

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – March 17, 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 17, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building.

INVOCATION: MJ Romano 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
April 7, 2025
City Council Meeting

Absent: none

Also present: Erin Harris, City Attorney
Cristian Estrada, Deputy City Clerk
Aliza Libby, Director of Finance
Dawn Block, Personnel Director
Bette McFarren, RF Gazette
Paula Mahoney, Administration
Bill Jackson, Property Management
Chris Arguello, Electric
MJ Romano, La Junta
Katie Pickering, La Junta
James Osborn, La Junta
Kendyl Osborn, La Junta
Julie Worley, La Junta
David Polley, La Junta
Carter Pickering, La Junta
Josh Harris, La Junta
Kimberly Gallegos, Library
Derrick Blea, Parks
Alvin Gallegos, La Junta
Matthew Mendoza, Parks



MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING: Mayor Ayala asked if there were any corrections or additions to the minutes of the Regular City Council Meeting of March 3, 2025. Hearing none, the mayor asked for a motion to approve the minutes as published.

MOTION TO ACCEPT THE MARCH 3, 2025 MINUTES AS PUBLISHED: Ochoa

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – March 17, 2025**EMPLOYEE SERVICE AWARDS****A. January 2025**

1. Isaiah Aragon, Street – 5 years
 - Maintenance worker in our Street Department; in 2018, Isaiah began with us as a part time Industrial Park/Property Management Laborer. On January 3, 2020, he moved to full-time Maintenance Worker I in the Street Department. We hope to see him here for another 5 years, so we can celebrate his 10 years with us.
2. Lydia Jebe, Library – 20 years
 - Library Patron Service Technician; began with us as a part-time Library Page; Lydia has been with us since January 3, 2025. Her initial job of Library Page was later renamed Patron Service Technician. She has a wealth of knowledge; thank you for 20 years.

B. February 2025

1. Chris Arguello, Electric – 20 years
 - The Electric Superintendent for the city. He began as a part-time laborer in the Electric Department on August 30, 2004. He then moved to full-time Groundman in the Electric Department on February 16, 2005. On January 1, 2008, Chris became a Lineman Apprentice, which lasted until 2021 when he became the Electric Superintendent. October 2024, he also became the Line Crew Chief.

C. March 2025

1. Derrick Blea, Park – 5 years
 - Being Maintenance Worker 1 in the Park Department, Derrick began his time at the city in 2019 and a part of 2020, where he started as a part-time Mower Operator. He then transitioned on March 1, 2020 as a full-time Maintenance Worker 1.
2. Kimberly Gallegos, Library – 15 years
 - Kim is the Program and Outreach Coordinator. She began with the Library in March 1, 2010. Kimberly does quite a bit for our library, and is the lead on the summer reading program. Her husband also works for the city. Kim does a lot for our youth and public.

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

1. David Polley, 622 Colorado Avenue: Was here at the last meeting to discuss the neighborhood watch. Has run into some difficulties – visited the bank to see if we can have a bank account with a few peoples' names on it, and one must have legal-type forms to be able to open the account, which we do not have. There were some issues with the senior center and other things that were going on, so having a specific set time will happen in the future. We feel like we have been losing our 'grass roots' with our idea for the Police and Fire Departments being moved around. There is another idea. We could have a bucket that we can collect money that way that is a legal way to gather money. Approached a few businesses for the idea; if business wanted to participate on a specific day or time, and we would have a program where food would be served where a percentage of profits would go toward the neighborhood watch program. This would be according to business schedules. It would be great to have people in our community where we would stay in contact with each other and aid each other in protection. We could call ourselves the "Neighborhood Watch Posse". If we can gather like minds together, we would be able to come back and name those people, so long as it doesn't break any laws. My phone number is (719) 492-0913 if anyone is interested in joining the "Neighborhood Watch Posse". The program can benefit the community and help bring the community together.
2. James Osborn, 3 Jackson Circle: Daughters and I have been studying pollinators and insects. Would like to request if we could add some flowers to the Brick & Tile Park down in the creek. It would be a great place for the flowers to grow. By next summer, we could see butterflies, hummingbirds, and bees.

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- a. Mayor Ayala: Absolutely. Get with Brock Hinkhouse, and bring up these ideas with him. At one point, we were looking into plants that were natural and water-saving for the area.
- b. Council Person Rikhof: There is absolutely a good option of using native species of plants and flowers for the area.

NEW BUSINESS**A. Liquor Licenses**

1. **Application for Renewal of a Hotel & Restaurant Liquor License by Alicia P. Lucero, d/b/a Mexico City Café, 1617 Raton Avenue.** 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 Deputy City Clerk recommends approval.
2. **Application for Renewal of a Hotel & Restaurant Liquor License by Fargerson LLC, d/b/a Boss Hogg's Saloon, 808 E. 3rd Street.** 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 Deputy City Clerk recommends approval.

MOTION TO GRANT A RENEWAL OF HOTEL & RESTAURANT LIQUOR LICENSES BY ALICIA P. LUCERO, D/B/A MEXICO CITY CAFÉ, 1617 RATON AVENUE AND FARGERSON LLC, D/B/A BOSS HOGG'S SALOON, 808 E 3RD STREET: Ramirez

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

B. First Reading/AN ORDINANCE MAKING SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS TO THE ELECTRIC FUND FOR THE CALNEDAR YEAR 2025.

Mayor Ayala: I'd like to use what is now available to us for Bob's Rules of order, which is to have the discussion first. This is something that was brought forth to the Utilities Board, and there was a bit of a disagreement with the language. We have cleared it up as best as it could be. I would like to call Mr. Jackson forward, just to clarify a few things regarding the ordinance. Would you briefly explain to council what this is, for those of us not on the Utilities Board?

Bill Jackson, Property Management: The request was made for the replacement of two breakers at the Light Plant Substation. These are the transmission breakers that protect the main transformer. Being proactive and as requested by the Utilities Board, we had a C.L. & P. engineer come in and do a review on a few of our systems. These specific breakers were the focus, as they have aged significantly, reached the end of their useful life and have started to leak oil. We see problems going forward. These are the most critical items listed in that survey. We would like to amend the budget to include monies to pay for the two breakers.

Mayor Ayala: In the Utilities Board meeting, you cited the JK Study; looking through it, I did not notice anything mentioned in that study about the breakers.

Bill Jackson: That was confusing on my part – the JK Study was concerning the rate passthrough and not about the breakers. This study came from City Light & Power in conjunction with ARPA. The JK Study will affect finances this year.

Council Member Rikhof: When was the City Light & Power assessment done? Is that report available for us to review?

Bill Jackson: This last year in 2024. It started in May. The report is available.

Mayor Ayala: When was the report complete?

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Bill Jackson: I believe it was in November. I do have a copy of the report.

Mayor Ayala: The reason we are asking is because it is budget time, and we are looking at an ask of \$680,000.

Bill Jackson: We did our capital budget in May/June/July of 2024 for the 2025 year. We did not have any inkling that we would ask for this right then. That is why it is not on the regular cycle. We start our capital budgets in June and July.

Council Member Rikhof: How will this impact what you would anticipate being asked for the 2026 budget?

Bill Jackson: In the 2026 budget, there are other items that they always have in the budget as 'capital items', such as underground and new overhead lines; replacing the system as we can. That is our plan.

Council Member Rikhof: Does that come out of retained earnings, or is that from a different fund?

Bill Jackson: Capital funds request every year and we put together a budget. You will see that when you get these papers. Some of the capital line items we pay through depreciation line item in the budget.

Council Member Rikhof: What is that fund now, the depreciated fund?

Bill Jackson. On page 38 of this document you can see in our investments that there is \$3,278,188.70 that is just for the electric fund.

Mayor Ayala called on Aliza Libby, Finance Director, to explain her concerns regarding amount to the council. The Utilities Board is aware of all concerns, but Aliza Libby reiterated those concerns for the City Council as well as explained what depreciation funds are and the processes for using the funds.

Dialogue about price guarantees for quotes on items needed and work needed to be done. Council Member Ochoa inquired whether the prices will remain firm until a decision is made, or if they are subject to changes. Bill Jackson confirmed that the prices are firm for a certain amount of time, but prices are subject to availability as well as changing depending on supply chain and delivery.

More conversations occurred about the transparency of the report as well as inquiring about timeliness of viewing said reports, especially since City Council is responsible for the city's finances. Nobody on the City Council has viewed the specific report that details any items needed and costs of items. A sudden request of \$683,000 in the budget seems unjustifiable. If a report were presented to council prior to the ordinance asking for the money, then it could be justified. The Utilities Board has done their due diligence for the review of the report. This report was brought up out of cycle. The amount of scrutiny that this request is receiving is perfectly appropriate.

An inquiry was made by Council Member Velasquez regarding the evaluation of the breakers. The council was aware that these breakers were "under review" and are seemingly and suddenly "critical". If the breakers are in "critical condition", why weren't we being proactive about this and put in the request earlier, preferably during budget time? Bill Jackson responded that he wanted to wait for professional, paid engineers to do an evaluation before requesting any money. Bill Jackson then called for Chris Arguello, Electric Plant Superintendent, to reiterate and explain again the reasoning for such a major fund request.

The board moved to table the approval of the ordinance until more dialogue and a review of the C. L&P report can be had at the next work session (Wednesday, March 26, 2025 at 4:30 P.M. in the Council Chambers).

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – March 17, 2025**C. Board Appointments**

1. Appoint Angel Saucedo and Zach Miner to the La Junta Urban Renewal Authority Board – Terms to expire 12/31/2025

MOTION TO APPOINT ANGEL SAUCEDO AND ZACH MINER TO THE URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY BOARD: Rikhof

SECOND: Stoker

DISCUSSION: None.

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

2. Appoint Nickolas Burdick to the Library Advisory Board, term to expire 12/31/2025 and Holly Huerta-Hudak to the Library Advisory Board, term to expire 12/31/2026.

MOTION TO APPOINT NICKOLAS BURDICK AND HOLLY HUERTA-HUDAK TO THE LIBRARY ADVISORY BOARD: Rikhof

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: None.

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

D. Committee/Board Reports

1. Senior Citizens Advisory Board (Council Member Velasquez):
 - This is to Mr. Polley; I did see your proposal and there was a difficulty with the dates and times. There was no dates and times noticed by the Senior Citizens Advisory Board and are needing those dates and times for them to consider anything. Please get with Celeste Kauten, Director of Senior Center. As for the Senior Center, the Tai Chi classes have been suspended for a few months. It is holding strong with about 488 members. Rockies games are available, please contact Celeste Kauten for more information about getting deals for Rockies tickets.
2. Utilities Board (Council Member Velasquez)
 - Hopefully with the cold weather behind us, the snow will be gone also. Regarding the snow on the sidewalks, this year people have been using small ploughs when clearing snow. Using these machines, people have been hitting the bottom of the decorative lampposts, which costs the city money to repair. Please exercise caution; or perhaps the City Council would have to take further action on how to clear those sidewalks properly.

E. City Manager's Comments

- Apologies for not being there in-person for tonight's meeting; my eldest son, Austin, is joining the US armed forces and is being sworn in today. Being a veteran, I understand the sacrifices he will be making. Being his dad makes the opportunity even more special.
- Attended the Library Board meeting on March 10th. As always, the library has so many unique opportunities and programs going on. Encourages everyone to go check in with the Woodruff Memorial Library.
- Been able to get out and about to check out city facilities and properties. Recommends to everyone that they get with Tom Seaba at the Water Treatment Plant and schedule a tour of the facilities.
- On March 11, 2025 met with and presented a city coin to Drew Yochum in the Electric Department for his efforts in restoring power and assisting a resident.
- On March 12, 2025 met with and presented city coins to Frankie, Randy, and Gilbert with the Street Department for their outstanding dirt work performed at Potter Park with high praise from

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Coach Hill. Their dedication to serving their community brings great credit to themselves, their families, their departments and especially the City of La Junta.

- Had the opportunity to meet with Mike and Keith with the Utilities Board regarding the ongoing Ark Valley Conduit situation. Looks forward to working with the Utilities Board, as well as the AVC board to determine what the best path forward is for La Junta.
- Had a meeting with Pam Denahy and we will be having an Economic Development work session on March 26, 2025.
- Met with Andy Flemmer, AVRMC; they are going to begin starting the process on bringing on a new internal medicine doctor. They are looking to partner with the City of La Junta for incentive assistance. More information to follow.
- Expressed gratitude towards the citizens and personnel of the City of La Junta for being so kind and receptive to him being here. Looking forward to the reception on Friday. Hopes to see everyone there and meet anyone whom haven't been introduced yet. Thanked everyone for the understanding of absence.

F. Governing Body's Comments**1. Council Member Rikhof:**

- I would like to make sure that the takeaway is clear from the conversation about the budget supplemental; we have had a couple of requests from last year about the budget supplementals. I was pretty consistent that I wasn't against trash trucks and I wasn't against paying our insurance premiums; I am very much for our departments planning ahead. I am very much for knowing things ahead of time. I think it is confusing to the public when we have a \$600,000 bill come across and it is approved, while there doesn't seem to be much information or discussion. I very much appreciate Chris Arguello. I have been watching the discussion from the last few meetings from Utilities Board, and that is the information that we would need. I could not get on board with the budget supplementals that had to do with the trash truck/insurance premiums, even though those ideas themselves are not what I was against. It was the process that bothered me then, and this process is what bothers me now. Referring back to the smaller street sweeper that was purchased, we were given information and a presentation regarding as to why the money was needed. That was approved. I think information is power. That is the only takeaway that should come from this process. I do not know anyone that is up here currently that does not want to know more about why we are spending the money the way we are. When we get to answer constituent questions in public, we would like to know the facts beforehand.
- Today is officially my "La Junta Day". Exactly 5 years ago today we moved from Denver to La Junta and have officially been here since then. St. Patrick's Day will always have a special meaning as it's the day when we made the move to the area.

2. Mayor Ayala:

- Disagreed with Council Member Rikhof regarding the way the process was handled, specifically referring to the trash truck/insurance premium situation from the previous year. Council Member Rikhof clarified that her concern was the insurance premium payments, not on the trash trucks themselves.
- We passed the resolution for the Property Management audit; Michael Hart is not present, but I would like to see updates from Michael Hart added to the agenda every month. We would all like to make sure we are getting to the bottom of the situation.
- I did send out an email about vehicle use. Michael has gotten work on some items regarding city emblems on vehicles as well as looking at the vehicle use policy. Please get with Michael to voice concerns on the vehicle use policy. My concern is that if we are not using the city vehicles properly, and we ask the community for something, then we are not doing our best to build trust within the community.

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- Had a conversation with Chief Todd Quick concerning the speeding in La Junta. Chief Quick is working on the enforcement side of the speeding. Now that warmer weather is approaching, it tends to bring people out “cruising” the streets in their vehicles. Not only are people taking drives, but there are more people out playing with their families, taking walks, walking their dogs, etc. We would like to prevent any accidents prior to enforcing speeds.
- The speed trailer that we were looking into – that company is no longer working with the City of La Junta. Jennifer Hinkhouse, Purchasing, is looking into more options for us that are more local to Colorado, if we would like to pursue that route. Not sure if the company believed that we did not have enough volume of traffic to be useful for the need of the speed trailer, or if there is another reason. The company is, in fact, going to pull that trailer out.
- I would like to make sure that everyone keeps a special prayer for Bob Blair, whom has done so much for our community. He’s going through a battle right now and would like to make sure we support him.
- Prayers go out to the Salazar family whom had a horrible loss; they’d been around La Junta for many, many years.
- If you would like to join us, we are having a work session on Wednesday, March 26, 2025 at 4:30 P.M. for Electric talks, and 5:00 P.M. for Economic Development talks.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:11 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF LA JUNTA

Cristian Estrada, Deputy City Clerk

Joseph Ayala, Mayor