

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – March 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, March 3, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building.

INVOCATION: Mayor Ayala gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Council Member Pantoya led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL: The following Council Members were present:

Damon Ramirez, Ward
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 17, 2025
City Council Meeting

Absent: none

Also present: Michael Hart, City Manager
Erin Harris, City Attorney
Melanie Scofield, City Clerk
Aliza Libby, Director of Finance
Dawn Block, Personnel Director
Christina Tozzie, Chamber of Commerce
Kristin Carpenter, La Junta
Terry Smalling, La Junta
Kenneth Pearson, La Junta
David Polley, La Junta
Larry Chatman, La Junta
Jeff Richardson, La Junta
JoAnna Finney, La Junta
Ted Finney, La Junta
Christine Coffield, La Junta
Marie Mora-Menges, La Junta
Renee Mora-Menges, La Junta
Christopher Menges, La Junta
Bette McFarren, RF Daily Gazette
Nancy Harrington, SECO News



Douglas Golding, La Junta
Dottie Burnett, La Junta
Stacey Ayala, La Junta
Zeke Ayala, La Junta
Josh Harris, La Junta
Connie Clifton, La Junta
Niels Rikhof, La Junta
Cheryl Lindner, La Junta
Angela Ayala, La Junta

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 18, 2025. Hearing none, the mayor asked for a motion to approve the minutes as published.

MOTION TO ACCEPT THE FEBRUARY 18, 2025 MINUTES AS PUBLISHED: Ochoa

SECOND: Ramirez

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – March 3, 2025**CITIZEN PARTICIPATION FOR NON-AGENDA ITEMS (5-minute time limit per person):**

1. Christina Tozzie, La Junta Chamber of Commerce President: On Saturday, March 8th at Otero College, the School of Statesmanship Stewardship and Service will be offering an introductory session on leadership that will lead to an 8-week course. The introductory session is free and open to any community member who has an interest in La Junta.

The Chamber Board of Director in conjunction with the City of La Junta will be having a Welcome Reception for Michael Hart on Friday, March 21st from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Kiva.

The Chamber is in the planning stages of Early Settlers Day. It will be held Saturday, September 6th and we look forward to working together with the City.

2. Douglas Golding, 1316 Lincoln Avenue: Glad to see the La Junta webpage up but it's important to keep it up-to-date. The following items need addressed: add Senior Center available for rent, remove Senior Center dances, update the golf schedule, remove the Fairway from the website.
3. David Polley, 622 Colorado Avenue: Spring is coming which means bears are coming out of hibernation. Encouraged everyone to call the Police Department and get with their neighborhood watch. The Police Department has moved to the Armory. Thought it would be nice to build cohesion in the community by having fundraisers (cookouts, dances, hole-in-one, turkey shoots) where the proceeds would go back to the Police Department to help with their new facility.

REPORTS**A. Yielding Equitable Entry to Housing & Well-Being (YEEHAW).**

Terry Smalling, Kitchen of Kindness: Kitchen of Kindness serves meals every Thursday at the River of Life church building. Typically, anywhere from 70-100 meals are served every week. We are part of the street outreach which also includes the County Health Department and Valley Wide Health Systems.

Larry Chatman, 606 Santa Fe Avenue: At the meeting held at Otero College, there was not a single voice in the room that didn't agree that something needed to be done. Out of that meeting, YEEHAW formed. It has become a community collective of people who want to do something to help make this community a better place. We opened warming centers when the weather was very threatening. We have the Kitchen of Kindness who's is also doing outreach. We're also trying to develop resources to help people take the next steps. We're focusing on primarily getting people in the warming centers and then doing interviews to see how we can help them take that next step. We've interviewed over 75 individuals in 5 warming centers and have gotten them the basic stay alive tools which is all donated. The beautiful thing is us getting to come here and report something good to the council.

Jeff Richardson, 617 San Juan Avenue: Welcomed the new City Manager. Thanked the community. We've helped a lot of people to go in a lot of different direction. The City has participated with law enforcement. Everybody's really great. It's good to see that people are getting the help they need. It's brought a lot of people together in our community.

NEW BUSINESS**A. Board Appointments for Merit Appeals Board – terms to expire 12/31/2025**

1. **Dillon Martin**
2. **Angela Bamber**
3. **Joanna Finney**

The City of La Junta's Charter designates how certain decisions are made in a situation where a city employee is unhappy in some way; being suspended, aggrieved or terminated. In our Charter, we are required to have a Merit Appeals Board for when an employee needs to speak to someone about their particular issue. We don't always have a board seated because we very seldom have these things happen. It's a group of three people who reside within the taxing limit of the City of

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La Junta. These individuals would have some experience with human resources, Colorado Law and deals with employees and how that process is done on a day-to-day basis.

MOTION TO APPOINT DILLON MARTIN, ANGELA BAMBER AND JOANNA FINNEY, AS A SLATE, TO THE MERIT APPEALS BOARD: Rikhof

SECOND: Ochoa

DISCUSSION: The Merit Appeals is the last step in a grievance process in the case of suspension, demotion or termination. If you are grieving the action of another employee, that would go to their supervisor. If you are grieving the action of a supervisor, that goes straight to the City Manager. The employee would appear before all three members. Members of the board are chosen because of their ability to do their job. Any conflicts of interest would be addressed each time.

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

B. Liquor Licenses

1. **Set for Hearing/Application for a Retail Fermented Malt Beverage and Wine Liquor License by LJ Liquor LLC, d/b/a LJ Liquor LLC, 302 E. 1st Street.** The City Clerk set this matter for a Public Hearing on Monday, April 7, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.

2. **Application for a Special Events Permit by La Junta Elks Lodge, Tara Kliesen, Event Manager. The event is a St. Patrick's Day Celebration to be held March 15, 2025 from 12:00 noon to 11:59 p.m. at 119 Colorado 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 LA JUNTA ELKS LODGE FOR A ST. PATRICK'S DAY CELEBRATION TO BE HELD MARCH 15, 2025 FROM 12:00 NOON TO 11:59 P.M. AT 119 COLORADO AVENUE: Rikhof

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 6-0 (Stoker recused)

3. **Application for Renewal of a Fermented Malt Beverage and Wine Liquor License by Walmart Inc., d/b/a Walmart #1384, 6 Conley Road.** The application is in order and has been reviewed by City supervisors for compliance with City and State codes. The appropriate fees have been tendered and the City Clerk recommends approval.

MOTION TO GRANT A RENEWAL OF A FERMENTED MALT BEVERAGE AND WINE LIQUOR LICENSE BY WALMART INC., D/B/A WALMART #1384, 6 CONVLEY ROAD: Rikhof

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

C. A Resolution Approving an Application for a Variance. The application is made by Niels and Maureen Rikhof for their business Carpe Construction. They are going to build a 3-car 2-story garage that will be affiliated with the Chestnut Apartments at 4th and Santa Fe Avenue. Resolution No. R-7-2025 was presented for the Council's consideration.

MOTION TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. R-7-2025: Ochoa

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: The Zoning Regulations require there to be a residence on the property prior to building a secondary building (garage). This piece of property is located across the alley from the Chestnut Apartments and is only around 2,000 square feet. This variance allows for the construction

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of a 3-car 2-store garage without a resident. It will be used for off street parking and storage during construction of the Chestnut.

VOTE: The motion carried 6-0 (Rikhof recused)

D. A Resolution for a Full Audit of the Property Management Enterprise Fund. Resolution No. R-8-2025 was presented for the Council's consideration.

Mayor Ayala: In a time when government efficiency and accountability are under scrutiny, we must take a hard look at ourselves as a city. We have to make sure we are being transparent. We have to have clear accountability and better oversight and a commitment to a responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

City Attorney Harris: The word "audit" is not an additional financial audit that repeats the work already done by the City of La Junta accountants. It is more of a detailed look at the processes in place and to look at the properties owned by the city, understand how they are used and know which are assets vs. liability for the purpose of the Enterprise Fund, which is not funded in any way by the General Fund.

MOTION TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. R-8-2025: Pantoya

SECOND: Ramirez

DISCUSSION: The City Attorney explained that any time money is needed for something that hasn't been budgeted, you need to figure out where it will come from. We would be looking at the General fund. This could be done in-house without any additional cost, an external company may be hired, or it could be something in the middle with a \$5,000 deductible padi to CIRSA (the City's insurance company) and they would do the audit themselves.

Council Member Stoker feels the funds should come from Property Management and not the General Fund. Council Member Rikhof believes that if management can move around money for raises, they can also move around the same budget to cover this expense.

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

E. Committee/Board Reports

1. Senior Citizens Advisory Board (Council Member Velasquez):
 - Board meeting is this Thursday at 10:00 a.m.
2. AVRMC (Council Member Velasquez):
 - There will be a town hall meeting tomorrow at the Arkansas Regional Medical Center from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

F. City Manager's Comments

- Attended Legislative workshop in Denver.
- Would like to apply for a scholarship to attend CML conference in June.
- Electric crew working on line maintenance, replaced a pole behind the Kiva and installed new lights at 2nd and San Juan Avenue.
- Tom and some of his folks will be attending the Arkansas River Basin Forum in a couple of weeks.
- Looking at possibly borrowing some irrigation equipment from Aurora.
- Working on a few grants, one with the county and one at the federal level.
- Had fourteen candidates for the utility clerk position, testing today.
- There will also be a circulation coordinator position at the Library.
- Street crews are putting up stop signs in uncontrolled intersections and also replacing some of the older poles in town.
- Received a \$250,000 planning grant for the Anderson Arroyo bridge.
- Lots of board vacancies.
- CIRSA paper audit is good.
- Get with Melanie if you want to attend CML.

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- High winds today. Bad weather headed this way.
- Fire Department doing some Wildland training.
- Weed control.
- 2024 books are closed.
- Sally is retiring. Her last day will be next Wednesday. Position being advertised now.
- Library programs. There are so many resources not being used. The free legal clinic for one.
- Police Department will be hosting the County Sheriffs of Colorado Leadership Institute at the training facility. FBI Law Enforcement Institute will be in July. In August, there will be conducting desert snow drug training. POST is covering the costs of all the training.
- Working on the solar contracts for the Industrial Park.
- The LJ Grill, formerly known as the Fairway, will open March 17th.
- Continuing to work with the state on the runway planning.
- Smothered burritos at the Senior Center this Friday.
- Switching to the Share platform with the city buses.
- Installed a new warning track at Tippy Park.
- All the spring sports are up and running.
- The sign at Brick & Tile Park is almost complete.
- Register for soccer until Friday.
- Summer applications opening up March 17th.
- Will be doing some clean-up at the cemetery.

G. Governing Body's Comments

1. Council Member Stoker:
 - Michael needs to try Dino Dogs.
 - Appreciate all the new signage going up.
 - The Young AmeriTowne is now at the Elks Lodge and will go for about two weeks. Youth learn financial literacy.
 - The Elks is the longest continuous tenant in the downtown area. Been there since 1901.
2. Council Member Velasquez:
 - Attended the 2nd Annual Career and Technical Education open house at the college. We are so lucky in this community. Let's build our futures.
3. Council Member Ochoa:
 - RTAP (Colorado Rural Technical Assistance Program) helps rural communities in Colorado leverage the outdoor recreation economy by providing technical assistance for economic development strategies. Sessions will be held March 11th at the Senior Center from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. and a full day session at Otero College on March 12th in the Banquet Room.
4. Council Member Rikhof:
 - Thank you to the folks who applied for the different committees and boards. There are two new members on the Urban Renewal Board (Zach Miner and Angel Saucedo).
 - Thanks to Michael. It's refreshing and I'm glad that you're here.
5. Mayor Ayala:
 - There will be an Economic Development work session on March 19th at 5:00 p.m.
 - We are in an election year. A summary of information will be put on the website.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF LA JUNTA

Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

Joseph Ayala, Mayor

