



MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING LA JUNTA CITY COUNCIL
LA JUNTA, CO
MAY 4, 2026
6:00 PM
COUNCIL CHAMBERS
601 COLORADO AVENUE

CALL TO ORDER (Mayor Ayala)

The Regular Meeting of the City Council of the City of La Junta, Colorado, was called to order by Mayor Ayala on Monday, May 4, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building.

INVOCATION (Mayor Ayala)

Mayor Ayala gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE (Mayor Ayala)

Mayor Ayala led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL (City Clerk)

Present: Damon Ramirez, Ward 1
Paul Velasquez, Ward 1
Scott Copley, Ward 2
Joe Ayala, Mayor
Chandra Ochoa, Ward 2
Lisa Pantoya, Ward 3
Maureen Rikhof, Ward 3

Absent: None

Also Present: Michael Hart, City Manager
Erin Harris, City Attorney
Melanie Scofield, City Clerk
Pam Denahy, Director of Tourism/E.D.
Christina Tozzie, AVRMC
Ron Hogan, AVRMC
pam Jenkins, La Junta
Teale Hemphill, Matrix
Ben Mason, Preservation Board
Gary Reed, Rocky Ford
Nancy Harrington, SECO News
Adrian Hart, SECO News
Bette McFarren, RF Gazette

PROCLAMATION

A. Recognizing Nurses Week and Hospital Week

Mayor Ayala proclaimed the week of May 6 – 12, 2026 as “Nurses Week” and the week

of May 10 – 16, 2026 as “Hospital Week.”

Christina Tozzie: Thanked the Mayor and City Council members for their service to our community and the many ways they support the people of La Junta. Healthcare is deeply personal and in times of uncertainty, healing, joy and loss, our nurses, providers, and hospital staff are there for our friends, neighbors, family members, and loved ones. We serve with compassion, skill, and a deep commitment to this community, often in ways that go unseen. At AVRMC, these individuals do more than provide care, they bring comfort, strength, reassurance, and hope. Their work is essential not only to the health of our community but to the heart of it as well. It is truly a privilege to recognize them tonight and to thank them for all they do each day to care for our community and provide high-quality care close to home. Their work is also a reminder that the future of local healthcare depends on strong relationships, shared commitment, and a community that stands together. That is why it is so important to work closely together with the City of La Junta as we look toward the future and continue doing all we can to support the strength and longevity of our hospital. I’m especially excited to continue growing that partnership through our Tour de Santa Fe bike ride for the Arkansas Valley Health Foundation in conjunction with Visit La Junta Tarantula Festival this September. This will help invest in the future of local healthcare through the Arkansas Valley Regional Medical Center.

Ron Hogan: We greatly appreciate the proclamation and recognition of all the great work that the hospital does and certainly that our nursing staff have done. I’m going to forward a document that has some really good body work that was completed recently called the Rural Future Analysis. We have a group called Colorado Rural Futures Group. I’ve been privileged to join that group in the last few months. A lot of great work has been done over the last three years and its an in-depth study done in conjunction with CU and the Farley Research Division. Id like to share that with you guys so you understand the challenges overall of rural healthcare and its endeavor to overcome and help you as elected officials help us in terms of advocacy with your colleagues upstream and in Denver. I think it would be a good document. Also, we greatly appreciate the dinner that we had a couple of weeks ago. We appreciate your participation. I think it was really good. Our team and our board were very appreciative of the time that you guys gave us and we thank you for that. In two weeks, I’ll be presenting the requested amendment to the bylaws, which includes the amendment to the consolidation agreement, which is an effort to clean up some old languages and bring a more modern approach to the consolidation agreement.

Arkansas Valley Nurses Honor Guard: Was formed to give tribute to our living as well as our nurses that have passed to see that they get the deserved dignity that they have earned.

B. National Historic Preservation Month

Mayor Ayala proclaimed the month of May 2026 as “National Historic Preservation

Month.”

Ben Mason: The Board has been working really hard over the past year and a half on historic preservation, trying to break it down into smaller obtainable goals. At the last council meeting, we designated 902 Belleview Avenue and 322 Santa Fe Avenue. That was super huge for the Board. We have also had two great public engagement events over the past six months and we look forward to more.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION (5-minute time limit per person)

There was no citizen participation.

PRESENTATION

A. Housing Needs Assessment (Matrix Design Group)

2026 Southeast Colorado Regional Housing Needs Assessment. (Christian Caron, Project Manager and James McMurray, Stakeholder Engagement Lead)
The study was conducted in accordance with SB 24-174, which requires municipalities to periodically evaluate housing supply, affordability, and needs. It combines quantitative data analysis and community engagement to identify gaps and emerging pressures in the housing system.

Scope: Demographics, economy, housing stock, housing market, housing challenges, housing gaps and preliminary recommendations.

Data Sources: Five-Year American Community Survey, State Demography Office, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics, U.S. Census Bureau Building Permits Survey, Zillow, Colorado Secretary of State and Redfin.

Community Engagement: Stakeholder interviews, tabling events and resident survey.

CONSENT AGENDA

A. Regular Meeting Minutes April 20, 2026

MOTION TO APPROVE THE MAY 4, 2026 CONSENT AGENDA: Rikhof

SECOND: Ochoa

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

NEW BUSINESS

A. Amendment No. 1 to Employment Agreement - City Manager, City of La Junta (Mayor) (Action)

City Manager goals for 2026 are: bring back Economic Development, craft workforce study, to include analysis and implementation, initial assessment of AI/Technology to evaluate the City’s need for opportunities for improvement and five (5) year infrastructure plan, including, but not limited to, road, sidewalks, water lines, waste water lines and bridges.

MOTION TO ACCEPT AMENDMENT NO. 1 TO EMPLOYMENT AGREEMENT – CITY MANAGER, CITY OF LA JUNTA: Ochoa

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

- B. A Resolution of the City Council of the City of La Junta, Colorado, Authorizing the Sale of Certain City-Owned Property for the Purpose of Affordable Housing Development (City Attorney) (Action)

Resolution No. R-11-2026 was presented for the council's consideration.

MOTION TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. R-11-2026: Ramirez

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: This resolution is in reference to 618 Colorado Avenue and 1220 Rice Avenue.

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

- C. First Reading/AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LA JUNTA, COLORADO, AMENDING TITLE 17 OF THE LA JUNTA MUNICIPAL CODE TO ADD A DEFINITION OF "SHIPPING CONTAINER (CONEX BOX)," TO AMEND TABLE 17-B (SCHEDULE OF USES), AND TO CREATE SECTION 17.40.215 ENTITLED "SHIPPING CONTAINERS" (City Attorney) (Action)

The issue of Conex Boxes was brought to the Planning Commission regarding residential areas. The committee felt that they should not be allowed in residential areas unless it's a "conditional use", "commercial zone", or "permitted industrial zone." You must come before the Planning Commission to be approved for "conditional use."

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON FIRST READING: Rikhof

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

- D. First Reading/AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LA JUNTA, COLORADO, ADDING CHAPTER 5.12 TO TITLE 5 OF THE LA JUNTA MUNICIPAL CODE ESTABLISHING A BUSINESS REGISTRATION REQUIREMENT WITHIN THE CITY (City Attorney) (Action)

This came to the Planning Commission, in part, because with a proper registration, the town knows more about where businesses are being located and this helps ensure that zoning is properly followed as well.

MOTION TO PASS THE ORDINANCE ON FIRST READING: Ramirez

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: Upon approval of the resolution, it would be made clear that we mark the date and state that we would be putting it in place one year from that date. There's a reference that the city clerk would administer the program since the clerk is the record keeper and a business registration is a record. However, it could read that it would be

the city manager's designee.

During the Planning Commission meetings, it was discussed that Section 5.12.020 Definitions of Business should also include the Industrial Park. This would give a full picture of what is happening in La Junta.

FRIENDLY AMENDMENT ON FIRST READING TO INCLUDE ALL CITY PROPERTY WITHIN THE CITY LIMITS: Ramirez

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: It was discussed that more clarification was needed in Section 5.12.030 Separate Registration Required whether that refers to separate locations, business names or LLC.

SECOND FRIENDLY AMENDMENT ON FIRST READING TO STRIKE "A" FROM SECTION 5.12.030 SEPARATE REGISTRATION REQUIRED: Ramirez

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: It was reiterated that this is only the first reading of this ordinance. It is not being finalized tonight.

VOTE: Those voting YES: Ramirez, Velasquez, Ayala, Ochoa, Pantoya, Rikhof

Those voting NO: Copley

The motion carried 6-1

E. Committee/Board Report

There were no committee/board reports.

F. City Manager Report

- Police: Had 298 calls, 12 arrests, 51 traffic stops, and seven traffic collisions for the month of April. They have two police cadets that will be graduating next Tuesday from the academy and taking their POST test on Thursday.
- Code Enforcement: Had 47 calls, eight weed violations, six trash violations, 10 Muni code violations and 23 animal complaints.
- Fire: Had a total of 188 calls for the month of April with 154 EMS and 34 other calls for service. They had to go out and do two rescues at Picketwire Canyon which came after the chiefs PSA about people going out there. If you're going to go out and do these hikes, make sure you are preparing well in advance. They also had two new babies.
- Human Resources: We have had five new babies since the beginning of the year. Our health insurance this year, we initially had a 5% increase which is super low, we went back to the table and were able to negotiate an 8% increase that will be locked in until the end of 2027.
- Water: La Junta is currently in a State D2 severe drought. About 25% of Otero County is in the D3 stage. We are looking at possible Stage 2 water restrictions.
- Parks: The tennis courts are done. We're going to plan a pickle ball tournament as a ribbon cutting type of event. The wall at the City Park that was run into has been repaired.
- Recreation: Baseball registrations are ongoing and we're going to start filling the pool next week. We're looking for a June 1st open date.
- Audit: Is complete and the financials will be posted on the website. Once audit books are created, we will schedule a work session with the auditors.

- Streets: Finishing up at the Plaza Building tomorrow with the concrete. Then will begin chip sealing between 10th & 14th Street and between Raton and Smithland. Then Smithland between 14th & 16th Street.
 - CML District 6 meeting is May 21st at Otero.
 - “Come From Away” starts next Thursday through the weekend.
 - Coffee and Conversations with the mayor and myself will be May 11th at the Chamber.
 - Library: 85 entries for the 6-word story contest. May 11th is last day to turn in teen applications for 7th-12th graders. There’s still lots of books over at the book sale.
- Mayor Ayala: Michael won City manager of the Year. It’s not just a reflection on him but it’s a reflection on La Junta, his supervisors and the council. Congratulations. We’re proud of you and the whole team.

G. Community Events/Council Report

- On Friday afternoon, Otero will graduate 256 students.
- Come From Away, is about the town of Gander, Newfoundland on September 12th, its ordinary people thrown into an unimaginable moment, community responses, hospitality, courage, humor and humanity. It’s a story about what small communities do best.
- Ward 3 Listening Tour is next Monday night at 6:00 p.m. at the Brick & Tile Park.
- May is Law Enforcement Appreciation Month.

H. Governing Body Report

There were no governing body reports.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF LA JUNTA

Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

Joseph Ayala, Mayor