

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – September 15, 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, September 15, 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:

Paul Velasquez, Ward 1
Joe Ayala, Mayor
Chandra Ochoa, Ward 2
Lisa Pantoya, Ward 3
Maureen Rikhof, Ward 3

Absent: Damon Ramirez, Ward 1

Also present: Michael Hart, City Manager
Erin Harris, City Attorney
Melanie Scofield, City Clerk
Pam Denahy, Director of Tourism/Econ. Dev.
Todd Quick, Chief of Police
Josh Cobb, Police
Brad Davidson, Fire Chief
Gary Reed, Rocky Ford
Holly Huerta-Hudak, Library Board
Sheari Shoemaker, La Junta
Christina Tozzie, La Junta
Julie Worley, La Junta
Terry Smalling, Library Board
Heather Maes, Director of Library Services
Nick Burdick, Library Board
Erika Lively, La Junta
Nancy Bennett, La Junta
Sara Holt, Library Board
Carly Johnson, La Junta
Nancy Harrington, SECO News
Adrian Hart, SECO News
Bette McFarren, RF Gazette



Subject to approval at the
October 6, 2025
City Council Meeting



PROCLAMATION: September 2025 is Tarantula Trek Month. Mayor Ayala proclaimed September 2025 as Tarantula Trek Month. We also received a proclamation from Governor Jared Polis. (Receiving a proclamation from the governor gives us eyes that we normally wouldn't reach.)

EMPLOYEE SERVICE AWARD**A. September 2025**

1. **Josh Cobb, Police – 5 years.** Josh started as a junior in high school on an internship with Swink School. After two years, he got into the reserve program where he became a volunteer police officer. During that time, there was an opening in code enforcement that he took until he went to the academy.

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – September 15, 2025**INFORMATION**

- A. Brad Davidson (618 Colorado Avenue fire):** Gave a timeline of events that occurred during the fire that happened on September 4th. Thanked all of the mutual aid that responded, La Junta Police Department, Otero County Sheriff's Office, city staff, community members and college students.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION (5-minute time limit per person):

1. Gary Reed, 18975 State Hwy 202, Rocky Ford: Want to thank the Fire Chief and the police. I have received tons of calls on the fire across the street. I'm glad we got some clarity on a lot of stuff. The next thing I want to say is just how quickly this got out of hand. With that being said, they acted really fast. I have a house a couple of blocks over. People were calling me saying my house is on fire. This was a city-owned property and we've had lots of questions on. I know the girl on the corner had to move some tenants possibly. Is that something that the city is accounting for because it was a city owned building or is that, what's the process for that, do you know? Again, I've said it before, we need as a community and as a city especially, we need to take care of our own houses before. There's been a lot of contention with landlords in the valley and how they're taking care of their houses. It could have been anyone of us. Whether it's a rental house or just residential. Anyway, I hope that kind of puts a little bit of water onto the heat about landlords. Also, quick shout out to Carly Johnson, first Tuesday of the month at Wild Roots Kava, she has her entrepreneurial thing going. It's really informative.
2. Adrian Hart (seconews.org), 201 Colorado Avenue: We're hosting our annual candidate forum. Any candidates on the ballot are welcome to join us. We'll have Jim Rizzuto moderate. It will be Monday the 29th. Doors will open at 6:00 p.m. and we'll begin at 6:30 p.m. at the Picketwire for Performance and Visual Arts. We're going to invite everybody from Otero County.

REPORTS**A. Library Advisory Board (Holly Huerta-Hudak).**

- Handed out the annual report to City Council which highlighted strengths, weaknesses, short-term goals, long-term goals, capital improvements, policies, procedures, programs/guidelines to enhance library operation and library advisory board requests. The library just finished up their summer reading program which was fantastic and well attended by the community. The staff has been fantastic. They do well juggling their patrons and activities.
- Heather Maes: Through the Colorado Workforce Center, we had a teen work with us this summer. At the end of his hours, we were notified that the Workforce Center had submitted the library and Jayden for an award for the Governor's Summer Job Hunt. Both the library and Jayden received the award. On September 4th, we were presented the award at the Governor's Mansion Carriage House.

CONSENT AGENDA**A. Special Meeting Minutes August 28, 2025.****B. Regular Meeting Minutes September 2, 2025****C. Application for a Special Events Permit by La Junta Chamber of Commerce, Christina Tozzie, Event Manager. The event is the 4th Annual Tarantula Fest to be held September 27, 2025 from 12:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m. at Live Well Park**

MOTION TO APPROVE THE SEPTEMBER 15, 2025 CONSENT AGENDA: Ochoa

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 5-0 (Ramirez absent, Ward 2 Vacancy)

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – September 15, 2025**NEW BUSINESS****A. Letters of Interest – Ward 2 Vacancy.**

Carly Johnson: Thank you for considering me for this appointment. I've had the privilege of serving this community through my small business downtown, the Urban Renewal Authority, Kiwanis, and numerous community service projects. I didn't step forward for this role lightly. I believe that City Council is where the practical work gets done, like making sure streets are safe, infrastructure is reliable, and opportunities exist for families and small businesses to grow here in La Junta. If appointed, my commitment is simple. I will listen to the residents, do my homework, and work respectfully with each of you to move our community forward. This city has given me so much and I feel called to give back through service. Thank you for your trust and for the chance to continue building La Junta's future together.

Christina Tozzie: I did submit my interest in this Ward 2 seat as an interim position. I did not get on the ballot. As you all know, I have a son who is in high school and he will be graduating in three years and a 4-year term at this time just wasn't really feasible for my family and I. I do take strong interest in La Junta. I do support our small business community. I actually have my own small business as well. I not only write grants but help support small businesses and maybe some of the facets that they're not experienced in, like marketing. I've even done IT support for some of the small business clients that I have. I am a grant writer. I work for the state of Colorado in the Division of Military & Veterans Affairs. So, I also handle all the veteran's funds that go out through two of our major grants through that department. I haven't lived my whole life in La Junta but I've lived the majority of my life in La Junta and I just have this need to give back to the community that served me so well throughout my life. I think that I have a level head when it comes to issues for not only residents but also business owners and community members and I just want to do my part to continue that service. I serve on multiple non-profit boards and I'm requested very frequently to join other boards. But like I said, with my son graduating in three years, I do want to devote my short-term time to him because I don't get that time back but I am ready and willing to serve.

Julie Worley: I am going to withdraw my application because I really feel that you need to appoint Carly and give her three meetings before she's actually elected to the council. I had no idea and I'm very pleased that she put her application in and I would strongly suggest that you appoint Carly Johnson to this position. So, thank you for your consideration and thank you for all your service and what you do.

Council members had opportunity to asked additional questions of all applicants.

MOTION TO APPOINT CARLY JOHNSON FOR THE WARD 2 SEAT: Rikhof

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: Those voting YES: Velasquez, Ayala, Ochoa, Rikhof
 Those voting NO: Pantoya
 The motion carried 4-1 (Ramirez absent, Ward 2 Vacancy)

B. Committee/Board Reports

1. Senior Center Advisory Board (Council Member Velasquez):
 - Holding strong at about 493 members.
 - Started the La Junta Senior Center Gem of the Month and I'd like to recognize Ms. Juanita Hinkhouse for September's Gem of the Month for all she does.
2. Utilities Board (Council Member Velasquez):
 - (Water) The fire hydrant on 8th and Colorado had a compression plate problem and they had checked it two months prior to the fire. It was working fine but just like Murphy's Law says, things will break down in order of priority or importance of the task that you're undertaking at the same time. That is a clear indication that Murphy was out there with that fire.

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – September 15, 2025

- (Water) With routine maintenance, there's a lot going on. As you're driving around the city and you see fire hydrants with white caps on the sides or on the top, that means that they've been looked at and they should be in working order but again, you can't discount Murphy out there.
- (Water) Reminder for customers to stay out of the meter pits to manipulate valves. If anything is damaged, the customer is responsible for the cost of repairs. Homeowners should have a master valve installed inside their home. Please call the utility office at 384-2546 during regular business hours.
- (Electric) We had a lineman working on a pole while it was on fire, that's just high risk. These are not only our friends and neighbors and employees of the city and people that you see drive by every day. They're putting their lives on the line.
- Shout out to the other departments, the street, water, police departments and everybody involved. One of the things that was most impressive was the community got involved. Not only did the Otero students get involved as well as other community members. Shout out to the people who offered up their homes to those who were displaced.

E. City Manager's Comments

- Invited council to the CML District meeting next Thursday the 25th in Las Animas.
- The Neighborhood Watch meeting is going to be next Wednesday the 24th at 6:00 p.m. at the Police Department.
- We are waiting to hear back about concrete availability for the tennis courts but we're positive it'll be started by October.
- Invited everyone out to the public budget hearing next Monday on the 22nd here in the Council Chambers.
- The Veteran's Coffee at the Senior Center is every Wednesday around 8:00 a.m. It's open to everybody. Come hang out, shake some hands, hug some necks. It's a good time to come out and socialize.
- Safeway – Myself, the Mayor, Pam Denahy and a few others have been working non-stop on the Safeway issue since it started last Tuesday. We are in the process of trying to get something figured out. We don't quite know what that is yet. I welcome all ideas anybody has.
- Everybody did a wonderful job the evening of the fire across the street. It was amazing the turn out that we had. Now that reports have been done, we're working with Ayers, which is our Brownfield consultant, along with the EPA and CDPHE for emergency grants for the clean-up.

F. Community Events/Council Reports

1. Tourism/Econ. Development Director Denahy:
 - Tarantula Fest is September 26th and 27th. There's lots going on. Dr. Paula Cushing and Dr. Cara Shillington will be at the college. Arachnophobia will be playing on Friday at the theatre. The bus tours are filled up. We'll have the parade, classic car show, vendors, food truck, contests, beer garden, Koshare dancers and bands along with the education pavilion. We are also partnering with the Art Project again this year.
2. Mayor Ayala:
 - Neighborhood Watch meeting September 24th at 6:00 p.m. at the Police Department.

G. Governing Body Reports

1. Council Member Rikhof:
 - Questioned if the Parks Board and Senior Center Board are also going to be having their meetings in the council chambers? (Mayor Ayala responded affirmatively.)
2. Council Member Pantoya:
 - Requested for Michael and Aliza to work on a budget that would have the shortfalls we're expecting losing the Safeway tax revenue.

City Manager Hart: It's going to be difficult to do that because it's not like everyone that exclusively shops at Safeway is going to just not shop anymore. They're obviously going to go somewhere to shop. Is that going to stay here in La Junta at Wal-Mart? Are they

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – September 15, 2025

going to go to one of our neighboring communities? It's difficult to plan what that shortfall is going to be. The shortfall we can do a little bit better on calculation is going to be on the utility side. So, yes, we can but it will be purely speculative.

- We received the report for Property Management showing all of the insured properties that we have. Are you working on another spreadsheet that would show us all the city-owned properties at the Industrial Park and then also all of the properties that we have housing structures that have been taken down already. Ones that need to be taken down. Something more broken down.

City Manager Hart: That's why it was requested multiple times from you all what you were looking for and with no response, we gave you all the most general broad spectrum as we could. If there's specific categories of what you're looking for, please respond to that email.

On that not, I talked to Brock this morning and we're looking at the bus tour to be able to take you on next month. Again, same thing, if there are specific properties you want to look at, please let me know.

3. Mayor Ayala:

- When we have these Property Management tours, make sure that you're getting with Mel so if there is something you guys want to see, we let them know because that list is massive. If we need to do more than one tour, we can do that. Just make sure we're all clear on what we want to see.
- Regarding the fire, I want to talk a little bit about how the city owned that. We had an EPA grant to where the city would have these houses in their care. They would get taken down and it was fairly quickly. Last year, that stopped and we have the Brownfield that we're doing now but it doesn't take that place of what the EPA was doing. They were doing anywhere from three to five a year which was amazing. But it's not that same way anymore. It's a lot tighter to get any EPA money and that one was on the list to tear down.

City Manager Hart: Brownfields funds do not actually do the demo. They do all the stuff up to the demo. That's when the EPA would jump in.

- When the city takes these houses, it's not to rent them out its because they need to come down. So, we're not getting that property across the street to do something with it. We're getting it to take it down because the people that had it were not able to do that.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:34 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF LA JUNTA

Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

Joseph Ayala, Mayor