

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – May 19, 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 19, 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 1
Paul Velasquez, Ward 1
Jeremiah Stoker, Ward 2
Joe Ayala, Mayor
Chandra Ochoa, Ward 2
Maureen Rikhof, Ward 3

Absent: Lisa Pantoya, Ward 3

Also present: Michael Hart, City Manager
Erin Harris, City Attorney
Melanie Scofield, City Clerk
Martin Montoya, Director of Engineering
Randal LaRue, La Junta
Kathy DelRio, La Junta
Nancy Harrington, La Junta
Thomas Martin, La Junta
Charley Henschel, La Junta
John Morgan, La Junta
Angela Martinez, La Junta
Robert Fowler, La Junta
Betty Lopez, Swink
Jack Clifton, La Junta
Sam Lopez, Swink
Nancy Bennett, La Junta
Douglas Golding, La Junta
Gary Reed, Rocky Ford
Thomas Martinez, La Junta
Angela Ayala, La Junta
Adrian Hart, SECO News
Bette McFarren, RF Gazette



Subject to approval at the
June 2, 2025
City Council Meeting



PROCLAMATION: Mayor Ayala proclaimed the month of May 2025 as National Historic Preservation Month.

Betty Lopez, United Methodist Church of La Junta (601 San Juan Avenue): The building has been there since 1913 and we're so pleased to have this designation from the City of la Junta. We found out this week that we have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Colorado State Register of Historic Properties.

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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 May 5, 2025. Hearing none, the mayor asked for a motion to approve the minutes as published.

MOTION TO ACCEPT THE MAY 5, 2025 MINUTES AS PUBLISHED: Rikhof

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

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

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

1. Thomas Martin, owns property in La Junta, resides in Rocky Ford: The vacant building is defined by significantly below standard usage. Question is I have Airbnb all across the United States, am I going to be flagged because my properties at times have low utility usage. It doesn't seem fair. I provide a service to the citizens of La Junta and also people coming here to stay. Am I going to be subject to that? Second question is about the commercial buildings. It seems like the Bradish area seems to be a hot subject with these vacancy building letters. I know Morgan & Sons uses their building quite often. It doesn't seem fair to me that he as a business owner, pay a dormancy fee. He provides a service to many of you and your vehicles. So why should he be punished. If you make these owners move out of the city and move out to the Industrial Park, are their buildings going to sit vacant and become blighted? Every city needs a plan. Every city has blighted buildings. You need to work with the citizens. Help the business owners out. Don't send them letters in the mail. Try to work with them.
2. Gary Reed, 18975 State Hwy 202, Rocky Ford: How can the city tell residential land owners what they can do with their properties? As long as that property is looking good and its maintained and not an eyesore. In Rocky ford, that guy thinks he can tell the land owners that if a place is empty and can be rented, it needs to be rented. But yet, as a landlord, we get no help from either La Junta or Rocky Ford. We send tenants down that get no help with deposits. They have to pay the full high-priced deposit. I do have properties in town, that's why I'm here and my business plan does not allow me to leave the property empty. So, none of my properties are empty but I do feel for anybody else in here that does have a property that's empty. The next thing was commercial property. Morgan and Sons has been in business in that building for 25-30 years. When I was a kid, it was a Coca-Cola bottling warehouse. It's a warehouse that you store stuff in. What's the difference between what he's using it for now? He's using it for his windows. It's an active business in town. Same with La Junta Trading Company. They got a letter saying they can't use their building they have for storing stuff in their place. Next thing is the etiquette on this council, especially at the last few meetings. The guy that was here talking about speed cameras, the retired patrolman, had some very good questions, shoved under the rug. Nothing was answered. Maureen Rikhof, at the last council meeting, same thing. It was shoved under the rug when she had valid questions. And yet, all she was told was, we need to vote for it. If there's any questions with any council member, you don't vote until everybody has all the information they need to make a good decision. Last but not least, I watched that meeting you had, the Planning Commission, and I'm very disappointed. Maureen has some very good questions relating to this and it was all pushed under the rug. Nothing was answered. It seemed to me like you guys were discounting her. I don't know how many of you guys are rental property owners and I know she is. She has some very good questions and they were not addressed at all.
3. Angela Martinez, 722 Raton Avenue: I'm attempting to move myself and my father to his other property. The biggest issue I have is I feel like I'm continuously harassed, in violation of some silly thing. Weeds do what they do, they grow. This is a weed prone area. Yes, I completely agree that they need cut. My dad presented me with this letter on one of his properties. We've been grieving the past six years. Every year, we've had a loss. I don't know if any of you have dealt with loss. But it's not easy at all. There's lots of things. You've got to plan. You've got to figure out estate, what to do with vehicles, properties. Here I am by myself. My dad's disabled. I feel like he's being targeted for these properties. I get a violation on a winter day from code enforcement saying we need to pick this area up. Vehicles, debris, whatever, in seven days. Look at the size of my property. Seven days

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for this? It's seven in a half times a regular average property in the vicinity and I get a seven-day notice. It was 15 degrees that day, it was February, it was snowing. I have a lot of issues with that. I have since tried my best to maintain and clean up the area. I've gotten tags and registrations, and live auctioned vehicles. I've done all the things to try to appease all the silly ordinances and all of the made-up rules that try to keep the governing process in place but ultimately, I feel like I am running in an uphill battle constantly. I am one person. A small army would have a hard time dealing with all the properties and vehicles that I have to deal with. All I'm asking for is some time. I should get due process, right? That's part of it and it should be fair due process. As for vehicles, the ordinance says, fitted car covers. What does it matter? Why does it have to be a fitted car cover? I don't know if any of you have bought fitted car covers. I have bought probably twenty in the past year. They deteriorate, they're weather blown, they rip apart. Then you have to go right back and buy more. I'm trying to consolidate, limit what my dad has but some people have a hard time letting go of memories, of what was, and I think we are just a number in your game. Talk about it. Ask what's going on. Everybody has problems. I have a hard time checking on him. I have to check on my grandfather. I've got kids. I work. Where am I supposed to find this time of the day to make things happen. This is rural La Junta, we live in cow town La Junta. It's like, we are used to rural type stuff. Not downtown Denver.

REPORTS

- A. Property Management Fund Audit (City Manager Hart).** Brock and I sat down and laid out a process of what we're going to go through in order to do the audit itself. We're going to be getting into that over the next couple of weeks. I should have a preliminary report sometime in June.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- A. Second 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 SECOND READING: Velasquez

SECOND: Ochoa

DISCUSSION: Lengthy discussion centered around the importance of having Chief Quick available to answer questions and share his vision, secondary violations, whether the handheld machine is considered an AVIS machine, further explanation of the statute, funding, etc.

FRIENDLY WITHDRAW OF MOTION: Velasquez

NEW BUSINESS

- A. First Reading/AN ORDINANCE AMENDING SECTION 10.12.080 OF THE LA JUNTA MUNICIPAL CODE TO ALIGN WITH THE AMENDED ENFORCEMENT TIMELINE FOR JUNK VEHICLE VIOLATIONS.** There are two parts to the towing law. One part says a vehicle may be towed within 72 hours the other part says that notice would be given within 15 days. This ordinance will sync the timeline. The ordinance was introduced by title only, there being copies available to those in attendance.

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON FIRST READING: Velasquez

SECOND: Stoker

DISCUSSION: Ordinances do not show up online until they have become codified. Until that's done, you do have to look through the ordinances too if you want to be thorough. City Attorney Harris was made aware of the situation and spoke with the Municipal Judge Doug Manley and Cassie Sanchez to make sure nobody was affected.

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

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- B. First Reading/AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 8.08 OF THE LA JUNTA MUNICIPAL CODE CONCERNING WEEDS, RUBBISH, AND LITTER TO CLARIFY DEFINITIONS.** The ordinance was introduced by title only, there being copies available to those in attendance.

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON FIRST READING: Ochoa

SECOND: Ramirez

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

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

C. Committee/Board Reports

1. Utilities Board (Council Member Velasquez)
 - RO Plant: Routine maintenance, changed membrane and electrolyte in chlorine analyzer, changed oil and grease in pump.
 - Distribution: Working on hydrants around town. Replaced a lead service line at 6th and Santa Fe Avenue.
 - Water: Consumer Confidence Report has been completed and sent to the state.
 - Electric: Power outage at Industrial Park. Replaced a lot of high-pressure sodium lights with LED lights. A tree fell on a service in the alley at CDS. Nobody hit a traffic light or pole on Highway 50 since the last meeting. The traffic light at 3rd and Carson has been repaired.
 - Sanitation: The rate will increase 3% effective July 1, 2025. There will be more cardboard receptacles placed around the city which will help lower what is being paid at the landfill.
2. Ark Valley Conduit (Mayor Ayala)
 - The Utility Board and City Council had a joint work session with the Arkansas Valley Conduit. It was our first meeting with the conduit since the last year and a half. They have some new leadership as well as us. They answered our questions and even got back to us last week with some more answers to the best of their ability. It is an ongoing relationship that we're working on. The conduit is now projected to be over \$1.3 billion. We want to know what that means for the City of La Junta.
3. Planning Commission (Council Member Rikhof)
 - City Manager Hart had done some research on state statutes on what a planning commission should be doing. We will have further conversations about that.
 - Cynthia Sollenberger from CASA was wanting to confirm if purchasing a building downtown for a non-profit would be compliant. It seemed that it is non-compliant.
 - I asked some questions about zoning and I think they're still a lot that we need to learn as a planning commission. I asked for additional information and education about the different zoning and what the intentions are and just questions about the current statutes and how the city is implementing them.
4. Library Advisory Board (Council Member Rikhof)
 - The Summer Reading kickoff is June 2nd from 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon. Their theme is "Color Our World". It's for ages birth to adult.
 - Valleywide is at the library doing free health screenings every second Monday of the month from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
 - There's an author talk on Thursday at 4:30 p.m. Mr. Abdel Berrada is talking about his Moroccan journey, "Driss's Trials and Triumphs."

D. City Manager's Comments

- Walmart grand re-opening is this Friday at 10:00 a.m.
- Will be out of town for Action Colorado in Pueblo this Thursday and Friday.
- CML District meeting in Ordway will be Thursday evening.
- The vandalism happening to the park bathroom facilities has been going on too long. If you see something, say something.

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- Congratulations to the La Junta Class of 2025. This class put together \$1.7 million plus in total scholarships.
- Council has its Bent's Fort tour tomorrow.
- Will be submitting my application for the Colorado Municipal League executive board.

E. Governing Body's Comments**1. Mayor Ayala:**

- Regarding ethics and government (conflicts of interest). I noticed Blue Stem all had to do a disclosure form on any outside businesses that they did. So, I got with Ms. Harris and asked if there was something that council should be doing? She looked into it and we do have something already statewide that home rule can adapt.

City Attorney Harris: In 2010, the City of La Junta adopted one part of an overall ethics and government statute that was adopted at the state level. What we already had was a rule around confidential information being used to create pecuniary gains, monetary gains, or any kind of gifting outside of regular Christmas kinds of things. The state statute though includes the rest of the things that you might expect. Generally, there are requirements that disclosures be made. We want to make sure that things are safe, fair and appears as it should from the outside. What I think we're talking about doing is adapting the rest of that 2010 Colorado statute to be La Junta connected and then probably presented as an ordinance.

Mayor Ayala: Yes, that's what I intended. I'm going to use myself as an example for my professional job. I work for Edward Jones, if some reason, the city was interested in switching their 401K, I should not be a part of any conversation. I shouldn't even be around for something like that. So, if we don't have these things in place, there could be impropriety for stuff like that. I just want to make sure everyone knows why I think it's important we have these things. Not for us particularly but for us and everyone coming after us.

2. Council Member Stoker:

- To address some of the concerns over violations that's issued, especially if it comes to weeds. You get a seven-day notice and it's not going to work out. If it's not going to work out, you need to come talk to somebody. I'm sure between Michael and anybody else, you'd be dealing with, they're willing to give some grace period. But if you don't say anything, then you're going to have the seven-days. I just encourage anybody that has any questions or concerns to reach out to the city to address them. That way they've heard and have that conversation. If it is a deal with your weeds, maybe you can get a little bit more time to get them cleaned up.
- Saturday will be the Elks Fishing Derby. Registration is at 8:30 a.m. for ages 5-15 or if they can fish on their own. The Elks have put on the derby for about twenty-five years and have partnered with Colorado Parks and Wildlife who provide the fish and stock the pond. They provide fishing poles and general education. The Colorado Bank & Trust has been our partners for a long time and they provide the prizes that are given out for the category winners.

City Attorney Harris: Going along with Jeremiah's previous comment, you may also call the municipal court and arrange to talk with me. That's what the free trial meetings are about that happen on the first Thursday of every month.

3. Council Member Ramirez:

- To echo what Jeremiah said as far as taking those points and coming to the city, you got a bunch of people up here, our contact phone numbers are readily available. We can point you in the right direction to who you may need to speak to deal with some of these things if you need an extension. I think everybody here, the city, is willing to work with you if you work with them. It's not a one-way deal it should be a two-way deal. I think even on some of the building issues that there's a compromise there. You have to be willing to take that step and

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not feel like we're not going to do anything. We're willing to work with you. I think if you guys take that step that can occur.

4. Council Member Rikhof:

- Want to thank the people who came and talked tonight. I appreciate you taking the time. I know we have things we would rather be doing than attending city council meetings.
- We all do want the same thing for La Junta. I think that nobody wants blight or our neighborhoods to not be attractive. We all want communities that are livable. I hear you and I agree we want the same things. I think that our staff also wants those things and figuring out how to remove the disconnects that's what we should be focusing on. I appreciate people's time in trying to figure out how to solve some of these problems because I do think we want the same things.
- Congratulations to the bowling alley for opening. I think it's awesome that they're pulling that off.
- Yielding Equitable Entry to Housing and Wellbeing (YEEHAW) have their monthly meeting tomorrow from 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. in the old bookstore in the student center at Otero.
- Ward 3 listening tour will be June 9th from 6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. at the Brick & Tile Park. Everyone is welcome.

5. Council Member Velasquez:

- Thank you for the citizens for showing up. I echo Maureen's sentiments on that. This is the appropriate place to bring concerns. You can contact me and if I can help, I will, even if you're not in my ward. Once we're up here, we serve the city as a whole.
- Martin has done a tremendous job in his undertakings as city engineer. The work that he did on Bradish and Grace, those streets were in such poor shape that people didn't want to drive on them anymore. He also mitigated the flooding last week when it rained for two or three days in a row. The pumps worked the way they were supposed to. He's been receptive and responsive in doing things. Thank you.

6. Council Member Ramirez:

- Thank you for everybody who came. Understand, the public comment time is time for you to talk and time for us to listen. You may not get a response right then but we're taking that information in and listening to you and forwarding that to the correct people.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:23 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF LA JUNTA

Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

Joseph Ayala, Mayor