

LA JUNTA URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY

CALL TO ORDER: The La Junta Urban Renewal Authority Board of Commissioners held a Regular Meeting on Thursday, May 22, 2025 at 4:00 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
Zach Miner
Erin Monroy
Randall Roberson (via Zoom)

Carly Johnson
Ben Mason
Angel Saucedo

**Subject to approval at the
June 26, 2025
Urban Renewal Meeting**

Also present: Melanie Scofield, City Clerk
Pam Denahy, Dir. Tourism/Economic Development

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

There was no citizen participation.

MINUTES: April 24, 2025

Chairperson Bennett asked if there were any corrections or additions to be made to the April 24, 2025 minutes. Toni Madrid stated that under the Director Comments, page 4 of the April 24, 2025 minutes, there was a usage mistake ('through' needed to be changed to 'threw').

MOTION TO APPROVE APRIL 24, 2025 MINUTES WITH THE CORRECTION: ERIN MONROY

SECOND: TONI MADRID

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

ABSENT: Johnson, Mason, Saucedo

OPPOSED: None

The motion carries.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS: APRIL 2025

For the month of April, we took in \$1,320.45 of interest. There was \$40.78 of expenditures for the electric of the welcome sign; as of right now in our cash account, we have \$71,891.88. There is \$376,717.80 in our investment account. Notes receivable is for \$1,187.50. Total assets for March are up from \$449,027.08 to \$449,797.18.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE APRIL 2025 FINANCIAL REPORT AS PRESENTED: TONI MADRID

SECOND: JOE AYALA

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

ABSENT: Johnson, Mason, Saucedo

OPPOSED: None

The motion carries.

REPORTS:

A. Martin Montoya – Vacant Building/Zoning Ordinances

- Joe Ayala: Before Martin speaks, I would like everyone to know that on Tuesday, the Tourism and City Council boards had a tour of Bent's Old Fort; Michael Hart, Pam Denahy, and I have been having conversations regarding Mr. Montoya and his bringing up the ordinances for zoning, as well as ordinances for vacant buildings. He has identified many commercial buildings that could use some help from Urban Renewal. This discussion was not officially placed on the agenda, but I did contact Nancy and Melanie to ensure it was ok for him to speak at this meeting.
- Nancy Bennett: I believe this is a good idea for Martin to talk about it to us. Is there a list of those identified buildings?
- Martin Montoya: There is not an official list that has been publicly presented yet.
- Joe Ayala: To add, not all of these commercial buildings identified are located within the TIF district.
- Martin Montoya: I enforce the building code as well as zoning ordinances. I want to touch briefly that the Zoning Ordinance and Vacant Property Ordinance are two completely different things. There are zoning issues that I will discuss, as well as separately discussing the vacant building issues. First, the Vacant Property Ordinance and more specifically the Vacant Building notice. Essentially, this was a notice that was put into effect in 2017, but has not been enforced until about two years ago. I am not sure as to why it has not been enforced; before Rick Klein retired, he had asked me that he would like to see the ordinances be enforced.

Martin Montoya gave definitions of each ordinance, as well as what constitutes a vacant property and evidence of vacancy (proof that buildings are vacant). Martin proceeded to explain that any reason given under evidence of vacancy can be used to determine if a building is vacant or not.

- Martin Montoya: Once we determine a building is vacant, we send them a 'Vacant Building Notice'. Upon receipt of the notice, they have 90 days to fill out a 'Vacant Building Registration' in the Engineering office. That document explains to us what the plan is with the property. Only if they do nothing with the property, then fees will be assessed. There are a number of ways that a building can be exempt from said fees. One would be if the building is under a current building permit. Another exemption would be if the building had experienced a fire or had fire damage, which gives 90 days to register the building as such. If it is for sale or listed with a licensed realtor, it would also be exempt. Another option would be to come into the Engineering office and speak to us directly with intentions to fix the building, then we can offer a 6-month extension to bring the building up to code. Once it is up to code, owners must either use the property, and for residential properties, they must either live in, rent, or sell the property. It has to be used in some capacity and not just be left convicted.

- Joe Ayala: Just to clarify: Building owners have 60 days to respond to the initial notice letter. Then after they respond, they have 6 more months. I feel like there is a fair amount of time allowed for a response, as well as have an action plan to hopefully get the building where it needs to be.

Further questions were asked by the board in regards to clarifying the timelines of when the notice is received, and what the action plan(s) for the buildings are and how they affect the timeline. It was also mentioned that owners have the option to sell the buildings as is, if that is an option property owners are pursuing.

- Randall Roberson: You mentioned that, as long as property owners are in the process of trying to get a tenant to the buildings or a purchaser, they would be considered exempt. Would the case still be true if the building has been on the market for a long time?
 - Martin Montoya: I am not entirely sure, that idea would need visiting. I am almost certain that it would fall under the exemption of having a licensed realtor if they are trying to sell/rent a property.
- Joe Ayala: When you talk about utilities usage when determining if a property is vacant, tell the public how you go about that.
 - Martin Montoya: When we talk about significantly below standard utility usage, I'm not trying to define what that is. Normal to you could be considered entirely different from what I consider normal utility usage. If I see a building with evidence of no utility usage, then that would fall below standard usage. If there is some utility usage, then it is something I would not consider as evidence of a vacant property.
- Zach Miner: It's a good thing that you clarified that your decision isn't solely based off of one of the criteria. For example, if you just use the "overgrown" criteria to issue a notice.
- Erin Monroy: I agree that we should work together with the Engineering Department; I think this is a vital function of the board, which is redevelopment of vacant properties. As I was looking through my book, I located a 'Vacant Property Transition Plan' dated from 2021. It seems like the URA and the Engineering department were heavily involved previously in 2021.
- Randall Roberson: Just to clarify, you're looking for evidence of vacant properties using multiple criteria to not just leave a building vacant, you would like to see owners take care and fix up the buildings so they can be used/sold/rented out, rather than just leaving a building vacant and becoming dilapidated/affected by blight. Does that sound right?
 - Martin Montoya: Ultimately, you are 100% correct. I recommend that anyone that receives a vacant property notice to come into the Engineering office and discuss your situation with our staff.
- Martin Montoya: Moving onto the Zoning Ordinance. It is a whole different issue. In 2023, the Planning Commission together with City Council passed this new zoning ordinance. Because the ordinance was a new one, generally anything that was in place prior to 2023 has been grandfathered in. An example of how the zoning looks; just recently we had a question, which involves Urban Renewal. We had someone whom wanted to sell a property to a non-profit within the C-2 district. According to our schedule of uses, nonprofits cannot be located within the C-2 district. A major reason for this was taxes. Since

nonprofits do not pay taxes, we would then not receive any tax increment from these nonprofits. Of course, we will honor any nonprofit located within the C-2 district that has been there prior to 2023 (they have been grandfathered in). We currently have churches in our C-2 district as well as some nonprofits. We are honoring anyone that has been in this district prior to the approval of the 2023 ordinance and honoring any active leases and continue to hold that lease without termination, as long as the property owner/tenants would like to continue their lease.

- Joe Ayala: This is something that has come up, as well. We are not terminating any leases located within the C-2 district. If they choose to continue to lease their building, then they are allowed to be within the district. If they decide to no longer lease the property, then future owners/tenants of that building must adhere to the C-2 district schedule of uses. Also, leasing a building to a nonprofit is different from selling a building to a nonprofit within this district. Martin, could you talk a little more about that?
- Martin Montoya: What Mayor Ayala is referring to is the TIF district funds; the TIF district collects their taxes from building owners. If a nonprofit rents from someone who isn't a nonprofit, then that owner still pays taxes. If a nonprofit wants to purchase a property rather than rent, that would be a different story as, again, nonprofits do not pay taxes.
- Joe Ayala: Plus, many of the buildings may be a case-by-case decision. When Michael Yerman did all of the zoning, he included the percentage of current nonprofits and churches (also considered nonprofit) that were in our C-2 district. If this percentage grew, then Urban Renewal and our taxes would be negatively affected. If we want a vibrant downtown, then we need a good tax base in that district and we can't allow nonprofits within that district.

Conversation continued regarding the explanation of the varying districts as well as the C-2 district schedule of uses. Many buildings that are located within the C-2 district are not following the schedule of uses. For example, buildings located within this district cannot be used as storage buildings or warehouses (unless grandfathered in). Any variances must be applied upon and discussed with the Planning Commission. Unless it was built and designed as a warehouse, it cannot be used as a warehouse. Warehouses are designated for the C-1 districts. A breakdown of the location of each district can be found on the city's website, specifically on the La Junta GIS link at the bottom of the home page. The schedule of uses will be codified and on the Municipal Code website TBA. "Spot zoning" (picking one property and changing the zone of that property only) is not legal, as per state law.

- Joe Ayala: The reason for bringing Martin Montoya in front of the board was to provide him with more tools for his toolbox to work with people that come in. We can't do much for residential owners, but for the commercial properties we can. The City of La Junta wants to make sure this works out for everyone. The city wants more businesses to move in, but cannot as buildings are being used for storage. If they are being used for storage, then there are options we can visit for those situations. We are not trying to punish people. There are multiple properties affected with misuse. Martin Montoya is only doing his job by informing the boards about the situation. Property owners also have quite a bit of time to get in touch with the Engineering office, as well as adequate amount of time to be able to correct the violations.

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- Toni Madrid: The ultimate goal is to ensure that the buildings do not look like old, dilapidated storage areas, and that's where we as URA would come in.
- Erin Monroy: I agree with that, but to add to that point, our ultimate goal is development and redevelopment of these buildings to increase our revenues. We could absolutely be involved to fix the blight, and I can see Economic Development also being involved with the process.
- Zach Miner: I think cooperation between the multiple boards is ideal. Working together could get our name out there to people. Our biggest obstacle currently is that people don't know whom to reach out to for assistance.

B. Plaza Building (Nancy Bennett)

- The drywall is installed everywhere. The building has been primed on the second floor. Paint and primer are happening on the first floor.
- The prep work for the installation of finishes is in progress in the kitchen and the restrooms.
- The process is about ten (10) days behind schedule; the tile for the restrooms and the kitchen were backordered; they have arrived and they are working on getting it all installed.
- Even though the process is behind, the contractors are working hard to get caught up.

C. Chestnut Apartments (Maureen Rikhof): Melanie Scofield, City Clerk, mentioned that there has been no news on the Chestnut Apartments.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Pueblo Urban Renewal Authority (information)

1. Pueblo Urban Renewal is supposed to get in touch with the La Junta URA to set up a date in June to meet. There is not a specific date set yet, but we will be in touch.
2. Paul Benedetti has been talking up Pueblo Urban Renewal to other municipalities, as Walsenburg has also shown interest in learning more about new TIF districts.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Director Comments

1. Melane Scofield, City Clerk: I would like to first set a date for our next work session; there is a very informative video regarding HB 15-1348 (urban renewal and tax increment financing (TIF)). It is 50 minutes long and breaks everything down to be understandable. It may be helpful to watch the video prior to meeting with Pueblo Urban Renewal.

An Urban Renewal Authority work session is scheduled for Monday, June 11th at 4:00 P.M. in the Power Board Room of the Municipal Building. Subject: HB 15-1348.

2. The Urban Renewal tab on the website has been fully updated and is now live. Thanked Cristian Estrada, Deputy City Clerk for updating the website. All of the requested links (policy, application, maps) are located at the very top of the page. I was looking through my notes, and somebody on the board requested that the strategic plan be put on the Urban Renewal tab; I will put that on there soon.
3. I am currently compiling a list of all the businesses and completed projects, which will be completed sometime next week.
4. I have located a "cheat sheet" with all of the projects completed by Urban Renewal from 1970-2017. This morning, I have also located all of the details for those projects

as well. This information will not be accessible through the website, but personally shared with you on Dropbox.

5. There has been one business owner that picked up one of the applications; it has yet to be turned in.
6. It has been asked why the URA has projects outside of the TIF district; at one point, years ago HUD (Housing and Urban Development) and La Junta URA worked hand in hand together. That is the reason as to why there are different areas that URA has helped outside of the TIF district. Somewhere down the line, that changed. I am unsure when or why it changed.

B. Governing Body's Comments

1. Joe Ayala: I had some interesting conversations with Mrs. Pam Denahy regarding Economic Development and Tourism; she has an update to share with the board.
2. Pam Denahy, Dir. Tourism/Econ. Dev.: Joe and I were talking during our Bent's Fort trip, and I was updating him on a few things we are working on. I also oversee Main Street, which Nancy Bennett is one our representatives on the Main Street board. We have some grant funds that we need to spend by the end of the year; it is very specific of what we can do. We are also working on the Brownsfield grant; long story short, we are looking to do something called a "parklet". It is essentially a mobile outdoor dining space that takes up two parking spots. We are going to try the parklet out. We are going to use a local contractor to build the parklet and working closely with Martin to see how it can be stored during the winter. This was a suggestion from the Brownsfield grant. We are supposed to have this done by the end of the fiscal year – which is June 30th, 2025.
 - o Also, Economic Development had a work session in March discussing the future of Economic Development and what it looks like, which is an excellent conversation the city should be having. There are some contracts through DOLA that have not been filled for facilitation, so DOLA have offered to give us a facilitator to come down and help us facilitate that conversation; we would like to extend the invitation to the Urban Renewal Authority, CLG, City Council, The Chamber of Commerce, and Martin Montoya to have the conversation of what should Economic Development look like for La Junta. Tentatively, the date is Monday June 30th, 2025. It will more than likely be a four (4) hour session. We will share out a short survey to get some ideas flowing for the discussion.
 - o When Martin presented to City Council regarding the vacant buildings, I had emailed him the next day. I had actually just had a conversation with Main Street regarding the vacant buildings. Marilyn Schleich, secretary of the Engineering office, had emailed me a list of eight (8) vacant commercial properties in our downtown. I put that list together and I am happy to share the list with the board. They are defined within the C-2 district and TIF district, which would then involve Urban Renewal.
3. Joe Ayala: This is quite a bit, and it is starting to come together. This is my vision for what I would like this to look like going forward. There are multiple moving pieces, but if we get together as one, this will go a lot smoother. We just want to make sure that all boards are on the same page regarding this subject. What does the partnership look like with Otero College to see if students in architecture could work together with us and Urban Renewal to see ideas of how to restructure our buildings in downtown? They usually are looking for real-world projects.
4. Pam Denahy: Dr. Zant serves on our Main Street board, as well as Nancy Bennett, and we are required to have that board because we have grants from DOLA. I feel like we have a strong partnership. We are starting to talk about the vacant buildings; Main

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Street is an important piece of the conversation and perhaps how they can show up to storefronts. This would be helpful with the promotion piece of Main Street and Urban Renewal. It would be great to have Dr. Zant and Otero College work together with Urban Renewal.

5. Joe Ayala: I really do like the idea of the parklet and mobile dining areas; I would like to see some ideas for art pop ups that we could do in our downtown, if funds allow. Having it be mobile is even better so that way multiple downtown businesses can reap the benefits of those.
6. Toni Madrid: Melanie has been doing a lot of work for the Urban Renewal Authority; I would like to make a motion to assign Melanie Scofield as the official URA Director, having the board remember that we do have a budget item of \$20,000 per year; understanding that duties from the Historic Preservation Board also be covered by the salary. This would also be subject to her supervisor approval.

MOTION TO ASSIGN MELANIE SCOFIELD AS THE DIRECTOR OF URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY WITH SALARY AS BUDGETED AT \$20,000 PAID QUARTERLY, RETROACTIVE TO JANUARY 1, 2025, SUBJECT TO CITY MANAGER APPROVAL: TONI MADRID

SECOND: ZACH MINER

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

ABSENT: Johnson, Mason, Saucedo

OPPOSED: None

The motion carries.

An Urban Renewal Authority work session is scheduled for Monday, June 11, 2025 at 4:00 PM in the Power Board Room of the Municipal Building.

The next Urban Renewal Authority meeting will be held June 26, 2025 at 4:00 PM in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:02 p.m.

Cristian Estrada, Deputy City Clerk

Nancy Bennett, Chairperson