

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – April 21, 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, April 21, 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
Paul Velasquez, Ward 1
Jeremiah Stoker, Ward 2
Joe Ayala, Mayor
Lisa Pantoya, Ward 3
Maureen Rikhof, Ward 3

Absent: Chandra Ochoa, Ward 2

Also present: Michael Hart, City Manager
Erin Harris, City Attorney
Melanie Scofield, City Clerk
Jamie McNerney, Library
Ashli Hernandez, Swink
Julie Worley, La Junta
Pam Denahy, Director of Tourism/ED
Nancy Harrington, La Junta
Josh Harris, La Junta
Jack Goble, LAVWCD
Nancy, Bennett, La Junta
Danae Stratton, Property Craft
Adrian Hart, SECO News
Bette McFarren, RF Gazette



Subject to approval at the
May 5, 2025
City Council Meeting



MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING: Mayor Ayala asked if there were any corrections or additions to the minutes of the Regular City Council Meeting of April 7, 2025. Hearing none, the mayor asked for a motion to approve the minutes as published.

MOTION TO ACCEPT THE APRIL 7, 2025 MINUTES AS PUBLISHED: Rikhof

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

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

EMPLOYEE SERVICE AWARD

A. April 2025

- 1. Jamie McNerney, Library – 10 years.** Jamie McNerney was hired on April 14, 2015 as a Patron Service Technician for the Library. Mayor Ayala presented her with a certificate and pin for her years of service. Thank you.

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

1. There was no citizen participation.

REPORTS

- A. Property Craft (Danae Stratton).** The company does demo, asbestos, mold, fire, loss of life, fentanyl and meth mitigation. We are working with Rocky Ford on a demo project and also abating the old Bents Fort. I realized that your six-county community is highly underserved when it comes to mitigation and abatement. We're considering opening up a shop out here. Our main office is located in Pueblo. Thank you for allowing me to introduce myself and the company.
- B. Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District (Jack Goble).** We were voted in in 2002 by five counties, including Otero, because this valley had seen a lot of farmlands dried up over the years and the detrimental effects that it had to our economy and environment in our communities. We work in a variety of areas but tonight, I'd like to talk to you about water quantity. The Karman Line annexation of Colorado Springs is about 1900 acres and will include 6500 homes along with some commercial space. It will need approximately 1700-acre feet of water per year every year. That would require 50,000 – 60,000 acres of farmland that would need to be permanently dried up in the valley. Colorado Springs, as it sits today, to build it out, needs 34,000-acre feet of water. The reason I'm here today is to ask you to consider adopting a resolution in opposition to Colorado Springs annexations.
- C. Tourism and Economic Development (Pam Denahy).** The Tourism Board is in the middle of the Destination Blueprint Program through the tourism office in partnership with Bent's Old Fort. We are helping them with communication and have updated all the websites that are out there. We will be having a Bent's Old Fort private tour on May 20th and City Council is invited. The Resident Sentiment Survey is part of the Blueprint Program as well. There have been 163 responses. Most say they agree or strongly agree that the positive impacts of tourism outweigh the negative impacts. They also agree or strongly agree that the tourism industry in La Junta has a positive impact on local business. We also have the Stakeholders Survey that will be sent out specifically to stakeholders.

During the Tarantula Fest, we had the Outdoor Recreation Department under the State of Colorado film a Rocky Mountain PBS series called "Colorado Uncharted" in partnership with the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. It will air on April 24th at 7:30 p.m. and then re-aired on May 11th at 5:30 p.m. Southeast Colorado will be highlighted as well as Ouray, Moffit County and the San Luis Valley.

The Visit La Junta website was created in 2017 and the technology has since changed. We have a really hard time updating the back-end information of the website so we were looking at doing a facelift. It was presented to the Tourism Board and it was decided to keep the website the way it is now but give it a refresh and redesign so we can update new businesses or new information.

For 2025, Economic Development will be focusing on outreach, networking and connections. We've had a lot of local engagement with businesses like Lewis Bolt, Copper Kitchen and Otero College. We are also focusing on monthly meetings with organizations like Otero County Economic Development, Southeast Colorado Enterprise Development, Southeast Business Retention and Expansion Attraction. Doing projects anywhere from transportation to housing to different regional projects. Continued outreach is being done with the state through DOLA, OEDIT and Colorado Workforce Center. We're also trying to focus on data or the lack thereof. We're subscribing to a CRM (customer relationship management) tool that will help us track who our businesses are and how we contact them. This will benefit Economic Development, La Junta Mainstreet and we've talked to the Chamber of Commerce about partnering with that as well.

We're wrapping up phase 1 of the RTAP (rural technical assistance program) Program. This is a project through Outdoor Recreation Office and CU Masters of the Environment. We've identified the goals to revitalize downtown and expand economic opportunities. Strength and collaboration,

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community engagement, volunteerism and partnerships, outdoor recreation, infrastructure and programming, destination and marketing and promotion of outdoor and cultural assets. Those are the goals that we're working on and we have action items and steps under each one of those. The students working on this will have it completed on the 29th of April and I can share it with you then. We had a lot of participation in the workshops. So, it's not necessarily going to all be led by the City of La Junta. We'll have some great partners that will be helping to lead different efforts. One area of enhancing outdoor recreation is to look more into birding, how do we attract more people for birding since we have some very unique birds here. We'll be increasing our partnership with the Rocky Mountain Bird Association to do that.

As a reminder, we are a La Junta Mainstreet and Creative District. Both of these fall under state programs. We used to call ourselves La Junta Rise. The board is currently taking a step back to see if La Junta Rise is the right name. The strategic working plan of that board is based on the funds we get from DOLA and Creative Industries. We may be calling ourselves La Junta Creative Mainstreet and looking to re-evaluate and re-envision the strategic plan.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Property Management Fund Audit Update (City Manager Hart). After receiving the information from CIRSA at our last meeting and how they are not going to be able to conduct the audit, Brock and I will begin this process. We met last week and we discussed a little bit of what was going on and what we were looking for. He was in agreement with what the mission is. We'll probably get together within the next couple of weeks to put a plan together. We're going to go through the finances, look at each property lease we have and see if they're performing the way they should be. Also, we're going to look at the buildings that the City has and determine if they are assets or liabilities. If they're liabilities, why are we continuing to sustain them. Any input is welcome at any time from you all.

B. Second Reading/AN ORDINANCE MAKING SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS TO THE ELECTRIC FUND FOR THE CALENDAR YEAR 2025. The ordinance was introduced by title only, there being copies available to those in attendance.

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON SECOND READING: Velasquez

SECOND: Ramirez

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: Those voting YES: Ramirez, Velasquez, Ayala, Pantoya, Rikhof

Those voting NO: Stoker

The motion carried 5-1 (Ochoa absent)

NEW BUSINESS**A. Board Appointment****1. Appoint Erika Lively to the La Junta Historic Preservation Board.**

MOTION TO APPOINT ERIKA LIVELY TO THE LA JUNTA HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD: Stoker

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

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

B. First Reading/AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LA JUNTA, COLORADO REPEALING AND REPLACING CHAPTER 10.04 OF THE LA JUNTA MUNICIPAL CODE AND ADOPTING A NEW CHAPTER 10.04 OF THE LA JUNTA MUNICIPAL CODE TO ADOPT THE 2024 EDITION OF THE MODEL TRAFFIC CODE. The ordinance was introduced by title only, there being copies available to those in attendance.

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City Attorney Harris: In the midst of doing research in connection with all of the speed enforcement that we've been talking about doing. I began researching what our current code looked like and I found that the last time we as a city adopted a model traffic code was in 2010 and it is true that the model traffic code is not updated every year but the last time it was updated was 2020. So, there's quite a lot of changes that have happened. I suggested that if we were going to be moving towards some of the more modern parts of traffic enforcement, which might include the AVIS (automatic vehicle identification systems), that was discussed at the previous meeting. This would be a good first without having to make any adoptions that are outside of what the City of La Junta has already done.

Council Member Stoker: Since we did miss the update in 2020, is there a way where we make sure we stay on top of that for whenever new ones come out or do we just have to hope somebody remembers?

City Attorney Harris: I don't have a story around what happened whether 2020 historically was a difficult year for everyone. My guess is it might have been easily missed. My conversation with Chief Quick is that he does keep abreast of these but until recently wasn't really aware of his ability to influence what we might do here. So, it sounds like that might be a natural change.

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON SECOND READING: Stoker

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: There was no further discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 5-1 (Ochoa absent)

C. Committee/Board Reports

1. Utilities Board (Council Member Velasquez):

- Sanitation
 - Martin will start placing more cardboard collection containers to reduce the amount of cardboard going to the landfill. We'll offset the cost of putting up those containers in a couple of years.
- Water/Wastewater
 - They're in routine maintenance mode at both plants. Also doing hydrant maintenance throughout the city.
 - They are working on providing water to the Brick & Tile Park.
- Electric
 - If people keep hitting poles at the rate they are, the City of La Junta will have a dark sky environment pretty quick. There were three poles that week not to mention the traffic control light at 3rd and Colorado Avenue.
- Water
 - During times of black outs, don't go outside and start watering your lawn. We can't replenish water to the tanks and we will deplete that in short order if everybody goes outside during a blackout in the middle of the day.
 - Level 1 water restrictions begin May15th.

2. Planning Commission (Council Member Rikhof):

- Appreciate that City Manager Hart looked up in the State Statute what the Planning Commission should be doing and I think we're going to be updating our mission and probably the composition of the board as well.
- Martin gave a fantastic presentation and update on efforts with vacant buildings and bringing them up to their full use. One-hundred eleven properties received letters. This is only 2 ½% of the residential properties in La Junta. Also, twenty-two commercial buildings are part of this. It is not compatible with our current building code to be using buildings only for storage. If you've received a letter, go talk to Marilyn and Martin in the Engineering Department.

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3. Library Advisory Board (Council Member Rikhof):

- There's no city money anymore supporting the Summer Reading Program. The Friends of the Library have really taken over on that. If you participated in the book sale last week, that got us about halfway there of the \$3,000 cost to do the Summer Reading Program. They raised \$1,600 approximately.
- There's a question about a half position that is currently on hold in the circulation. We (City Council) had passed it in our budget, when we approved the budget last year, but now, the position is vacant but not being able to be filled and I just wanted to know the background of that because the understanding is that City Council set to put it on hold but I don't remember that conversation.

City Manager Hart: When that position became available, I was contacted by several council members as well as other city employees that it was discussed and agreed upon that if there was a vacancy in the library at any point this year, that it would not be refilled because of potential budget issues.

Council Member Rikhof: I don't remember that conversation happening during the budget conversation.

City Manager Hart: I wasn't here for that at that time. All I had was to rely on the folks that all told me. I had seven different people between elected folks and appointed folks that all told me the same exact thing. Now, again, I do understand that position is there and it may have been budgeted. However, with budgets the way they are, that's what I was told.

Council Member Rikhof: Are there any other positions or departments that are being told not to fill positions if they come open?

City Manager Hart: I was not told of any of the conversations with any other department heads of similar fashion.

Council Member Rikhof: Okay. Does anybody else remember the conversation?

Council Member Stoker: We had the lengthy discussion on the budget as it pertained to the library as far as salaries being way over the income and at the time it was more of a compromise instead of cutting positions. I felt it was an agreement with council that those positions would not be filled if they became open and that kind of a compromise versus cutting the actual positions or firing somebody or cutting the hours. I know cutting hours was also part of the discussion. Kind of trying to put a band-aid on the library budget due to the ninety some percent revenue versus expense.

Mayor Ayala: I do know when that happened that Michael did his due diligence on calling previous people that were in those discussions. So, I know he did that side of it.

Council Member Rikhof: Alright. I just don't remember us deciding that as a council. It may have been part of discussions around the budget but I just want to make sure that we're being transparent when we're doing that. Right now, the library's hours are three hours less than they used to be but that change in schedule isn't really having any cost savings. The numbers of people who are accessing the library are slightly down from last year on checking out books and that sort of thing. So, just putting it out there that if we're not having cost savings, I'm not sure closing the library for three hours is helpful to the community.

Council Member Stoker: I also think that those hour changes have to do with the change of work week schedules. I believe that's when the change to the library hours happened because of the change of work schedule for everyone else.

Council Member Rikhof: I'm not sure it totally makes sense to cut a service just the same way we didn't cut the hours that police and firefighters are available. I think the library is more of a service that the hours they're operating might have made sense the way they were if it's not having cost savings and people are still working the same number of hours. Just something that I think might want to be re-visited.

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Council Member Pantoya: I don't think comparing the police department to the library is comparing apples to apples.

4. Tourism Advisory Board (Mayor Ayala):

- We talked about putting some local brochures in the Amtrak station. We have times throughout the week that they're stuck here for a prolonged period of time. So, we wanted to make sure that we're putting something out there that promotes La Junta possibly using stickers. Also, maybe doing something with our sports tourism with big QR codes that have the website for Visit La Junta at our ballfields, city recreation sports and high school sports.

City Manager Hart: Can we circle back to the library? Who sets those hours? Me? So, no one's ever told me that. That's something I didn't know was within my realm to look at. I will look into that and see if there are better times and days that the library should be open. I'll put a report together and get back to you.

Council Member Stoker: I do know, at that time, Brad got with Heather and those hours are figured because they were the least traffic times. That's why they came up with what they did for the schedule.

City Manager Hart: Which makes complete sense having the most folks there during the highest volume of patrons there. I'll get with Heather and put something together and get back to you.

Mayor Ayala: When you did make that decision on that part-time position, you did get with Heather, correct?

City Manager Hart: Yes, there was a discussion that Heather and I had whenever that position became vacant and again, that's when I made all the phone calls that I did and asked all the folks. Seven of you all indicated that that's what was agreed upon. I can only go off what I'm told. I'll look into this and again see if we do need to shift the hours some, shift when folks are there, or not.

D. City Manager's Comments

- Working on updating some policies. Will be getting final drafts to you on the vehicle policy and the take-home vehicle policy.
- Also working with Erin and Chief Quick on the AVIS and weed/rubbish ordinance.
- MMOF (multi-modal transportation and mitigation options fund) We've had a couple of meetings discussing this. The city received a grant of about \$525,000 to do the design of it. I don't think the city is in a position to take on the project because of the budget but that doesn't mean some other entity can't. We will meet with other entities and see if someone wants to take this on. However, when you think down the road, 5 years, 10 year, 15 years, who's paying to operate that?
- Met with some of the owners of Strike & Play, the new bowling alley. Talked about some of the obstacles that they're facing and some of the ways the city may or may not be able to help. They're in the process of searching for grants but due to where they're at right now, there's not many out there.
- Took a tour of Blue Stem Nursing Center. They are now taking Medicare and Medicaid so they're going to be doing another open house type event. They currently have fifteen or so residents and they can hold up to fifty-four or so.
- Ribbon cutting for the Otero County Detention Center went on last week. It's a very nice facility.
- CASA lunch was last week as well. It's a great program.
- We have a new light pole holder at 3rd & Colorado. It's one of our trucks that's holding the light up. We're in the process of trying to get some bids to get that fixed.
- Will be out of town beginning tomorrow for the rest of the week to attend the Colorado City County Managers Association workshop in Glenwood Springs.

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E. Governing Body's Comments

1. Council Member Velasquez:
 - Would like to see a resolution for the Conservancy District before the next meeting.
2. Council Member Rikhof:
 - Thanked the people of Ward 3 who came out for the listening meeting last Monday. There were nine folks, with a couple of new ones. Everyone is welcome to come. You don't have to live in Ward 3. The next one will be May 12th at 6:00 p.m. at the Brick & Tile Park.
 - There are a lot of questions about Urban Renewal. I would love for Nancy to possibly come to one of our Ward meetings sometime.
 - There's also a lot of conversation about Strike & Play bowling. We're very excited about it and really happy to hear that it was mentioned several times tonight.
 - Special memory to Sally Hibbs. She passed last week. She was a very special person to this town along with her husband Tom. Their impact to La Junta will always be huge. A celebration is planned May 18th.
 - In addition to bowling, we also have a lot of people who play foosball. Two from La Junta, Tina Harper and Rob Guernsey, won the Hall of Fame International Tournament in Las Vegas last weekend. They were first in doubles.
3. It's about that time where you'll probably be seeing less of me here as I am helping coach the Otero County 4-H shooting sports team. Since it is 4-H season, you'll probably be seeing kids coming around seeking donations. Consider making a donation because a lot of hard work goes into all these projects every year.
4. Mayor Ayala:
 - Condolences to the Hibbs family.
 - We'll be planting three trees for Arbor Day. One at the Primary School, City Park and Tiger Trades Academy. The celebration will take place on May 30th at 11:00 a.m. at Tiger Trades Academy in memory of Billy Remick.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

ATTEST:**CITY OF LA JUNTA**

Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

Joseph Ayala, Mayor