

BOARD OF UTILITIES COMMISSIONERS – July 8, 2025

CITY OF LA JUNTA)
COUNTY OF OTERO) SS
STATE OF COLORADO)

A Regular Meeting of the Board of Utilities Commissioners of the City of La Junta, Colorado, was called to order by Chairman Patrick Berg on Tuesday, July 8, 2025, at 4:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building.

Roll was called and the following Board Members were present:

Present: Joe Ayala, Mayor
Patrick Berg, Chairman
Mike Bourget, Commissioner – Via phone call
Keith Manweiler, Commissioner
Paul Velasquez, Council Member/Vice-Chair

Subject to approval at the
August 12, 2025
Utilities Board Meeting

Absent: None

Also present: Michael Hart, City Manager
Erin Harris, City Attorney
Cristian Estrada, Deputy City Clerk
Tom Seaba, Director of Water/WW
Chris Arguello, Electric Superintendent
Martin Montoya, Director of Engineering
William Streeter, La Junta

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Chairman Berg asked if there were any corrections or additions to the minutes of the Regular Meeting of June 10, 2025. Hearing none, the Chairman asked for a motion to approve the minutes as published.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE JUNE 10, 2025 MINUTES AS PUBLISHED: Velasquez

SECOND: Manweiler

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 5-0

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

1. William Streeter shared some concerns regarding his water meter readings and would like an adjustment to the water bill. Received a call from the Water Dept. in March of 2025 mentioning that he must have a leak at his house due to the fact of the meter readings being high. Increased from \$47 to \$637. Valley Plumbing has repaired the leak and is providing the receipts. The following month for March it was \$636 and then in April the bill was \$298 and the bill is normally in the \$40-\$60 range.
 - a. Joe Ayala asked William Streeter who was it that asked him to come to the Utilities Board to address the problem.
 - b. William Streeter responded that the Utilities Office referred him to speak to the board regarding his bill and having an adjustment made.
 - c. Joe Ayala explained the process/procedure for bill inquiries; Michael Hart is to look into the situation and will inform Mr. Streeter of any updates.
 - d. Tom Seaba, Dir. Water/Waste Water to also look into the situation and will get back to Mr. Streeter.

REPORTS

A. ARPA Board: Chairman Berg mentioned that the ARPA report is posted and is available for viewing.

B. Water & Wastewater Treatment (Tom Seaba):

1. R.O. Plant

- Kicking into high gear for the summertime as more folks are using more water; anytime that occurs (sprinklers, etc.) a lot more issues come up. Preventative maintenance as well as monitoring usage to ensure that Mr. Streeter's situation does not happen often.
- Had two (2) service calls today; usually range from 4-6 service calls a day to address any major usage reported by a meter or to address any leaks occurring.
- Got some great new irrigation equipment for the Water Dept. for out in the farms; huge reel sprinklers with 1,000 ft. of hose; also had some pumps included. These were provided by the city of Aurora, CO, which was being used for their revegetation project up until now, which are pivoting to something different.
 - The reason for the City of La Junta owning a farm; water on farms is exceptionally valuable (especially when in reference to Aurora, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo); there is only so much water and so many sources of water to go around. Different entities, not only municipalities, will purchase farms that are going foul or that are no longer in use, which becomes highly competitive for the local farmers and farms that are currently in use (in reference to farms recently purchased by Aurora).
 - The next step would be to go through water court for what is referred to as "exchange case" to be able to change the use of that water from agricultural use to municipal use. During this time, the water court's decree states that the land must be revegetated and returned to a natural state with natural grasses as if a farm had never been there. Once accomplished, and its approved, then the city is able to use the water and gain water rights to augment the current well use. The current augmentation for the wells is the Frying Pan Arkansas Project water. The more water is available, the less reliance on questionable sources; ensures the ability to pump water into the wells as needed and lessen the costs on outside water to require that augmentation.
 - To the department's knowledge, there are no current homes on any of the city-owned farmland. Will look further into this.
- Getting some quotes for inline testing for sewer affluent to do some industrial pretreatment qualified testing.
- The line break at 10th and Colorado was further investigated; there are only four or five customers that remain on that low pressure line (the one that sprung the leak). The department has repaired the line; shortly after repairing the line, another leak was detected nearby the repair. It is a 70+ year old line and has rotted quite a bit. One of the next projects is to remove the few remaining customers off of that line and add them to the high-pressure line.
- Advanced to the final round for consideration for an additional \$300,000 grant; this goes along with the previous one that will help with the design, effective emergent contaminant treatment. Will hopefully be able to streamline own process when it comes to the grind or discharge water, and how to better handle that. It will lighten up requirements that are on the permit.

C. Electric Department (Chris Arguello):

1. Line Crew

- Have been experiencing a few minor interruptions with the light plant substation; there are currently 3,000 customers served by this substation. About 558 transformers are connected to it. Various factors for the outages have been birds, snakes, squirrels, hair-line cracks in the insulators, tree branches, weather-related issues. This is the reason for

having a line crew available is that in case the power goes out, then the line crew will go out to fix it.

- If anyone hears a loud explosion and then the power goes out, it then gets reported to the electric department, which then in turn will respond to the calls rather quickly to ensure power is restored. Thanked the line crew for all of the work done on the service repairs.
- Great turnout for the Pole-Top/Bucket Truck Rescue training, which included ARPA members, employees from the Parks & Recreation department, as well as Michael Hart.
- Blown fuse at Winter Livestock, which could have been another cause of outages.
- Anchors were replaced at 14th Street and Santa Fe Ave., as well as 26th Street and Santa Fe Ave.
- New service was added at 1308 Adams Ave.
- Pulled out a faulty underground wire at W 12th Street and it was replaced with a new one.
- A new pole and light were added at the Brick and Tile Park parking lot.

2. SOLAR Accounts

- No new changes.

3. System Update

- SF6 Breaker Replacement: Engineers conducted a walkthrough of the Light Plant Substation; pictures were taken and maps were reviewed. The drafting engineer that came from Chicago will be putting plans together; will share the plans with the board.

4. Financials

- a. Revenue month to date total is \$937,276.88 (prior month was \$962,794.87). Year to date is \$5,700,679.82. Expenses totaled \$1,912,281.29 (prior month was \$1,565,887.37). Year to date is \$5,751,806.71. Revenue less than expenses shows in the negative at \$51,126.89. It is showing in the negative for the ARPA bill estimation being high due to the hotter temperatures, so more electricity will be used. This is not an actual number, but an estimate.

D. Sanitation (Martin Montoya):

1. June 2025 supplemental information

CUSTOMER INFORMATION

CUSTOMERS	2025	2024
RESIDENTIAL	2,778	2,798
COMMERCIAL	437	437
INDUSTRIAL	10	10
MUNICIPAL	31	29
	3,256	3,274

LANDFILL

TONS	2025 June	2024 June	2025 YTD	2024 YTD
OTERO COUNTY LANDFILL	547.41	540.22	3,304.60	3,092.96
SOUTHEAST RECYCLING	10.79	20.48	200.17	115.50
CLEAN VALLEY - CURBSIDE	2.99	3.25	20.08	21.05
CLEAN VALLEY - TRAILER	2.00	1.90	8.46	15.75
	563.19	565.85	3,533.31	3,245.26

OTHER INCOME

ITEM	2025	2024	2025	2024
	June	June	YTD	YTD
SPECIAL PICK-UP	4	5	21	19
40-YD BOXES	25	27	203	149
20-YD BOXES	11	23	88	156
OVERAGES	8	6	70	79
COMPACTOR	5	4	26	28
TRX STATION (OPEN BOX)	20.94	36.86	183.46	200.05
TRX STATION (COMPACTOR)	5.80	12.87	56.80	71.82
TOTE REPLACEMENT	3	9	38	54

2. Had a few events where containers were provided by the sanitation department; one event where containers were provided was the Stars and Stripes event at City Park and also provided containers for an event that the area schools did.
3. Cardboard program: eight containers have been ordered and will hopefully be here in the next month or two; has suggestions for appropriate rates - \$30 per month for one pick up a week. If more is requested, then it will be increased to \$50 per month. At this point would like to do just a Monday and Thursday pickup; then if there is an increase, more pick up days can be added (such as Monday, Wednesday, and Friday). The reason for coming up with the \$30 per month fee is that a municipality nearby La Junta charges \$25 for the service. A question of the board would be if the department should charge more for those businesses that produce a lot more cardboard than the average person.
 - a. More cardboard is more weight added to dumpsters, especially when wet. Many local area businesses would benefit from purchasing the service, as businesses produce a larger amount of cardboard waste. Has spoken to a few businesses and are anticipating such a program, as cardboard takes up quite a bit of space in dumpsters.
 - b. This program could also be made mandatory, especially in the cases of businesses whom create cardboard waste. The cost of this of course would increase the businesses' utility bill to cover the cost of the cardboard box. Even if they decide to remove their containers altogether, they will still be billed for sanitation, as the ordinance requires sanitation to be billed with electricity and water (the complete utility bill). That is considered mandatory for everyone.
 - c. Joe Ayala – Only has an issue with the word “mandatory”. Not usually well received by public.
 - d. Patrick Berg – asked Martin Montoya if he is leaning towards mandatory status because that would increase the likelihood of volume or be more cost-effective. Agrees that the word “mandatory” gets a lot of bad press. It sounds like there is a lot of positives, too. An aspect that is still uncomfortable is the subjective nature of “a lot of cardboard”. This would be worth defining, as a lot of cardboard could mean differently to each person. Is leaning towards start the program without mandatory status, but if the department notices that it would benefit the program and they are not meeting their revenue cost expectations, and look at how often those customers use the services that should be put on mandatory status.
4. Other things to note is that, comparing La Junta to another municipality such as Lamar, Lamar owns their landfill and not the county, where in La Junta, the landfill is county-owned. Lamar came out with a similar program like this one to divert as much cardboard from their landfill to recycling. La Junta can do the same thing, even if they do not own the landfill. La Junta produces

the most trash out of the entire county, and feels responsible as members of the board for the county landfill to divert the cardboard.

- a. Joe Ayala – asked Martin Montoya if he could explain how the trash schedule for the city is set up. What happens when there are holidays/a four-day weekend?
 - i. There have been a few new holidays added; therefore, it does change the regular schedule a bit. At the beginning of every year, the sanitation department sends out mailers included with the utility bills that detail all the holidays and when trash service will occur around those holidays. In addition to that, it is always announced to the Public Notices Facebook, as well as on the city website under the sanitation department tab. Even with all of this going on, it is still common practice that if someone forgets to set out their trash or if their trash is not picked up by mistake, then citizens are asked to call in for a special pickup at no cost. If people do not call in, then there is nothing that the sanitation department can do.
- b. Patrick Berg – It seems like there is an ample number of ways that people can get this information. The citizens must meet us halfway if they want the information regarding trash service during holidays.
- c. Joe Ayala – another question is that people have been concerned as to why trash outside of their bins is not being collected.
 - i. That is really just a safety issue; for the most part, the sanitation department will not pick up trash outside of the containers. If it does become an issue where trash containers fill up a lot, then that person will need to request a second container. There have been issues with commercial businesses and their trash containers being constantly full of trash that does not belong to the businesses.

NEW BUSINESS

A. City Manager Comments.

1. Thanked Chris Arguello for allowing him to attend the pole top/bucket training.
2. Appreciated Tom Seaba, Chris Arguello, and Martin Montoya for always being there and responsive when probed with questions in general, as well as thanked them for their great work for the city.

B. Governing Body's Comments.

1. Joe Ayala – As a senior member on the Utilities Board for four years, this board has been dealing with financials, which is the main portion of this board. Have had to switch meeting dates/times around to accommodate for the financials being ready in a timely manner. Having the financials in a timely manner will ensure that any rate increases, budgets, etc. are shared with the public in a timely manner, as well remaining on track. The number of times that this board has had to wait for the financial reports to be ready has been a lot. Understands banks have issues; hopes to see the financials being timelier.
2. Patrick Berg shared the following report from Gary Cranson regarding a question about ARPA and cash reserves from the last meeting:
 - a. “ARPA does not have a policy requiring a certain level of cash reserves. Agencies, which rate ARPA’s credit worthiness, customarily have a threshold of 90 days as an acceptable liquidity level. ARPA has a comfortable cash reserve margin, which is 128 days in April 2025. The cash reserve figure is reported as a simple indicator of financial health for the boards. If there are any further questions, please let me know.”

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There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:53 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF LA JUNTA

Cristian Estrada, Deputy City Clerk

Patrick Berg, Chairman