit by Otero Junior College Foundation, Dillon Martin, Event Manager. The event is their Annual Otero Junior College Ag Gala to be held March 8, 2025 from 6:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m. at 2101 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 Clerk recommends approval.

MOTION TO GRANT A SPECIAL EVENTS PERMIT TO OTERO JUNIOR COLLEGE FOUNDATION FOR THEIR ANNUAL OTERO JUNIOR COLLEGE AG GALA TO BE HELD MARCH 8, 2025 FROM 6:00 P.M. TO 11:59 P.M. AT 2101 SAN JUAN AVENUE: Stoker

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

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

- 2. Application for a Special Events Permit by Our Lady of Guadalupe/St. Patrick Parish, Deborah Smith, Event Manager. The event is their Annual Dinner Auction to be held March 15, 2025 from 4:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m. at 202 Lincoln 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 Clerk recommends approval.

MOTION TO GRANT A SPECIAL EVENTS PERMIT TO OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE/ST. PATRICK PARISH FOR THEIR ANNUAL DINNER AUCTION TO BE HELD MARCH 15, 2025 FROM 5:00 P.M. TO 11:59 P.M. AT 202 LINCOLN AVENUE: Stoker

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

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

- B. A Resolution Approving the 2025 Airport Grant for Runway Design and Layout Plan.** This resolution is for the design for the replacement of the main runway 826. It is a discretionary grant from the Colorado Aeronautics Division of CDOT. Construction will begin in 2026. Resolution No. R-6-2025 was presented for the Board’s consideration.

MOTION TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. R-6-2025: Stoker

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

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MOTION TO GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS THE PURCHASE, ACQUISITION, LEASE, TRANSFER, OR SALE OF REAL, PERSONAL, OR OTHER PROPERTY INTEREST UNDER C.R.S. §24-6-402(4)(a) AND 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: Ochoa

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

The Council went into Executive Session at 6:30 p.m. and reconvened at 8:01 p.m.

C. Committee/Board Reports

1. Senior Citizens Advisory Board (Council Member Velasquez):
 - Celeste Kauten is up and running as the Senior Center Manager now.
 - Credit card fees are as follows: \$0-\$50 is \$2.00. \$50.01-\$100 is \$2.50. \$100.01-\$200 is \$5.00. Each additional \$100.00 is \$2.50.
 - The Senior Center is now available to rent out. Contact Celeste for the fee schedule.
2. AVRMC Board (Council Member Velasquez):
 - Still working on a safe closure of the OB Department. They're working with a current list of patients, expectant mothers, and finding an outside provider to provide prenatal and post pregnancy care.
 - They have four highly trained nurse practitioners that are going to be doing family medicine. Three are here in La Junta and one in Rocky ford. They have long standing roots here in La Junta.

Mayor Ayala: Wrote a letter to Governor Polis requesting help with funding the OB unit and stopping that from closing. Received a call from Ty Winter and a member of Governor Polis' cabinet. At this time, they have no money to offer the hospital. They had HCPF (Department of Health Care Policy and Financing) trying to find some money.

Everything that I've gathered from speaking with Andy and the hospital, it seems as if they are intent on closing the OB unit without much in the way of attempts to save it. They are seeking outside counsel to look into the Health Service District to see if there is any money available through that. Pam Denahy is also helping out with that process that they're going through. I did tell Ty Winter that I would still encourage people out there to write letters not just to Governor Polis but to Andy Flemer as well.

I'm very concerned that this is going to end very badly and it is not something that we may see right now but somewhere down the line we may lose a mother, we may lose a baby, or we may lose both. I know we're in a tough situation with finances but I really would hate for something like that to happen knowing we had the opportunity to try a little bit harder to save this program before it goes away. I'm a firm believer that it is a lot harder to bring it back than it would be if we could try and find a way right now to keep it from closing. I understand that there's a multitude of issues that go into that and its not a decision that was made lightly but I will go on record saying I'm not a fan of this decision and I'm just very concerned for the mothers in the area.

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3. Utilities Board (Mayor Ayala):
 - We had one application for the one open vacancy that was vacated by former Chairman Gary Cranson and that was Keith Manweiler. Keith was a long-time employee of the City of La Junta who retired last year and is now going to serve on the Utility Board.
 - We had a request to replace two breakers at the light plant; however, there was some discrepancy in how those numbers were presented. We're working with Aliza to see if we can get that clarified before we bring that before council.
 - We also approved a \$700 ARPA Scholarship.
4. Tourism Board (Mayor Ayala):
 - Michael Hart attended.
 - Received financials. Aliza is working on closing the gap on this fund also.
 - Talked about using the 5280 magazine and other ways to spread information.
 - In CML's magazine, there's an article talking about cities that are using tourism money to fix roads and improve infrastructure if they can prove that the infrastructure was damaged by an increase in tourism. I've talked to City Attorney Harris and we've looked at that ordinance on how the tourism fund works. I don't really see where it would need to be changed at all. We would just have to prove that it was a tourism related expenditure. For instance, if we wanted to try and fix a road to increase usage. Martin would then put out a traffic counter before an event and then put it out when Tarantula Fest is going on or whatever big type of event we're having. If we can prove an increase then we can use some of those funds for that. It would have to be a vote to come to council. But it's something, thinking outside the box.
5. Planning Commission (Council Member Ochoa):
 - Will meet this Thursday.
 - Troy Langford submitted a Letter of Interest.
 - Will be doing officer nominations.
 - A variance application is also on the agenda.

D. City Manager's Comments

- It's been a great first day here in La Junta. Super thankful for all of the knowledge that's already going on here. I think it's going to be a really good experience for everyone. There's a lot of good things going on here and I appreciate everybody reaching out with words of encouragement. I'm really looking forward to getting engrained in the community and being one of you all.
- Going to Denver on Thursday for a Legislative Workshop put on by CML. There will be a capital tour and I'm hoping to run into as many people as I can. It's being hosted at History Colorado.
- Again, I appreciate you all. Everyone's just been awesome here and I'm looking forward to working with you.

E. Governing Body's Comments

1. Council Member Rikhof:
 - There are four board vacancies. If you're interested in serving on any of these four opportunities, send an email to Melanie by 5:00 p.m. February 27th. There's one opening on the Planning Commission, two openings on the Urban Renewal Board, one opening on the La Junta Certified Local Government and one opening on the Library Board. I encourage everyone to consider stepping up their civic service.
2. Mayor Ayala:
 - La Junta recently lost a very prominent member of the community. Beverly Babb passed away. Beverly served on the Tourism Board. She was a big volunteer for the Wake-Up Breakfast. She was an early Clean Valley Recycling supporter. She has a passionate story about how she got started with recycling. She was driving with her uncle down the highway in California and she was in the back seat. She'd seen all this trash on the highway and she kept saying why don't they do something about it. Her uncle turned around and said who is they? That's when she took the initiative to start doing it herself. She was an adamant volunteer for La Junta. She was a frequent attendee of all city meetings. It's a very big loss for this community. I will miss her as a friend and a community member.

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There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF LA JUNTA

Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

Joseph Ayala, Mayor