



MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING LA JUNTA CITY COUNCIL
LA JUNTA, CO
JUNE 15, 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, June 15, 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:

Also Present: Michael Hart, City Manager
 Cristian Estrada, Deputy City Clerk
 Kasey Miehke, La Junta
 Diane Rikhof, La Junta
 Nancy Bennett, La Junta
 Julie Worley, La Junta
 CaSandra Thomas, La Junta
 Kimberly Koehler, Sugar City
 Jerry Koehler, Sugar city
 Betty Velasquez, La Junta
 Douglas/Janet Golding, la Junta
 Gary Reed, rocky Ford
 Murisa Jackson
 Lisa Doney
 Rod Pelton, Senate District 35
 Ty Winter, House District 47
 Nancy Harrington, SECO News
 Adrian Hart, SECO News
 Bette McFarren, RF Gazette

INFORMATION

Ty Winter, House District 47 and Rod Pelton, Senate District 35 gave a quick legislative update for their districts. Thanked the City Council for allowing them to appear before them and the community to give the update. Spoke on the state's structure deficit.

Ty Winter: The year before last, there were issues and this year hit hard. Doesn't think that there is a revenue problem, but a priority problem.

Rod Pelton: During COVID with a lot of one-time dollars, the state increased their workforce by upwards of 7,000 people and created 100+ new programs. The understanding was that once the funding went away, those new positions and programs would go away, as well. Now, all of these different departments are building in these programs to their personnel line items, and there is not enough funding to support those positions. Structural part of the deficit wasn't solved. Reserves were lowered to make up for that.

Ty Winter: Another thing to discuss is the business climate in the state; Colorado is the 6th most regulated state in the nation and we are seeing a lot of business leave the state. Colorado Chamber wrote a letter to the Governor and the legislator asking them to take it easy on business. We literally over regulated business out of the state. Cost of energy is another thing: Coca-Cola wanted to open the largest bottle manufacturing facility in the nation in Colorado, and Excel Energy told them that it would take 5 years to dispatch that kind of energy based on the green energy requirements that the state put in. What makes it really hard is the state to the north of us, Wyoming, is building a small modular nuclear reactor. They're going to be pulling those businesses out of Colorado. Keystone Industries have been attacked in Colorado. Good paying, blue-collar jobs are leaving our districts. The number one export is kids. Trying to build that economic climate, which La Junta is trying to do. There has been a push with labor; electrical workers, and pipe layer jobs are being pushed out of the state. The state still uses severance tax dollars which come from oil & gas. All of us blue skies, green grass, clean water; but at the end of the day, you cannot starve your citizenry from jobs and being able to have the ability to provide for their families. Rural areas feed the urban areas. We always remind the larger areas exactly how important rural Colorado is. Denver was a mining town before it became a city, like La Junta. The Senator and I have worked on the Revegetation Bill. Our biggest commodity in Colorado is water, and we are seeing water being pulled out of the state. We are fighting the compacts with Nebraska and Kansas. Lower states in the federal compact like Arizona and Utah; nobody else around us is turning off the water, yet Colorado is asked to. We've seen what happens when the ground is just left as dirt. There are now revegetation standards that need to be met; it is seen as a blight on the community to leave the fields as dirt.

Rod Pelton: The cost would be incurred from the people taking the water off of the land, not the land owner. There will be third-party inspectors to make sure it is revegetated to a certain standard. Another bill that we ran helped small, rural pharmacies; if kiddos come in and need a flu or strep test, and they are under five years old, rural pharmacies can diagnose and treat without them having to go to their primary care physician. This helps relieve some of the load from our clinics and helps our rural pharmacies. Another thing that is driving people and businesses out of the state would be the high tax rates. At one point, Colorado used to be one of the most business-friendly states, now it is the least business-friendly state. I don't know the particulars, but there was a bill run to try to correct that.

Ty Winter: Another bill we ran, which was born out of coming to Rocky Ford. Senator Pelton and myself, we did a legislative tour my first year in office. We talked to the Hanagans, Knapps and Hirakatas; what we saw was that they raised the agriculture over time thresholds. We have lost over 3,000 family farms and ranches since 2017. 1.6 million acres of farmland has been retired in Colorado. That data comes directly from the vegetable growers. That is scary because we all know that food security is national security. We saw that with the supply chain disruptions during COVID. There is such a strain on farmers and ranchers. Small family farms earn around \$50,000 profit after everything was done. About 87% of farms and ranches in Colorado are small and family-owned. This bill didn't change any of the worker protections; it was all around the overtime thresholds. At the time, overtime was needing to be paid. All of the agriculture

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION (5-minute time limit per person)

1. Murisa Jackson: Shared her letter of intent to initiate civil action against the City of La Junta for failure to comply with CORA requests (attached).
2. Lisa Doney: Discussed concerns regarding transparency and public safety against the LJPd. She also brought up allegations regarding the City Attorney and City Manager.
3. Kimberly Koehler, Sugar City: Read a statement on behalf of a La Junta resident. Sexual harassment allegations against the LJPd were read.
4. Jerry Koehler, Sugar City: Asked City Council to listen to their constituents and residents and to be transparent with them. As a council member in Sugar City, knows the gravity of the job. Have no complaints with the council other than "listen to your people".

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Regular Meeting Minutes June 1, 2026
- B. Special Meeting Minutes June 9, 2026
- C. Application for a Special Events Permit by Our Lady of Guadalupe/St. Patrick Parish, Lisa Pantoya, Event Manager. The event is their 104th Annual Bazaar to be held July 10 & 11, 2026 from 5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. at 202 Lincoln Avenue

MOTION TO APPROVE THE JUNE 15, 2026 CONSENT AGENDA: Ramirez

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 6-0

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Member Appointment to the Arkansas Valley Regional Medical Center Board of Directors (Mayor) (Action)

City Manager Michael Hart explained that the City of La Junta through the consolidation agreement between AVRMC, City Council is able to appoint four people to their board of directors; one of those seats must be a City Council member, which is currently filled by Paul Velasquez. At this time, the city has two individuals on that board: former Asst. City Manager Bill Jackson, as well as Joe Pentlicki. This item on the agenda would be to appoint a third member to the Board of Directors. Written into the consolidation agreement and bylaws, the way it is supposed to work is that the hospital establishes a nominating board. They will submit names to City Council when the time comes for consideration when terms are up. The council has the right to approve/deny the list of names. Then the City Council would need to come up with a name (or names) that they would want to bring back and provide some sort of justification as to the reason why the names provided after are a better consideration to the names provided before. Just a suggestion, Mr. Mayor: this will be the City Council choice for the AVRMC board of directors.

MOTION TO APPOINT ROB PICKERING TO THE ARKANSAS VALLEY REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Velasquez

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: Council Member Rikhof inquired regarding the length of terms for the board members. City Manager Michael Hart responded that the terms are four years. Does not have the specifics regarding when each current member's term is up, but will send that information out to council. Whomever we appoint tonight will be appointed until 2030.

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

B. Approval of Contract for Interim City Attorney (Mayor) (Action)

Mayor Joe Ayala mentioned that the original contract that was sent last week needed to be changed out as the previous contract stated "Town of La Junta" rather than "City of La Junta" and that is now correct. Mr. Clayton Buchner has signed it. It is for an interim position for five months, and then it can be reviewed as a council. Council Member Ochoa stated that this five-month interim time frame was suggested by Mr. Buchner, himself, and would be evaluated at that time.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE CONTRACT FOR INTERIM CITY ATTORNEY: Ochoa

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: Council Member Rikhof asked if a kind of "biography" can be given on Clayton Buchner, just to give the public more information about him. Mayor Joe Ayala responded that this position wasn't just offered to Mr. Buchner, we had numerous legal professionals that were given to us as recommendations by CML (Colorado Municipal League); one of the last ones suggested was Mr. Clay Buchner. He is out of Pagosa Springs. He also owns 1/25th of two planes; if we need him to be down here, he can be down here. I suggested the interim position for three months, but he came back with five months; then the time frame will be revisited by the end of the five months. He has three other municipalities that he is currently working with. One of them meets on the second and fourth Mondays, so we fit into his calendar nicely in addition to assisting with Municipal Court once a month. We will try to get him down here when we can, but if not, then we will go the Zoom/Owl camera way for meeting. Council Member Copley added that Mr. Buchner is an active duty (Lieutenant Colonel) for the Army; he not only comes with civilian experience, but also extensive military experience.

VOTE: The motion carried 7-0

C. Committee/Board Report

1. Council Member Velasquez reported about the Senior Center's exercise classes at the La Junta Wipeout Pool. Contact the Senior Center for more info or to get involved. From the Utilities Board, the electric department is starting their summer tree trimming services. They are trimming around the power lines to prevent incidents. They ask that citizens not leave tree trimmings/branches for the electric dept. to pick up, as the electric department is not picking up from the curbs. Mr. Arguello also asked if anyone sees extension cords running from neighbor to neighbor, call the electric department

and report it. It creates a fire hazard. It was also announced at the Utilities Board that there is a vacancy on the board. If you are interested, please submit a letter to the City Clerk for the Utility Board.

- Mayor Joe Ayala added that another thing brought up at the Utility Board meeting that he, City Manager Michael Hart, Tom Seaba, and Meghan Wiker met with CBS Colorado to do an interview at the R.O. (Reverse Osmosis) plant. It would be good for not only the new Utility Board member, but all of us as council to go tour the R.O. plant. That should air sometime this week. It is about the Arkansas Valley Conduit. La Junta (besides Las Animas) has an R.O. plant that works.

2. Council Member Rikhof reported that upon meeting with the Library Advisory Board, it was requested by the board that they be placed on the July 6th City Council meeting agenda to give their annual report to the council. There will not be a Library Advisory Board meeting in July. Council Member Rikhof wanted to remind the council that now there being a City Attorney, wants to do a review of the Library Ordinance, as it has been three years since being put in place.

- Planning Commission typically meets on the third Thursdays of each month, but due to the Juneteenth Holiday, the meeting has been rescheduled for Tuesday, June 23, 2026 at 4:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building.

D. City Manager Report

- Yesterday was the grand opening of Auggie's Market. It was well attended by the public.

- Sidewalks around the hybrid courts at City Park have been completed; Brock is trying to coordinate with Angela Ayala for a pickleball tournament soon.

- o Additionally at the City Park, we have all the components to refinish the restrooms and that will be on the schedule and completed hopefully within the next couple of weeks. As everyone remembers last year, there were a few instances where there was severe vandalism/destruction within the restrooms (breaking the toilet into pieces, completely pulling sinks from the wall). After the second incident, we made the decision to close the restrooms down indefinitely. I'm sure there is an official name for them, but we call them "prison toilets" that are heavy-duty, stainless-steel toilets that will be installed. The total cost for just the materials is around \$8,000.00, and that is not including cost of labor.

- The Parklet that was outside of Wild Roots Kava Co. last year is currently under repair, but is looking to be placed the first full week in July. The new location is TBD.

- Starting July 13, 2026, the Streets Department will be doing some chip sealing on Raton Ave., Cimarron Ave., and Smithland Ave., between 10th and 14th Streets. They ask to please move your vehicles prior to 6:00 a.m. starting on the 13th. The Streets Department will do their best to ensure that it is done as quickly and efficiently as possible.

- Mr. Tom Seaba asked me to pass along some of the other street projects; between First and Third streets on Lincoln Ave. and Belleview Ave. the Water Department will be doing some updates to water services. The date is TBD, as the chip seal is priority.

- o Also from Tom Seaba, people who have received surveys concerning lead and copper/types of piping in homes could please complete the surveys. There is a QR code

located on the letters so it can be done digitally for ease.

- There are always tons of activities going on at the library: Summer Reading Program is going on, Legos, movies, etc. Check out all of the fun going on at the library.
- Safety Jam is this Saturday, June 20, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
- Next Friday, June 26, 2026 the La Junta Municipal Employee's Association will be having their pool party at the pool.

E. Community Events/Council Report

1. Council Member Rikhof:

- Shout out to SECCP (Southeast Colorado Creative Partnership) for the success and good turnout for the Brew Fest last weekend. It was a good time. This is supporting the arts, as well as the Plaza Block Building.
- Question regarding the Wet/Dry Parade on July 4, 2026. Many community members have been asking regarding the water restrictions and how the City Council/the city is reconciling the drought, restrictions, and having water at the parade.
 - o City Manager Michael Hart: Mr. Seaba addressed this at Utilities Board, as well as possibly another time. The draught conditions that are going on and the water restrictions that the city is currently under – it is not so much that we are looking/worried about this year, it is the years to come. As far as water use for the Wet/Dry Parade, this is something that the Chamber of Commerce kicked around for several months through several meetings and agreed upon that this is an event that the community is looking forward to every year. If you look at the actual water usage in the grand scheme of things, it is not much. I do not have the exact numbers in front of me, however, Aliza Libby, Finance Director, ran a few calculations for us last year.
 - o Mayor Joe Ayala: Tom Seaba and Meghan Wiker have those exact numbers as they have done the calculations; this event is not throughout several days/weeks, it is just one day, and not the entire day. It is just a few hours.

F. Governing Body Report

1. Council Member Rikhof:

- Question about the procedure for receiving a formal complaint request for administrative oversight.
 - o Council Member Velasquez responded that a formal complaint can be shared at Citizen Participation at City Council, or you can go through the City Attorney and start a process to look into it. There have been allegations made and conflicts have been flagged. We will and do acknowledge the receipt of the complaint. It will go under further review. The City Clerk has also received the complaint, which is a form of acknowledgement.
- The library held the top spot for when the Interim City Attorney begins tomorrow, and now there is another item on his top spot when he starts. Forwarded the email to everybody this afternoon regarding the complaint.

2. Mayor Ayala:

- CML, who has been very helpful in the absence of the City Attorney, begins next

week. City Manager Michael Hart as well as Council Member Velasquez will be attending. A couple of supervisors with the city will also be in attendance. We will bring some new knowledge back to La Junta to help us out. Look forward to all of the fun stuff we can learn. La Junta is not unique in some of the troubles we face. Thanked the community members that were present as well as those watching online. To the City Council: if you have any questions, you are more than welcome to personally reach out to City Manager Michael Hart. It is well within your right.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:24 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF LA JUNTA

Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

Joseph Ayala, Mayor