

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

INVOCATION: MJ Romano 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
Carly Johnson, Ward 2
Joe Ayala, Mayor
Chandra Ochoa, Ward 2
Lisa Pantoya, Ward 3
Maureen Rikhof, Ward 3


Subject to approval at the
December 1, 2025
City Council Meeting


Absent: none

Also present: Michael Hart, City Manager
Erin Harris, City Attorney
Melanie Scofield, City Clerk
Aliza Libby, Director of Finance
Gary Reed, Rocky Ford
MJ Romano, La Junta
Sandy Lee, Rocky Ford
Val Clark, La Junta
Scott Johnson, La Junta
Jessica LaPage, La Junta
Jeni Henry, La Junta
Kris Sarlo Koehler, La Junta
Angela Ayala, La Junta
Ellie Richardson, La Junta
Jeff Richardson, La Junta
David Polley, La Junta
Christine Coffield, La Junta
Connie Clifton, La Junta
Christopher Menges, La Junta
Dottie Burnett, La Junta
Maria Lopez, La Junta
Nancy Bennett, La Junta
Cheryl Lindner, La Junta
Steven Cordova, Total Concept
Larry Chatman, La Junta
Nancy Harrington, SECO News
Adrian Hart, SECO News
Bette McFarren, RF Gazette

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – November 17, 2025**CITIZEN PARTICIPATION (5-minute time limit per person):**

1. There was no citizen participation.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Regular Meeting Minutes November 3, 2025**
- B. Application for Renewal of a Tavern Liquor License by Ross V. Leyba, d/b/a B.J.'s Sports Bar, 10 E. 2nd Street**
- C. Application for Renewal of a Fermented Malt Beverage and Wine Liquor License by Family Dollar Stores of Colorado LLC, d/b/a Family Dollar #25100**

MOTION TO APPROVE THE NOVEMBER 17, 2025 CONSENT AGENDA: Ochoa

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- A. Second Reading/AN ORDINANCE MAKING SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS TO THE INTERNAL SERVICES, WATER, AND WASTE WATER FUNDS 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: Rikhof

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

OATH OF OFFICE TO NEWLY ELECTED COUNCIL MEMBERS. The City Clerk administered the oath of office to newly elected Council Members Damon Ramirez (Ward 1), Carly Johnson (Ward 2), and Lisa Pantoya (Ward 3). She then administered the oath to Joe Ayala (Mayor).

ELECTION OF MAYOR PRO-TEM. Mayor Ayala opened the floor for nominations for Mayor Pro-Tem. Council Member Johnson nominated Council Member Rikhof. Council Member Ochoa nominated Council Member Velasquez. There were no further nominations. Those voting for Maureen Rikhof: Johnson, Rikhof. Those voting for Paul Velasquez: Ayala, Ramirez, Velasquez, Ochoa, Pantoya. Council Member Paul Velasquez was elected Mayor Pro-Tem in favor 5-2.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS.

Mayor Ayala: Aliza is available to us at any time for financial help. There's been times when I wanted my financials a certain way and Aliza has been there to tweak things to make it easier for me to digest.

Finance Director Libby: The financials are also available on the website the same day that they are released. I go for the 3rd business day. You can also email any questions to myself or Michael or Melanie and we'll get the answer to you. If there is something you would like me to specifically discuss or if there's questions that you have, I'd be happy to answer them.

Council Member Rikhof: We meet in public as a board and it's reasonable to want to discuss what I think is our most important job which is the budget. I get questions about if we're on track. People want to know if we have savings, if we're eating through our buffer, if we're going to have to have another tax increase anytime soon. To me, it's entirely about giving information that gives the public a reason to feel confidence in the excellent system that we have and to point out anything that's deviating wildly from what we budgeted.

Finance Director Libby: Nothing is deviating wildly except for the supplementals that were put in front of you. When you look at the budget, it tells you that the general fund is \$57,000 negative. I'm going to tell you that that's okay because there's a lot of things that go on at the end of the year that you will see at the

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final financial. Anything under \$100,000 plus or minus is a good thing. We're also still waiting on grant moneys.

Council Member Johnson: Does that explain why the intergovernmental revenue is only at 59% for the year?

Finance Director Libby: Most of it is because of the fact that we have not gotten our section 5311. That has been a direct effect of the government shutdown and we've had a difficult time with the state, due to the shutdown, getting a contract signed and approved. We are starting to receive that money now. The other thing is the airport is budgeted for \$600,000 but we have not done that work yet.

Mayor Ayala: Outside of this, you have a third-party auditor that comes in to make sure that Aliza did everything right at the end of the year and gives us updates on what's going on with that, if we're on track, where we might have shortfalls, where we might have concerns, and that is Hancock-Froese who do that.

Finance Director Libby: Yes, and we do have procedures we have to follow with certain steps that have to be taken and they make sure we follow all of those steps.

Council Member Ramirez: So, on the point that Maureen asked, previous to me coming on board, there was a drain on our savings. Can you give us an idea where we're headed on that?

Finance Director Libby: We do have savings at \$2.1 million right now. We've been lucky enough that this council, most of this council, approved me to do a lot more than CD's and we have been able to take advantage of those high interest rates. That has also helped our investments a lot as well as the departments buckling down and of course the 1% was a godsend.

Council Member Rikhof: On that note, I'd like to point out the September sales tax was up this year over last year at 13% which I think is interesting. I don't know if that's tarantula tourism. I think that is commendable and up just under 5% overall where we were this time last year.

Finance Director Libby: What that essentially means is that people are investing in La Junta, shopping in La Junta, doing business in la Junta. It also means that you're doing business with places that do collect sales tax for La Junta. There's a lot of factors that have helped the sales tax grow.

NEW BUSINESS**A. Homelessness.**

City Manager Hart: I have been contacted by a few different people in the community regarding homelessness and what the city's efforts are in regard to that. I don't know what's been done in the past but I did say I would bring it up at council for discussion to potentially point out some different resources here in the community that may be available.

Jeff Richardson, 617 San Juan Avenue, YEEHAW: YEEHAW (Yielding Effective Entry to Housing & Well-Being) started around a year ago with the warming center that was at Sandy and Marty Lee's Church in Rocky Ford. We had a big snow and a lot of people were put out and a lot of people who were already out didn't have anywhere to go. What we're doing again this year is we're trying to be prepared. We learned a lot last year. We open when the weather dictates that we need to. Typically, that's when there are extremely low temperatures overnight followed by the next day of low temperatures. This is run by people who want to be a part of helping in whatever capacity they can. We're collecting donations, giving money. A lot of times people you see on the streets just need a place to go. We put them in hotel rooms. This is all done with funding that are donations. We've gotten some grants. Otero county Health Department is involved in this. We're just trying to help people get them the next place of where they want to go. We're not about enabling people to stay where they are. There's a lot more involved than just putting someone somewhere. There's a lot more to this kind of service that we provide. We really want to help people get out of that environment if they're ready to do that.

Our biggest donation needed is funding. The Kitchen of Kindness has an office on 2nd Street where they've been taking clothing donations. You can donate directly to Otero County Health Department. YEEHAW needs funding. A lot of people are in tough positions that we probably take for granted and don't think about. There are things we try and help people with. There's The Osborn but you just don't write your name down on the list to get in. You have to have identification, social security card, birth

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certificate. Those aren't things that people typically have on them while they're homeless. It's a process to get these things for people. Getting them a cell phone is really beneficial because then we can find them because we don't always know where they might go. They could be here today and gone tomorrow. These little things add up. A lot of us have been through this or have known people who have. We know what it is they might need in order to get out of that lifestyle.

Scott Johnson, pastor, Calvary Church, 2407 Johnston Drive: Invited the council for their training on Thursday at 11:30 a.m. If you really want to know what the warming center is about, come and see. We have about sixty people that are going to come and volunteer. If you want to see what we do, what we're about, where we're at. I can't tell you how awesome it is to be a part of this YEEHAW group. This is not just about us. This is all of us together.

Steve Cordova, Executive Director, Total Concept: We are the owner and developer of The Osborn. YEEHAW is a grassroots organization which is absolutely necessary. The housing and homelessness situation is a broad continuum. Over the last twelve months, we've assisted about 1,500 people and 1,200 with direct financial assistance. Totalling about \$5 million and about 300 people in what we call housing counseling, financial fitness and stuff like that. So, by providing them and serving them to understand what their financial situation is, helps them remain housed. The second thing is how do we connect them with the resources necessary to keep them housed and that's where that direct assistance comes in. I strongly recommend reaching out to the Housing Authority, it is absolutely necessary to receive some of those financial resources to keep people housed. You also have social services, your medical providers, all of those others that then can come in and collaborate with what organizations exist such as ours to address those people needing to remain housed. The homelessness, as we're talking about, those don't have a place that they call home, really rely on the grassroots efforts of people like YEEHAW and our permanent supportive housing project housing that will actually provide about \$10,000 of services to those individuals. This is not the rent that they paid. This is the services we provide in the form of mental health services and then potentially health care services. Then we partner with Valleywide. As a housing organization we provide a very robust array of services that don't exist right here in La Junta but our supportive housing project which will open up is in Rocky Ford, that would be a tremendous service in south and eastern Colorado that would not exist otherwise. The resources actually exist. Unfortunately, La Junta is not large enough to have its own fully funded shelter or fully funded anything. Seventy people do not pay the bills unless the cities and the counties want to subsidize that. I don't think anybody has that type of money. That's why the power of these grassroots organizations is so great and why we all need to donate to them and support their efforts because they're the people on the ground that can do the street outreach that organizations like ours and the housing authorities cannot do. It's got to be a community-wide event, effort, leveraging the resources of established organizations and your institutional organizations. But the grassroots organizations are hugely important as well.

B. Committee/Board Reports

1. Senior Citizens Center (Council Member Velasquez):
 - In October, I misspoke. I said that Maxie Lu Garcia was the Gem of the Month. It was actually Maxie Lu Carrica. It was properly reflected in the minutes, thank you Melanie.
2. AVRMC (Council Member Velasquez):
 - Had their women's wellness and ribbon cutting for the 3D mammography machine. It was attended by roughly one-hundred people and a lot of area health partners that set up booths or tables within the area. It was a really nice event.
3. Library Advisory Board (Council Member Rikhof):
 - The Friends of the Library received a 3-year grant in the amount of \$125,000 per year to spend on new computers and new technology at the library. They will also be providing more Spanish access to materials and providing programming. It's a partnership with the CSU Extension. Congratulations!
 - There are two seats open on the Library Board, the two people whose seats are open are both reapplying but I'm just encouraging everyone, if you want to serve our community, there's a lot of opportunities, including the Library Board.

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – November 17, 2025**C. City Manager's Comments**

- 618 Colorado Avenue: They should be finishing up all the backfill on that property this week.
- Streets: Last day for asphalt will be Wednesday, so tomorrow, they are going to be doing a bunch of utility cut fills on 14th and 16th Street.
- Airport: We have a big grant coming to redo the runway. We were contacted by the FAA, they have an additional \$350,000 they are going to award to La Junta for all of the taxi ways.
- Recreation: The tennis courts are up and going. The fencing should be done in the next couple of weeks, then the painting will be dependent on the weather.
- Ark Valley Conduit: A couple weeks ago in my report, I mentioned the Arkansas Valley Conduit and the amount of money that the City's paid into it. The City has paid in about \$1.5 million since 2011 or roughly about \$105,000 a year. The monies are going to development and planning charges, as well as water quality studies for our cost share, if we decide to participate.

D. Community Events/Council Reports

- There were no community events/council reports.

E. Governing Body Reports

1. Council Member Rikhof:

- Met with constituents last Monday from Ward 3. They thanked the City and Michael for getting the tennis courts going and the building across the street being demolished.
- Questions were asked about why the lines haven't been painted at the Wal-Mart intersection.
- We had about two dozen people show up, mostly people who live or own property at the Prairie View Heights with questions about their 25-year agreement with the City that expires at the end of the year. Who takes care of what in the City property that's out there. They want to have conversations about it. I sent an email to Mr. Hart and fellow council person Pantoya, encouraging that maybe the three of us meet with residents out there and try to move those conversations forward with some speed so there's answers by the end of the year when their current agreement sunsets.
- Board openings: Certified Local Government, Housing Authority, Library, Planning, Recreation, Senior Citizens, Tourism, Tree, Urban Renewal and Utility Board.
- Somebody asked me if we could try to be more aware of reading full names when we're voting on things. I think it's good governance so people know what we're discussing and what we're voting on.

2. Council Member Ramirez:

- We're nearing the end of the year and there's been some things that we've gone over throughout the year that I feel were dropped or we never followed up on. The vehicle policy for the City. We had some input on that but I haven't seen anything on that. I requested information about a take-home vehicle policy and whether that falls under the same policy. There's nothing really about what the requirements are for a take-home vehicle.
- The other thing, trailer and RV code for the City. I haven't heard anything about that.
- Then there were some processes we talked about maybe putting them on paper or format somehow, like the way this meeting is run. Several things like that and we haven't done anything about that or if we're going to. I just wondered about these things.

City Attorney Harris: I think that the vehicle policy is something that was provided to me by Dawn Block through HR and I think it has actually been finalized. It may not have been something that came back here. We could certainly make that available and if the council has additional comment, you could do that.

City Manager Hart: Previously, when this matter was taken up, I did reach out to everyone and say, hey, give me your takes and, for the most part, people did have some response to it. Both of those policies, the take-home and the general vehicle policy, are complete. I'm more than happy to provide you with a copy of them. To speak to the trailer parking policy. Again, I gave you all my input to the council, ultimately, it's a council decision because it's an ordinance. It's nothing I can do from my office. But I'd be more than happy to re-provide all the previous information that I have given to the council.

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- I think my problem is we did input and I never saw anything come back. Maybe I missed it but I don't remember anything coming back on that. So, it would be good to follow up with the trailers and if there's an updated policy on the vehicles.
- 3. Council Member Rikhof:
 - I would like to ask about our Economic Development Council and moving forward on that.

City Manager Hart: Again, you all have not had it ever and while it is on its way, it does take a little bit of time to put together. There are lots of moving parts to put together with this. It's not something I'm going to be able to whip up in a month's time by any means but it is in the process of moving forward. One of the things that Pam Denahy and I are trying to do is salvage what little bit of an Economic Development Incorporated there was before so we don't have to completely reinvent the wheel. It is something definitely that's going to be coming in 2026.

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