

LA JUNTA URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY

CALL TO ORDER: The La Junta Urban Renewal Authority Board of Commissioners held a Regular Meeting on Thursday, January 23, 2025 at 3:59 p.m. in the Council Chambers. The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Bennett.

Board Members Present

Absent

Joe Ayala
Nancy Bennett
Toni Madrid
Erin Monroy
Randall Roberson (via Zoom)
Lily Sweikert

**Subject to approval at the
February 27, 2025
Urban Renewal Meeting**

Also present: Melanie Scofield, City Clerk
Cristian Estrada, Deputy City Clerk
Aimee Hill, Building Code Official
Carly Johnson, Wild Roots Kava Co.
Ben Mason, Sutherlands
Erika Lively, La Junta

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

There was no citizen participation.

MINUTES: October 24, 2024

Chairperson Bennett asked if there were any corrections or additions to be made to the October 24, 2024 minutes. There being none, the board moved to a motion.

MOTION TO APPROVE OCTOBER 24, 2024 MINUTES AS PUBLISHED: TONI MADRID

SECOND: LILY SWEIKERT

AYE: Ayala, Bennett, Monroy, Roberson, Sweikert

OPPOSED: None

The motion carries.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS: DECEMBER 2024

Treasurer's Report: Randall Roberson reported that toward the end of December, we had \$13,028.36 in our cash/checking account; in the ColoTrust investment account there is \$371,480.76. Notes receivable for \$1,437.50 bringing our total assets to \$385,946.62 (rounded would be 386,000). We took in revenue from the tax increment district being \$464.14. We earned interest from the ColoTrust account on our monies deposited, which is \$1,411.32. We paid out \$4,257.00 in rehab grants. The City of La Junta welcome sign rent expense \$1,541.71. Finally, there was \$69.99 in general operating expenses. We have spent about \$4,000 more than we have taken in.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE FINACIAL REPORT AS PRESENTED: ERIN MONROY

SECOND: LILY SWEIKERT

AYE: Ayala, Bennett, Madrid, Monroy, Roberson, Sweikert

OPPOSED: None

The motion carries.

REPORTS:

A. Plaza Building

- The Plaza Building project is starting to move along again, however, that also means that the completion date is also moving forward and not closer.
- The doors have been installed on the south and east sides; however, the east-side doors are still covered up due to the door hardware not being in yet.
- The electrician was supposed to have started work last week; I have not been in to check out the progress. It is currently ongoing.
- SECCP has spoken to Ray Gonzales in Rocky Ford about installing A/V equipment for the Plaza Building; this will cost around \$8,000-\$10,000. That is ready to go as soon as the money is figured out.
 - Question by Lily Sweikert: What is the new completion date?
 - Response by Nancy Bennett: It could be between June-August of 2025. There is going to be an award given to the Plaza Building in April 2025 from the state, despite the building not being completed.
 - Sweikert: What has been the hold up with the progress of completion?
 - Bennett: The main hold-up has been with the electrician (wait time has been about 8-9 months). There have been issues with distributors and providing materials for the project; it has all been supposedly taken care of and things will be moving along.
 - Sweikert: Will there be any make-up for lost time?
 - Bennett: I do not imagine. It will take as long as it takes to get the work done. Another update is that the tin has also been purchased and is ready for installation.
 - Question by Randall Roberson: Nancy, help me out with the Audio and Video for the building – what are you talking about there?
 - Bennett: I do not have a list, but some items are an A/V cabinet for all of the wiring to be housed; three television screens will also be purchased; a system similar to the OWL video meeting technology that we are currently using here, as well as a microphone system to be able to hear people from different areas of the building. I would like for the A/V system to be similarly set up like the Rocky Ford Fire Department office. Ray Gonzales is the one who headed up the project for them. He would be a great contact for the process.
 - Roberson: There are two apartments upstairs in the building, are those apartments ready to rent out? If not, by when?

- Bennett: I would imagine the same time frame as the completion of the building (between June-August) due to there being no electric wiring in the building. The drywall has not been completed on the first floor of the building; after the electrician completes work, then drywall will be installed. The vent for the range hood and the vent for the kiln are both located in the ceiling and roof of the flat part of the building.
- Roberson: Do you have any intentions of renting out the downstairs part of the building? Is it just for the use of a community kitchen, or a place for social gatherings, or is there another plan for the main floor of the building?
- Bennett: That is the concept for now, SECCP would be more than willing to allow for those situations; if the board decides to sell the building after completion, I'm sure that SECCP would not object to that either. If there are any other suggestions or ideas, please bring them up to the board.
- Roberson: Other than the two apartments, I'm not seeing a purpose for the first floor of the building.
- Bennett: There will be meeting rooms; they will be able to be rented and classes will be given; those whom are teaching a skill in these classes would need to be paid, so they would need to charge participants a fee. Schools would also show great interest in renting the space for classes, as well. Julie Whorley is working with Mo Montgomery whom is a chef in Pueblo who worked with community colleges and community members, has done work with Pueblo Fuel and Iron. I'm hoping that local schools, Otero College, BOCES are just a few that would be interested, but would be open to the public for use as well.

B. Chestnut Apartments: Melanie Scofield, City Clerk, gave updates on the Chestnut Apartments.

- I have reached out to Maureen Rikhof and I have not heard anything back. According to her last email, she has ordered and received windows and they will not be installed until March. I still have not received any confirmation or invoices that the windows have been purchased. I am currently working on it.
 - Bennett: Would we want to pay for the windows before they are installed anyway?
 - Scofield: No. I will not pay anything until the completion of work. Also, her application has a loophole of 18 months, which is why we are where we are currently. We are not at 18 months yet, but her application had that window and she is still within that window. Please let me know if the board would like me to request Rikhof to be present at the next meeting to provide a direct update.
 - Bennett: I would like for Maureen Rikhof to be present at the next meeting. I cannot imagine that the weather is the cause of the hold up with the window installation.
 - Joe Ayala: What month does the 18-month window put us in?
 - Scofield: I believe it was July 2024 when we approved the application. 18 months is a year and a half, so that puts us at the end of this year.
- This was not an agenda item, but I believe the board would like to know that the Elks Lodge have completed their project and have been paid.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Funding Applications

- Melanie Scofield: I have the grant application very well streamlined; the policy is almost complete and I'll also do a separate loan application. I would like to place these on the next meeting's agenda and possibly make it an action item. Once those are done, we can add them to the website underneath the "About URA" section of the website. That way it will be easily accessible to the public when reaching out for funds from URA.

B. Website Information

- Melanie Scofield mentioned that Google knows who we are now! The City of La Junta website is now easily found with a Google search. I asked Cristian Estrada to go in and edit the URA page on the La Junta website; there was a lot we removed that we deemed as not necessary, now there are only two paragraphs that explain what URA entails, as well as the meeting dates and members with their terms/expiration.
 - Bennett: Will we need to hold a work session to work/look over the documents before they are posted to the website?
 - Scofield: This is up to you as the board.
 - Toni Madrid: I believe there are some limits we need to revisit on the forms; perhaps a limit dollar amount?
 - Scofield: I believe that there should be limits, however, I believe there shouldn't be a specific dollar amount. Instead of stating the exact limit in dollar amount, that can be decided by the board when reviewing applications. I will email the board when the documents are ready (I will need about 2 weeks).

NEW BUSINESS

A. Election of Officers for 2025

- a. Chairman** – Lily Sweikert has nominated Nancy Bennett.

MOTION FOR NANCY BENNETT TO RETAIN THE POSITION OF CHAIRWOMAN: LILY SWEIKERT

SECOND: TONI MADRID

AYE: Ayala, Madrid, Monroy, Roberson, Sweikert

OPPOSED: None

The motion carries.

- b. Vice-Chairman** – Lily Sweikert nominated Erin Monroy.

MOTION FOR ERIN MONROY TO BECOME VICE-CHAIRMAN: LILY SWEIKERT

SECOND: TONI MADRID

AYE: Ayala, Bennett, Madrid, Roberson, Sweikert

OPPOSED: None

The motion carries.

c. Treasurer – Lily Sweikert has nominated Randall Roberson.

MOTION FOR RANDALL ROBERSON TO RETAIN THE POSITION OF TREASURER: LILY SWEIKERT

SECOND: ERIN MONROY

AYE: Ayala, Bennett, Madrid, Monroy, Sweikert

OPPOSED: None

The motion carries.

B. Board Vacancy Interviews

- a.** Carly Johnson, *Wild Roots Kava Co.* – Thanked the board for the opportunity to speak; I'm a proud business owner here in La Junta. Over the last year, I have renovated a vacant building in downtown and transformed it into Wild Roots Kava Company, which is my own Kava bar. This experience has shown me that Urban Renewal can revitalize and strengthen our community. I'm passionate about building on these efforts to create opportunities for growth, attract new investments, and enhance the quality of life for residents. With my experience with my building, I feel that I can contribute fresh ideas and knowledge. I look forward to contribute to the board and community and collaborate with others to ensure La Junta continues to thrive.
 - Bennett: Do you understand the basis for Urban Renewal?
 - Johnson: I do. I've been doing a lot of research recently. I have never served in this capacity before, but I'm willing to learn and be here to get going.
 - Roberson: My recollection is that you did not apply through Urban Renewal for the renovations of your building, correct?
 - Johnson: Yes, I purchased the building and put about \$80,000 into the renovation.
 - Roberson: Did you apply with Urban Renewal at that time?
 - Johnson: I have spoken with Cynthia Neib, and was told that I did not qualify for the funding.
 - Bennett: Did they state a reason as to why?
 - Johnson: Just that Urban Renewal couldn't help me. I met with Cynthia in her office on Raton Ave. I had researched, and my building had blight and damage, which was on the criteria for qualifications. I did not have a positive experience with the process at the time. I would like to see a change on that aspect, which is why I have shown interest in joining the board.
 - Roberson: I had not known that you had applied and were immediately denied. If we had known, we might have been able to rectify the situation. If anyone is denied funds from the URA, please bring it up so we can discuss reasonings as to why. I apologize for your negative experience.
- b.** Ben Mason, *Sutherlands LJ* – Store manager for Sutherlands; I love to serve. I am currently on the Certified Local Government board, and I have been attending the URA meetings for a while now as an audience member. I have a lot to offer to the board. I enjoy being part of the community and excited to make a difference. I'm a quick thinker; I come up with out of the box ideas, which I believe could benefit the Urban Renewal Authority. I've been a volunteer on many different committees such as food banks, as well as SECCP.

LA JUNTA URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY

- Sweikert: What is it you would like to see done in La Junta?
- Mason: There is a lot we can do, especially throughout the corridor. There's a lot we can do to try to attract new people and especially new business. In order to get the information out, we could set up a booth at community events (especially since here in La Junta, there are a myriad of community events to enjoy that even larger cities do not host). La Junta is a great community to be a part of and the city has a lot to offer to its citizens. I would like to contribute to see the city grow and thrive further.
- Bennett: Is there any kind of project that you can name off of the top of your head that you would like the URA to be involved in?
- Mason: I've witnessed on Facebook that there are many complaints for weeds and tall grass; I am wondering if the URA has funding for that, especially for city-owned properties. Being more involved in community events would be a big plus to this board. There are obviously folks who want to do things Urban Renewal-wise, but have no idea where to start.

MOTION TO ACCEPT CARLY JOHNSON AND BEN MASON AS MEMBERS OF THE URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY: TONI MADRID

SECOND: LILY SWEIKERT

AYE: Ayala, Bennett, Madrid, Monroy, Roberson, Sweikert

OPPOSED: None

The motion carries.

C. Governing Body Comments:

- Ayala: I would just like to announce that the City of La Junta has a new City Manager. His name is Michael Hart, he will be starting on February 18, 2025. His plan is to get in front of every board at least once within the next three months to familiarize himself with the board members. He won't be joining any boards this year (other than City Council and Utilities Board), as he will be taking time to learn his position. We look forward to more successes with Michael Hart.
- Sweikert: What is the status or conversation of replacing Cynthia Neib as URA director?
- Bennett: I believe Melanie Scofield is handling that role for the time being.
- Monroy: According to the minutes of October's meeting, it mentions that City Council decided that the URA would not have a director. Is that not the case?
- Ayala: Correction: we did not vote on the URA to not have a director. It did not come up at council.
- Bennett: In the past, Rick Klein was the director and then passed the role onto Cynthia Neib.
- Ayala: According to the minutes, it mentions that Aliza Libby mentioned "City Council has decided not to fill the URA director role at this time." Which did not come up at council. It was confirmed by Scofield that Libby did mention it at the previous meeting.
- Ayala: There is a split between the city and URA for pay of the director role. City Council would only approve the amount of pay, or say that there is not enough in the city budget to comply with the amount of pay.

LA JUNTA URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY

- Ayala: We are really going to begin looking more into economic development; I believe that economic development does play a major role in Urban Renewal. The company in question is Denahy, Inc.
- Madrid: For the sake of Sweikert's question, is it safe to say that the URA will not do anything major until we have a director?
- Ayala: You as the URA can move forward on decisions without a director. It is ultimately up to you, as a board to decide final say in projects moving forward.
- Sweikert: I think there is an outstanding question for Melanie Scofield, as she is currently filling the role of the director. Is that a potential long-term solution for this board?
- Scofield: I would be willing to interim and see what that looks like for the URA.
- Madrid: I think that is a great part of the conversation moving forward. Does the city manager have something else to offer, wait on input from them possibly?
- Sweikert: I also would like to mention that I am selling my house in La Junta and will be moving soon. I would like to inform the board of my soon-to-be vacancy, but would be glad to help out the board as much as I can while I am still around. I am looking forward to new challenges, but am going to miss the board and everything we have accomplished. I am truly thankful and the URA is something I have come to enjoy. I appreciate the faith and support you all have showed me, and I have enjoyed every minute.
- Scofield: Thank you, Lily. However, I cannot legally announce your vacancy until I receive a notice of resignation from you. I am thrilled that you are willing to help the board in the future.
- Erika Lively: It is nice to see a mixture of old and new blood as an outsider who's also here. It is interesting to see things moving forward. It is nice to see things shifting to a new board. We are thankful that you served on the board, Lily, and do wish you the best.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:40 p.m.

Cristian Estrada, Deputy City Clerk

Nancy Bennett, Chairperson