

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – May 5, 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, May 5, 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
Jeremiah Stoker, 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
Erin Harris, City Attorney
Melanie Scofield, City Clerk
Martin Montoya, Director of Engineering
Robert Fowler, La Junta
Julie Worley, La Junta
Dottie Burnett, La Junta
Zoey Montoya/Family, La Junta
Adrian Hart, SECO News
Bette McFarren, RF Gazette



Subject to approval at the
May 19, 2025
City Council Meeting


COMMUNITY RECOGNITION

1. **Zoey Montoya:** A La Junta High School Senior, received the Boettcher Foundation Scholarship. This scholarship provides \$20,000 per year for four years along with additional institutional aid allowing recipients to attend any accredited Colorado University without significant financial burden. Zoey plans to attend Colorado State University in Ft. Collins and study in biological sciences and science communications.
2. **Robert Fowler:** Received both the Southwest/Western Region and National Pharmacist in Excellence Patient Care award. Bob has been working in drugstores here in the valley for sixty-two years. He is blessed to do what he loves in our community and loves taking care of people.

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 21, 2025. Hearing none, the mayor asked for a motion to approve the minutes as published.

MOTION TO ACCEPT THE APRIL 21, 2025 MINUTES AS PUBLISHED: Ramirez

SECOND: Stoker

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

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

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

1. There was no citizen participation.

REPORTS

- A. Vacant/Property/Zoning (Martin Montoya).** The ordinance was passed in 2017 but was not enforced until around mid-2023. About that time is when the council approved the new zoning ordinance which ties into the vacant property ordinance. The ordinance includes both residential and commercial buildings. It was basically designed to deal with blighted homes and buildings and then also make sure we're making the most use out of all of our homes and businesses.

Vacant buildings can be defined as significantly below standard utility usage. They can also be sought out by seeing overgrowth or dead vegetation, accumulation of trash, junk or debris, abandoned vehicles, or absence of items that show obvious habitation. Utility accounts with no water or electric usage are usually targeted. If it's determined that a property is vacant, they are required to come in and register with the City of La Junta in the Engineering Department. Technically, you're suppose to register ninety days after the building is vacant or you can come in 30 days after receiving a notice.

When you fill out a registration, you have to give your plan for what you are going to do with the property. The ordinance talks about two different things, either demolition or rehabilitation. There are a few exemptions: if you have an active building permit for the building, if there is fire damage, for about ninety days, then you have to come up with a plan for demolition, and the other is if its for sale with a licensed retailer. Once the Engineering Department has determined a property to be vacant, a vacant property notice is mailed to the owners. If you receive a vacant property notice, you should come into the Engineering Department and talk to us about what your plans are for the property.

For a residential property, you have to either be renovating it or rehabilitating it to fix it up to live in it yourself, to rent it or to sell it. The Engineering Department has automatically been giving six months to begin work on the properties. A meeting is scheduled with them to take pictures of the property. Then we'll schedule a six-month date to go back and make sure improvements are being done then we can look at possible extensions.

For commercial buildings, a lot of commercial buildings we've been finding vacant are due to utility usage, we send them a letter. We try to find out what they're using it for. A lot of people have been using vacant buildings to store personal items which is against the zoning. The zoning doesn't allow for storage in any of the zones in that capacity. These buildings that are in these zones are designated for specific uses. The schedule of uses gives you everything that a building can be used for according to its zone. So, when people go out and buy these commercial buildings and try to use them for their personal use, they're basically violating the zoning rules.

The next item I would like to talk about is companies or businesses using other commercial buildings, besides their own, for storage. This is also not allowed. Warehouses are allowed in our industrial zone, which is out at the Industrial Park. That would have to be approved through the Planning Commission. A warehouse is a building that was designated to be a warehouse. So, we can't buy another building and turn it into a warehouse. The buildings already existing were meant to be storefront properties/commercial business. We issue vacant property notices to these building as well. They're vacant and not being used for their correct zoning.

The fees start out at \$250 for the first year and increase \$250 each additional year to a maximum of \$1,000 each year.

(Discussion continued amongst the board and Director of Engineering Montoya.)

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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- A. Second 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.

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON SECOND READING: Rikhof

SECOND: Stoker

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

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

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Set for Hearing/Application for a Tavern Liquor License by New Venture LLC, d/b/a Strike & Play, 2420 San Juan Avenue.** The City Clerk set this matter for Public Hearing on Monday, June 16, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.

- B. A Resolution Opposing New Annexations by the City of Colorado Springs that Increase its Water Supply Gap.** Resolution No. R-9-2025 was presented for council's consideration.

MOTION TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. R-9-2025: Ochoa

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: This resolution does not address any individual property owners. It is just being resolved that we ask City of Colorado Springs to be thoughtful about their growth and remember that we're on the other end of the pipeline.

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

- C. First Reading/AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LA JUNTA, COLORADO TO ADOPT RULES CONCERNING USE OF AUTOMATED VEHICLE IDENTIFICATION SYSTEMS.** The ordinance was introduced by title only, there being copies available to those in attendance.

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON FIRST READING: Ramirez

SECOND: Ochoa

DISCUSSION: Council Member Stoker feels that since the vendor can't accept fines that are generated, we need to consider the budget before actually implementing a program and purchasing such equipment. City Attorney Harris reminded the board that the handheld device will be provided at no cost and State Statute does not allow any AVIS systems to be paid for through revenue generated from tickets. Council Member Rikhof has heard a lot of pushback from the community on the conversations that have been had and would like Chief Quick to be here during the second reading to answer any questions.

VOTE: Those voting YES: Ramirez, Ayala, Ochoa, Pantoya

Those voting NO: Stoker, Rikhof

The motion carried 4-2 (Velasquez absent)

D. Committee/Board Reports

1. Utilities Board (Mayor Ayala): Will have a joint work session with City Council on Monday, May 12th at 1:00 p.m.

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – May 5, 2025**E. City Manager's Comments**

- Police Department
 - Fire arms training next week.
 - The Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement training at the end of the month.
- Purchasing Department
 - We are still open for bids for the structure to cover the new de-watering equipment.
- Electric Department
 - May 1st system wide planned outage at 4:00 a.m.
 - Have some linemen attending Mesa Hotline School in Grand Junction.
- Human Resources
 - Received fifty-seven applications for the pool. We've hired twenty-five life guards and nine cashiers.
- Water Department
 - There's just one thing after another happening while working on 6th Street.
 - The RO Plant experienced a few temporary failures during the May 1st outage.
- Fire Department
 - There was a 160-acre fire in the river bottom behind Bent's Fort.
- May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Valleywide is going to be doing a children's mental health day this Wednesday at City Park from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.
- Had the opportunity to go to Glenwood Springs and take part in the Colorado City County Manager's Association. I was able to make lots of good contacts and networking.

F. Governing Body's Comments

1. Council Member Stoker:
 - The La Junta Elks Lodge is holding the annual fishing derby Saturday, May 24th at the City Park pond for children ages 5-15. Sign-ups are from 8:00 – 8:30 a.m. I would like to thank the Colorado Bank & Trust and Colorado Parks & Wildlife for providing the fish and the prizes.
2. Council Member Ramirez:
 - Water restrictions go into effect May 15 – October 15. There is no watering between 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.
3. Council Member Rikhof:
 - It's Teacher Appreciation Week. Thank you to Zoey for her innovative ways and she's a fantastic recipient of the Boettcher Scholarship. Thank you to all teachers throughout our town. Otero graduation is this Saturday and starts at 9:00 a.m. this year. There will be 219 people receiving their degrees or certificates.
 - Ward 3 listening tour is next Monday night at 6:00 p.m. at the Brick & Tile Park. (May 12)
4. Mayor Ayala:
 - Thank you to Otero Museum for their wine tasting event.
 - Arbor Day celebration for Billy Remick was held at Tiger Trades Academy.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:06 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF LA JUNTA

Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

Joseph Ayala, Mayor