

Council Goals

Envision a safe, flourishing downtown that provides a strong commercial tax base

Strive to be active stewards of existing aging infrastructure

Recognize importance of experience, well trained, and community minded staff

Ensure its electorate is well informed of on-going successes and future plans

Envision a safe, secure community for its families and youth

Promote redevelopment of existing businesses and neighborhoods and increase quality of life for all its residents



AGENDA REGULAR MEETING LA JUNTA CITY COUNCIL

La Junta, Colorado
September 15, 2025
6:00 PM
Council Chambers
Municipal Building
601 Colorado Avenue

CALL TO ORDER (Mayor Ayala)

INVOCATION (Mayor Ayala)

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE (Mayor Ayala)

ROLL CALL (City Clerk)
Council Members
Ramirez (Ward 1)
Velasquez (Ward 1)
Ayala (Mayor)
Ochoa (Ward 2)
Pantoya (Ward 3)
Rikhof (Ward 3)

PROCLAMATION: September 2025 is Tarantula Trek Month

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION *(5-minute time limit per person)*

EMPLOYEE SERVICE AWARD

- A. September 2025
 - 1. Josh Cobb, Police – 5 years

REPORTS

- A. Library Advisory Board (Information)

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Special Meeting Minutes August 28, 2025
- B. Regular Meeting Minutes September 2, 2025
- C. Application for a Special Events Permit by La Junta Chamber of Commerce, Christina Tozzie, Event Manager. The event is the 4th Annual Tarantula Fest to be held September 27, 2025 from 12:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m. at Live Well Park

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Letters of Interest – Ward 2 Vacancy (Mayor) (Action)
- B. Committee/Board Report
- C. City Manager Report
- D. Community Events/Council Report
- E. Governing Body Report
- F. ADJOURN



PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, every fall the City of La Junta comes alive with a unique natural spectacle; the Tarantula Trek, when mature male Colorado brown tarantulas emerge across the 443,000-plus acres of Comanche National Grassland in search of mates – an enchanting mating ritual, not a migration; and

WHEREAS, the City of La Junta celebrates this distinctive aspect of its natural heritage, encouraging responsible observation and respect for the creatures and their environment; and

WHEREAS, the City of La Junta promotes safe and respectful viewing by urging visitors to plan ahead, avoid roadside hazards, respect private property, and remain alert to tarantulas and traffic conditions; and

WHEREAS, the Tarantula Trek blends community engagement, tourism, and conservation, drawing visitors from across Colorado, the nation, and beyond, generating economic activity and shining a spotlight on La Junta's natural and cultural treasures, helping demystify tarantulas, and encouraging appreciation for the region's biodiversity; and

WHEREAS, La Junta's Tarantula Fest, held on September 26-27, 2025, invites visitors to enjoy guided bus tours, a festive parade, art, education pavilion – all designed to educate and celebrate this extraordinary phenomenon;

THEREFORE, I, Joseph Ayala, Mayor of the City of La Junta, do hereby proclaim the month of September, 2025, as

TARANTULA TREK MONTH

GIVEN under my hand and the seal of the City of la Junta, the 15th day of September, 2025.

Joseph Ayala
La Junta Mayor



WHEREAS, every fall the City of La Junta comes alive with a unique natural spectacle: the Tarantula Trek, when mature male Colorado brown tarantulas emerge across the 443,000-plus acres of Comanche National Grassland in search of mates—an enchanting mating ritual, not a migration; and

WHEREAS, the City of La Junta celebrates this distinctive aspect of its natural heritage, encouraging responsible observation and respect for the creatures and their environment; and

WHEREAS, the City of La Junta promotes safe and respectful viewing by urging visitors to plan ahead, avoid roadside hazards, respect private property, and remain alert to tarantulas and traffic conditions; and

WHEREAS, the Tarantula Trek blends community engagement, tourism, and conservation, drawing visitors from across Colorado, the nation, and beyond, generating economic activity and shining a spotlight on La Junta’s natural and cultural treasures, helping demystify tarantulas, and encouraging appreciation for the region’s biodiversity; and

WHEREAS, La Junta’s Tarantula Fest, held on September 26–27, 2025, invites visitors to enjoy guided bus tours, a festive parade, art, education pavilion – all designed to educate and celebrate this extraordinary phenomenon;

THEREFORE, I, Jared Polis, Governor of the State of Colorado, do hereby proclaim the month of September, 2025, as

TARANTULA TREK MONTH

in the State of Colorado.

GIVEN under my hand and the Executive Seal of the State of Colorado, this first day of September, 2025



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jared Polis".

Jared Polis
Governor

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – August 28, 2025

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

CALL TO ORDER: A special meeting of the City Council of the City of La Junta, Colorado, was called to order by Mayor Ayala on Thursday, August 28, 2025, at 3:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building.

ROLL CALL: The following Council Members were present:

Damon Ramirez, Ward 1
Paul Velasquez, Ward 1
Jeremiah Stoker, Ward 2
Joe Ayala, Mayor
Chandra Ochoa, Ward 2
Lisa Pantoya, Ward 3
Maureen Rikhof, Ward 3 – arrived at 3:02 p.m.

Absent: None

Also present: Michael Hart, City Manager – via telephone
Erin Harris, City Attorney
Melanie Scofield, City Clerk
Paula Mahoney, Admin. Asst.
Gary Reed, Rocky Ford
Nancy Bennett, La Junta
Bette McFarren, RF Gazette



Subject to approval at the
September 15, 2025
City Council Meeting



NEW BUSINESS

A. Candidate Residency Eligibility.

Mayor Ayala: We cannot wait until the 2nd because that's when everything needs to be certified, so we have to have this now. Start by saying, I don't think that we need to go into what this is not about. I think we can all agree that we understand the rule that you do not have to live in a ward for one year prior to running, you just have to live in the city. Can we agree on that? Okay. The second thing that I think we need to all be clear on is this is about a council member running for a ward but he is still claiming residency in another ward. It's like a dual residency. I think that's what we're here to talk about. Anything that's outside of that; we're not going to discuss today.

City Attorney Harris: To clarify, the dual residency is what occurs if we don't identify the declaration day. The date where you pin down which place you live in. I think the question that is being posed to you all as the judge of the election because in section 4.3 of the Charter, the council is the judge of its own election. With that, we need to figure out what is the declaration day that you identify which ward you live in. There are two days that are still coming. The day that the petitions are certified and election day itself. There's also a third day that has already passed in this cycle but that is the day that those who wish to run would pick up petitions. So, there's two days that I identified when I was writing the memo that went out to all of you but it's been brought to my attention that I didn't identify the third date. I didn't because that day has already passed in this case. However, it certainly would be within the panel's decision to use that day as the declaration day.

Mayor Ayala: So, those are the three options on the date. The other thing too is I had a couple people ask me, well, just because they're not in that same ward, does that really declare a vacancy? The Charter also says in 4.6, "an elective office shall become vacant whenever any officer is recalled, dies, becomes incapacitated, resigns, or ceases to be a resident of the city of the ward

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from which he was elected.” If you’re going to declare over here now on this date, then, that’s a vacancy.

Council Member Stoker: What I would say is the Charter doesn’t also clarify what a resident means. Under the state statutes just on what the state says on residency. C.R.S. 39-22-103(8) which speaks specifically to the state but since the City Charter does not identify that, so for resident individual domicile, general rules regarding domicile, a person’s domicile is the persons place of abode is in Colorado and that person whenever absent has a present intention of returning after a departure. Regardless of the duration of the absence. A place of abode is not limited to a specific structure but rather refers to a place or area to which the person expects to return. And why I feel this is relevant because it is in particular me. I’m currently going through a divorce case which I’d hoped it had been done which if its done and I’m I don’t claim resident there, then yeah, I would have resigned from the City Council. But at this time, with the pending, there’s still a possibility of me returning to that residence. I see where it causes a little issue. If I happen to run and get elected and then things change and I reside there, then obviously, that’s going to leave a vacancy for Ward 3. There’s technically still an intent to return to Ward 2 but by the election, we should have a pretty good idea and obviously, if I was to run and get elected and go back to the residence in Ward 2, then obviously there would be a vacancy in Ward 3.

City Attorney Harris: I think what we want to do is all of that is meaningful but let’s figure out where that belongs in the issues that we’ve identified. I think what I’m hearing from Councilman Stoker is that he believes that the declaration day should be the day of election. Is that what I’m hearing? Be any of the dialogue concerning the intent to return becomes moot. If we are setting forth one day where one makes a declaration. If a declaration of residency is made, it is no longer necessary to evaluate the factors that determine where one lives. That’s a different factor, different day. Right now, we’re trying to determine what day is the declaration day for where one lives, unless, what Councilman Stoker is proposing is that in fact someone can occupy two wards at once. I do see the Mayor saying no. What I want to make sure first though is, Councilman Stoker, what is the argument that you would like the body to be considering? Is it the opportunity to be in two wards at once or is it more that the date of election is the date that you would advocate is the day of declaration of residency?

Council Member Stoker: Yeah. Obviously, as we’ve already stated, according to the Charter and which we just agreed upon, there is no deadline for that, for being in the Ward. So, any layperson would believe if there’s not deadline for living in the Ward, as long as you live in the Ward before you’re elected, then, you’re a resident of that Ward.

City Attorney Harris: Okay, so once again, and I don’t mean to be pushing this too hard but I do think we need to narrow the focus of our question today. Otherwise, the dialogue could become longer than the hour that is available. I think, again, what Councilman Stoker is arguing is that the date that one must live in the Ward and therefore, declare as we phrased in the memo that we circulated previously, would be the day of election. Now, certainly the panel has an opportunity to have a differing view but Councilman Stoker, do I articulate that position of yours correctly?

Council Member Stoker: Yes, and like I said, I had no intention of it running this long but it just so happened to do it. I had hoped this was all finished a lot sooner, I see where that conflict is but you know, as the City Attorney said, that is exactly what I’m contending as far as my current seat on Ward 2. I don’t think there’s an issue with eligibility to run for Ward 3. I think the main issue would be continuing on Ward 2, which like I said, it’s still pending as far as my permanent residence. Everything is still leading to the house. I still get prescription medication, mail, and plus, I have city utilities in my name in that location.

City Attorney Harris: If I can just try one more time and then I promise I’ll back off, what we want to do though if I could, Councilman Stoker, is try to separate the facts of the individual case from the question because of course, there may be conflicts of interest, there may be lots of things that we need to consider if we’re talking about the individual facts of your specific case. So, what we were

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hoping to do is first entertain the question of when the declaration date should be so that then we could pick up the question of the specifics of any one Council person to whom the matter applies.

Mayor Ayala: Yes, so while I appreciate Mr. Stoker's honesty and transparency in everything that you stated, I want to take you out of this situation by saying, any Council Member, can Damon run for Ward 3 without technically moving to Ward 3 up until election day and then decide, now I make my residence there. Or should it be the day he picks up a packet? Or should it be the day that he certifies his packet? I think that's the question, I appreciate all of that. We need to focus on just that right now.

Council Member Pantoya: On the acceptance of nomination, it does state in there that you are a registered elector and a resident of the Ward from which this nomination is sought. So, I would say the acceptance of the nomination would be the date that they're saying that they live in Ward 3.

Council Member Ramirez: So, the question there is what are the rules for residency?

Council Member Velasquez: (Looking at Councilman Stoker) Your definition of residency is spot on but eligibility of running for a specific jurisdiction, ward or district, you have to be a resident of either one of those three in which you plan to serve. So, there's a difference. There are residents in which your established and I'll accept that definition but we're talking specific.

Council Member Stoker: That's what the Mayor said is we don't have currently have when that has to be. Just like the memo, when you pick up from the qualifications of office, it specifically says resident of La Junta for one year immediately preceding the date of election but then the next one is resident of ward which he/she is running for office if running for city council member. What we need to determine is when that date is, that you must be a resident because there's no length.

City Attorney Harris: I think what we've heard from Councilwoman Pantoya is that and certainly there are different ways that one can get to this question but what Councilwoman Pantoya has pointed out is that when seeking a nomination, one does at that time identify a ward. However, it is possible based on what Councilman Stoker has articulated that that would be an anticipated location of residents not the residents at that moment and that's the thing we just need to settle is are we talking about a time in the future when one will have and the example that I've given when I've spoke with several of you individually is let's say that you are required to live in a particular judicial district in order to apply to be a judge there. What they're allowed to do at that time is then find an apartment in that judicial district just prior to getting the job. So, there are examples of times where one applies without living there but secures a second residence at the time that the decision would be made. So, what our council just needs to do is how do we wish to proceed with this? Hopefully, if we make this decision and we do it clearly, this is the last time we will have this sort of meeting on a Thursday afternoon that has to be today because if its not, it will be too late. We are definitely down to the wire and just from my own, I appreciate all of you being here and entertaining this question now so that we don't put our city clerk into a difficult spot on Tuesday morning.

Council Member Ramirez: I would just follow that up saying we are where we are right now, in this situation but for future reference, maybe we put a requirement on that date on the ward like there is for the city. As far as right now, I think when you pick that up, you verify that you're a resident of that Ward. Now, dual residency and if you look at it like that, it's a possibility. So, we have to figure that out too because if that pops up in the future, we need to be prepared for that.

City Attorney Harris: I'm not sure that our Charter permits dual residency. Now, if you look at the segment that is entitle vacancies, I'm not sure what title it is but I think I just saw it in Councilman Velasquez book. We want to reference that but what is the statute that is actually entitled vacancies that we looked at a moment ago? 4.6 says a vacancy is created the moment it doesn't say the moment but when a party no longer resides in that ward. So, of course, the background or the greater question that we are addressing here is if you live in Ward 3, you don't live in Ward 2 anymore. So, although we are trying not to be addressing specific facts right now, we are instead trying to look at just that definition. The definition is significant because one can only be one or the

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other. So, the dialogue around dual residency I believe is drafted. It is not permitted based on the drafting of our Charter as it currently exists.

Council Member Ochoa: We had a situation like this about six or seven years ago and the person who was moving away from Ward 2 gave up her seat and she would no longer be living in Ward 2. I guess she could have argued the same thing that her hope was to go back home or come back to Ward 2 but she did it immediately upon not eight months later.

City Attorney Harris: And because of the declaration of a new address? Now, I've been handed some things that have to do with the facts that brought us here. I'm not sure its appropriate to address the facts yet. I think at least Mayor Ayala; I'll defer to you on the management of the meeting but it's possible that we could have a decision on the date of determination before we address further the facts of anything that brought us here today.

Mayor Ayala: So, does anyone agree with Mr. Stoker that it should be the date of election?

Council Member Rikhof: Another date would be the date of being sworn in. I think there's the day you pick up your petition, the day you get certified, the day of the election or the day that you're sworn in. I think arguments could be made for all four of these. And like Erin said, there's situations, judgeships, there's other situations where this happens. We're not reinventing something, we just need to decide which of these four and we need to decide residency.

Mayor Ayala: So, was there any, let's say election day or day of swearing in? How about that? Is there anyone that is for that?

Council Member Ochoa: So, someone lives in the county and they're wanting to purchase, rent, whatever, a home in Ward 1 and so they run. They live here now. They go and pick up a petition. They're going to run because they're certain that they're going to secure this home. So, they go through the whole election thing which isn't cheap to do and then all of a sudden there's no home for him. Then what does that do to a council? With a vacant council seat?

Council Member Stoker: So, in that instance, county is not city and there is a timeline on being a resident of the City of La Junta. So, if somebody lived in the county and wanted to run they . . .

Council Member Ochoa: They live in Ward 1. They want to go to Ward 2. They're going to, same situation, but upon swearing in and whatever that date is then they can no longer move to Ward 2 so what does that do a council?

Mayor Ayala: I don't think anyone is in favor of election day or later unless I'm missing someone speaking. Besides you, Jeremiah.

Council Member Velasquez: Jeremiah, when you picked up your City of La Junta nomination petition what address did you . . .

City Attorney Harris: Let's time out if we could.

Mayor Ayala: So, what about does anyone in favor of the day you pick up your packet, declaring your address.

Council Member Pantoya: Well, they're certifying to it and someone's notarizing that you're certifying it when you bring it back.

City Attorney Harris: I think before we entertain the specifics of what happened with Councilman Stoker's facts, we should first decide what we believe the rule should be.

Mayor Ayala: Then we can get to that.

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Council Member Ramirez: That seems like the obvious when you return it and it's certified that you're certifying that that's your address.

Mayor Ayala: Okay, upon return of the packet is what Damon's saying. Paul, what are you thinking?

Council Member Velasquez: When you pick up the packet, you're circulating your petition to perspective voters in that ward that you want to represent when you do that. It has your name and your address and your ward that you are soliciting the signatures from. When you return your packet, the City Clerk has a specific time frame to certify the signatures, she's not certifying the residency. She's not certifying your eligibility at that time. She's certifying that the signatures that you collected are registered voters within the ward that you live in and that you have met the minimum signatures required to seek that council seat.

Council Member Pantoya: Date of pick-up I think as well because it says on there that you're in that ward and circulating for that ward.

Council Member Rikhof: I agree with the date you pick it up but I think when we get to the specifics of this, that does not give us clarity in this particular situation.

City Attorney Harris: We can decide that part later.

Mayor Ayala: Do we want to entertain a motion to put your date of residency of the day you pick up a packet?

City Attorney Harris: What we've been calling the declaration date.

Council Member Rikhof: No, I would say the ward that you live in because if we say your residence, then it gets really sticky because that's the next issue where if you're saying this is the address that I will be running from to represent on this petition and I have residency there.

City Attorney Harris: Those are two different things. You're right. But what I have been talking about was not declaring the ward but actually declaring where one lives.

Council Member Rikhof: I get it. I think we still then have the question of how many places can you live at once?

City Attorney Harris: I would encourage the council to look at the Charter as it is now to determine whether, in fact, the Charter contemplates being able to live in more than one place. Based on the vacancy section that states that when one moves out of the ward that they are no longer that their place is in fact vacant.

Council Member Rikhof: I think it's possible to live in two residences.

Mayor Ayala: Okay. Do I have a motion?

MOTION THAT THE DECLARATION OF YOUR RESIDENCY IS THE DAY YOU PICK UP THE PETITION TO RUN IN A WARD [CITY COUNCIL]: Ochoa

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION: There was no further discussion on this topic

VOTE: Those voting YES: Ramirez, Velasquez, Ayala, Ochoa, Pantoya, Rikhof
Those voting NO: Stoker
The motion carried 6-1

City Attorney Harris: I think that if we have a decision that states that the declaration of one's residency is on the day you pick up the packet then there are pieces, as Councilwoman Rikhof was

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stating, there is still a way of trying to determine what one is declaring as one's residency. That's true. But when one states that they will be running in a particular ward than one would assume that's also the ward where they live. Am I following that correctly? So, I think then, the next question is, concerning this year's election and documents that were picked up, petitions that were picked up two weeks ago and that will be certified on Tuesday the 2nd. We have one applicant who lived in and stated that he lived on Grant Avenue while still serving as a Ward 2 councilman. So, the concern that one would express here is whether he had in fact moved out of his existing ward that he represented. At least of the date that that packet was completed. So, the question that I would be asking the panel to consider is two-fold. A) Whether Councilman Stoker can run for Ward 3 based on the documentation that he has turned in and that would be certified on the 2nd of September and then the follow up question B) what goes on if he has now declared his residence to be on Grant Avenue which is not in Ward 2. What is the fate of his current service as Ward 2 representative? Mr. Mayor I'd be glad to either restate that or at least take it in part so that we could take either pick up first.

Mayor Ayala: I think we're all, I'll ask you all that we're in agreement that he can run for Ward 3. I don't think anyone's saying that he can't.

City Attorney Harris: Okay. In that case, I think the only other remaining question is if one must declare a residence on the date of the packet pick up and if that residence was declared as an address that is in Ward 3, what is the fate of the current role that our Councilman Stoker plays as representative of Ward 2?

Council Member Ochoa: It needs to be vacated.

City Attorney Harris: You don't have to answer to me. You can answer to each other.

Council Member Rikhof: I just want to ask the precedence this is setting in the future, taking the current council person out of it. I think depending on what we decide, we could be setting ourselves up for situations where somebody temporarily moves out of their home and it's nobody's business but their business and their family, somebody on city council catches wind of it and wants to use it against them personally and say, but they're not even living there. They must resign from their seat. I just want to be careful that whatever we're doing, we're saying that this is how we go forward and I see an argument that can be made that, while it is confusing, or it is not clear to me under Colorado law, the second bullet point is intent to make one's permanent home. I don't think it could be argued that the current situation is that he hasn't had the intent to make it his permanent home. He has a situation that is changing it as his permanent home but the relevant factors, I think, make it very. I think they do make it that you can make an argument that somebody has two residents.

Council Member Stoker: I'll point out while this is kind of a unique situation on how this came up. It would be a little bit different if I picked up my family and we decided to move to a different location. I think that's a little bit different than this current situation where pending court litigation. I possibly could still remain in Ward 2 because it's my mailing address including prescription medications still go to the residence in Ward 2. As a matter a fact, this goes back to the statute with evidence of domicile, be it your drivers license, your vehicle registration, your voter registration, ownership of property which is all in the C.R.S. and like I said, this is a little bit unique situation because it's not just that we decided to move. I still hold interest and stake in the property in Ward 2 as far as being a resident.

Council Member Velasquez: I think the eligibility requirement to live within the ward that you represent or seek election is. I could move from the 1300 block of Bradish to the 1200 block of Bradish. I can move anywhere in Ward 1 and I'm still a resident and eligible to maintain that seat. According to the Charter, and that's all we really have to go on, vacancy begins when you cease to live in the ward that you represent. There are protections if you become incapacitated and you say during COVID, somebody gets COVID and they're transported to a hospital for respiratory care and you were in the hospital for three months. You were living in the hospital but your primary residence would still be where you're at. Those are some of your protections, there's other things that would

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come up as a result of that. As far as the incapacitation but we're not here to discover that. I think the protections that we have as council people that we can live anywhere within the ward but once we fail to live within that ward according to the Charter 4.6, that is when the vacancy arises. So, yes, you've got multiple domiciles . . .

Mayor Ayala: And I don't know but the mail thing, people can get P.O. Boxes. You can get mail in multiple places. I don't think that proves that's where you're living and the Charter says to live in the ward which they are representing, then that's a vacancy. While many things may be a factor for your situation or a future situation, that's how the Charter reads and I think we have to go by the Charter.

Council Member Pantoya: Another scenario would be there's a lot of people who own property here. So, if I owned a rental property in Ward 2 and I live in Ward 3 but I use that one for storage or whatever but that's mine too. So, I could run in Ward 2.

Council Member Velasquez: We're dealing with election eligibility. This happened to me last time; I circulated when I circulated the petition. I went to a resident's household and they signed the petition. They said, but I won't be able to vote for you because I am moving across town. I thought, well, no, you can't vote for me. He said, you always get extra signatures there's nothing this is basic election law. You can only vote once in an election. So, if you reside in Ward 1 and move to Ward 3, you can only cast one vote and you have to be an eligible elected voter in the ward that you are casting that vote for it to count for anything. It's the same for us. We have to be eligible within the ward that we represent and the eligibility requirement for council people is not. You declared your address on the day you pick up your petition and that's the ward you would . . .

Mayor Ayala: By signing that you're signing where you're living at. You're signing the affidavit that I live here.

Council Member Velasquez: I thank Councilman Stoker for running for election in the ward that he now lives in. But to the question, can Jeremiah declare that he no longer lives in Ward 2 and that would create a vacancy and then that would put it on the thirty days. I don't want this to look like we're forcing Jeremiah out and I don't know and I looked in Colorado, I don't see a precedence in election laws and municipalities or state or other local government, that have ever had to make an allowance for somebody leaving their district, jurisdiction or ward. I know that there's plenty of problems that have arisen not only in this state and other states and I think there's some on the national level where somebody's residency where they claim to feel lots but they were not actually residing in the district. That's on the national level. Not saying they did everything right at that level.

Council Member Rikhof: I am seeing the nuance that it is declaring, this is where when you're declaring this is where I live for the purposes of running for city council. I just want to make sure that we are not sending a message that if somebody suspects that somebody is no longer living in their home in their ward. Jeremiah said I have moved out and that's what is important in this case. While I also agree that one can reside in more than one spot. I think for the purposes of this, it does come down to declaring where he lives for the purposes of the election in 2025.

Mayor Ayala: So, due to that, I don't think we need him to state anything because when he signed that thing, he's saying that he lives there. So that does declare a vacancy for Ward 2.

City Attorney Harris: I think this is a decision that I can't make. This is for you. If it is a question at all for the panel, the panel would need to have a motion and vote on the specific facts of our Councilman Stoker's position. So, it will be phrases as moving that upon doing X, Mr. Stoker declared he lives in X.

Council Member Rikhof: I guess it's exactly what I'm trying to avoid is having the City Council decide these things. I haven't heard from Jeremiah himself. I think I would prefer to ask Jeremiah what are your plans and then if he says, I am not planning to resign from my seat, I'm going to push his issue. Then we would have to decide it. But this is exactly what I'm trying to avoid in the future is having a council say, we've heard that you moved and we saw that you entered a raffle ticket down at

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Sutherlands for the new cooler with your new address and we know you're going through a divorce and therefore, we want you booted off the council. I don't like the precedent of the council being the one saying, your seat is vacant. I would prefer that we ask Jeremiah what his intent is.

City Attorney Harris: If I may, just quickly. Let's make sure we're being guided by statute in the Charter. The Charter does indicate that the council is its own judge. So, when I'm directing the council to make a decision, it is not that I'm saying that the council decides without Mr. Stoker. It is that I cannot be the party who gives a recommendation. I can say that it is the decision of the council to act as its own judge in this determination.

Council Member Velasquez: Section 4.3, qualifications. I know what you're saying. It's uncomfortable for the council to be maybe having to make this but it does say that the council shall be the judge of the election qualification of its team members. So, it is incumbent upon us by Charter and I understand that we're not looking out to say that he moved and is no longer eligible. I don't think that's the game we're playing here. Maybe some other councils are being petty to do that but I think its incumbent on the council members to say and that's both simple form because and that guides each and every one of us, the Charter does, is if I move on . . . (inaudible)

Council Member Ramirez: Stated this is my address with the Grant address. You made that statement but if he's going to make a statement then I would say, let him make a statement and then.

Mayor Ayala: We could entertain a motion, do it in discussion, whatever you guys want to do. Jeremiah, do you want to say something?

Council Member Stoker: Like I said, I don't think we'd be here right now if this didn't run into an election. So, I do think it's a good idea to set the ground rules because if say back in January or whatever, any time prior to now, the pending court cases were finalized and yes, I no longer have the opportunity to reside in Ward 2, then year, I would have resigned. But the whole thing is up until that's finalized. I still have the opportunity to reside in Ward 2. So, that's basically as far as my current seat goes. We've kind of hashed out the whole eligibility and it's just the ability to serve on council while pending litigation.

Mayor Ayala: I'd entertain a motion.

MOTION TO DECLARE A WARD 2 VACANCY DUE TO THE ADDRESS THAT WAS STATED WHEN THE PACKET WAS PICKED UP: Ochoa

SECOND: Velasquez

DISCUSSION:

Council Member Stoker: At the same time, that packet hasn't been certified.

Council Member Pantoya: But we're just making is so that going forward, we know.

Council Member Stoker: Clarification question, is it the day that the City Clerk certifies your petition?

Council Member Velasquez: No, the motion was to declare a vacancy because you cease to reside at the residence in Ward 2. It's a vacancy issue not an eligibility issue.

Council Member Stoker: But if we're going off of submitting a petition as far as declaring a vacancy.

Mayor Ayala: No, it was off the day you picked up the packet.

Council Member Rikhof: Yeah, that was the first thing.

Mayor Ayala: Not when she certifies them.

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – August 28, 2025

Council Member Stoker: But at the same time, its just showing when we picked up packets. We don't do anything with the City Clerk as far as declaring our ward because we get a blank packet, and then it is up to you because there's no sign out sheets or anything. You don't pick up a packet for a specific ward.

City Clerk Scofield: Yes, you do.

Council Member Stoker: I couldn't remember.

Mayor Ayala: Any other discussion?

Council Member Stoker: Before you call for the vote, while I'm still a sitting member of the council, I ran into this in which the previous council before I was selected, failed the City Charter in this aspect because the position was not filled until election. There was never. The process wasn't followed of appointing somebody within thirty days because the previous Ward 2 position that I'm sitting in was vacated and went several months without being filled until the election. So, while I still have a say on this council, I would say that according to my knowledge and I believe it's what the City Clerk told me that there is one person that submitted a petition to run for Ward 2, so, the council should consider that person as filling the vacancy.

Mayor Ayala: No, that's not involved in this.

Council Member Pantoya: When Damon's seat was open didn't we say that they just have to submit a letter of intent?

Council Member Velasquez: Call for the question.

VOTE: Those voting YES: Ramirez, Velasquez, Ayala, Ochoa, Pantoya, Rikhof
 Those voting NO: Stoker
 The motion carried 6-1

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:44 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF LA JUNTA

Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

Joseph Ayala, Mayor

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – September 2, 2025

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

CALL TO ORDER: The regular meeting of the City Council of the City of La Junta, Colorado, was called to order by Mayor Ayala on Monday, September 2, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building.

INVOCATION: Mayor Ayala gave the invocation.


PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Mayor Ayala led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL: The following Council Members were present:

Damon Ramirez, Ward 1
Paul Velasquez, Ward 1
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/Econ. Dev.
Dawn Block, Director of Human Resources
Aliza Libby, Director of Finance
Julie Sumpter, National WIFE
Douglas Golding, La Junta
Josh Harris, La Junta
Traci Stoffel, Colorado DOLA
Matt Gordon, Colorado DOLA
Stacey Ayala, La Junta
Zeke Ayala, La Junta
Jeremiah Stoker, La Junta
Adrian Hart, SECO News
Bette McFarren, RF Gazette



Subject to approval at the
September 15, 2025
City Council Meeting



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION (5-minute time limit per person):

1. Douglas Golding, 1316 Lincoln Avenue: Recently attended the Tourism Board meeting a couple weeks ago. My vehicle was parked out front of the entry to this building and somebody sideswiped the whole side. I made a report to the Police Department and when the investigator got back to me, he said there's no cameras pointing this way. There's no camera's telling you who comes in and out of this building. I'm surprised you don't want to know. Also, disappointed to see a vacant council seat and am sorry there isn't some kind of time allowance for someone that has to change residence.
2. Traci Stoffel and Matthew Gordon, DOLA, representing Main Street: We are here for our annual visit and will be touring the downtown to see how we can help. We are just here to support your community and make your downtown what you envision it to be.
3. Jeremiah Stoker, 511 Grant Avenue: Yes, my seat was vacated after I submitted a petition to run for a new ward even though it's common practice in state and federal elections for people to run for other districts. For an example, Lauren Boebert running for congressional district 4 while she was

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – September 2, 2025

still representing and resident in congressional district 3. But that's a moot point. One of the things I do want to bring up that I'm a little disappointed we don't have an agenda item for filling that vacancy. Like I had said on Thursday, there's a reminder that it is thirty days to fill a seat. So, the fact that we haven't started already because the council already violated the Charter once with a vacancy. That seat was vacated in July and never filled. It was filled by election in November which is beyond thirty days. So again, I don't want that same circumstance to happen. Just kind of want to know when you plan on filling it. But the main reason I came up here today and I plan on attending the Urban Renewal meeting at the end of the month but this one is a little bit sooner. It has to do with last Thursday's Urban Renewal meeting. They approved to spend over \$5,000 including vinyl window coverings on what was the old Sears Building. My issue with this one, for one, there's no application. So, this was a project sought out by Urban Renewal and Urban Renewal policy pertains to blight, which blight can be referred in the state statute. Remediation of blight and safety or public health issues., to stimulate the economic vitality and business development. These funds can be used for code improvement which includes your electrical, plumbing, all your fire issues, sprinklers, fire alarms, fire escapes, additional egress and ingress points. As well as unsafe exterior and interior improvements. And again, this is all part of Urban Renewal policy. Increased commercial tenancy and it's a necessity to benefit buildings in the public. This fund, through application is a reimbursement after an owner paid. Which my understanding there's no application or no plans for the owner to front this. This is all Urban Renewal. Going on to the window covering, in particular, there is a section that says funding may not be used for finishes such as paint, flooring, furniture, blinds, lighting fixtures, or anything that would not qualify for blight or life safety. Now, the question I ask is those windows that are being covered, they're all intact. No cracks or breaks in any of them. So, what I want to know is if we do that for one building, if the other businesses see that go up and decide to put in an application to Urban Renewal for the same things. Those applications by rules should be denied. So, we're kind of setting a precedence here of hey this doesn't apply here but when Urban Renewal's own policy does state that those things wouldn't qualify and as long as the windows are intact, I don't see a reason for it to be blight or safety. I just wanted the council to consider that and maybe get in touch with Urban Renewal prior to the meeting. Urban Renewal is funded by the 1% TIF and so it should also be the council's due diligence to make sure that those funds are administered properly and to the correct items.

REPORTS**A. Tourism and Economic Development (Pam Denahy).**

- Tarantula Fest will be September 26-27, 2025. Tours are sold out as of August 31st but are still accepting merchant and food vendors along with parade registrations.
- The Visit La Junta website is being redesigned. It will have a similar look but updates will be made to the back-end for easier use.
- Working in close partnership with Bent's Old Fort. The Fort is now allowing plaza access on Thursdays through Mondays from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- Will be receiving a Tarantula Trek proclamation from the State of Colorado.
- Pam was nominated and selected as a finalist for the Governor's Award for Outstanding Colorado Tourism Champion.
- Pam is also part of the Doers & Makers Boettcher Fellowship. Her first retreat will be this weekend.
- The Economic Development Summit created three top priorities for La Junta. 1) Beautify store fronts in downtown La Junta. 2) Identify new primary industry(s) to recruit to La Junta Industrial Park by 2030. 3) Reassess and upgrade all aging City Infrastructure.
- La Junta Creative Main Street is in a joint program with Colorado Creative Industries and DOLA (who is here for our annual visit). Goals are: activate downtown, build lasting partnerships and spruce up La Junta.
- We are in Phase 3 (in partnership with CSU extension) of the Rural Technical Assistance Program. Goals are: revitalize downtown and expand economic opportunities, strengthen collaboration, community engagement, volunteerism & partnership, destination marketing and promotion of outdoor and cultural assets.
- Michael, Martin and Pam are working together on the second half of the Brownfields grant.

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – September 2, 2025

- **Main Street/Urban Renewal Project:** Out of the Economic Development Summit three priorities were identified. The beautify storefronts in downtown La Junta was one that came up as high priority. Urban Renewal and Main Street was a good fit. Both focus on economic vitality. These conversations came after a presentation that Martin Montoya gave to Urban Renewal concerning the vacant buildings that were downtown. This led to the discussion of how do we make it look better, beautifying it to help with the economic vitality of our community. The buildings were selected using the vacant building list within downtown. We had two joint work sessions to come up with the idea of the vinyl windows. It was approved by Urban Renewal from a funding standpoint to start this project. Main Street is hoping to be able to get grant funding to move forward. But we were really hoping to get this first one done by Tarantula Fest. We have a lot of tourists in town during that weekend.

CONSENT AGENDA**A. Regular Meeting Minutes August 18, 2025.**

MOTION TO APPROVE THE SEPTEMBER 2, 2025 CONSENT AGENDA: Ramirez

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 6-0 (Ward 2 Vacancy)

NEW BUSINESS

A. Present 2026 Budget. Finance Director Aliza Libby delivered the 2026 budget. A public budget hearing will be scheduled in the future.

B. City of La Junta Drug & Alcohol Policy (Dawn Block). In April of this year, we had a site visit by CDOT who administers our 5311 grant, which is a pass-through grant from the FTA (Federal Transit Administration). They said that we need to update our drug and alcohol testing policy. So, we followed their template. In order for us to continue to receive federal funding, we have to do this. FTA rules say that the governing body has to adopt or approve this policy. The other two policies we have is the federal motor carrier's policy which governs all of our DOT employees which are the CDL drivers. Then, we also have a non-DOT policy which governs your clerical and administration. These three policies mirror each other. The major change is we are proposing this to be a zero-tolerance policy. (Discussion continued regarding drug free workplace versus zero tolerance, provisions for searching employee vehicles, dispensation, marijuana use, who and where is the testing done.)

MOTION TO ADOPT THE NEW CITY OF LA JUNTA DRUG & ALCOHOL POLICY: Velasquez

SECOND: Rikhof

DISCUSSION: There was no further discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 5-0 (Ward 2 Vacancy, Pantoya absent)

C. Tourism Board Recommendation for Funding

1. National WIFE (Women Involved in Farm Economics) Convention, October 23-25 in La Junta at Otero College - \$5,000 sponsorship request. This is their 49th annual convention. It is a 3-day convention that will bring in between 100 – 125 people from outside of La Junta. Their goals for life are to educate, support and advocate.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE EXPENDITURE OF TOURISM TAX REVENUE IN THE AMOUNT OF \$5,000 TO THE NATIONAL WIFE (WOMEN INVOLVED IN FARM ECONOMICS) CONVENTION ON OCTOBER 23-25: Rikhof

SECOND: Pantoya

DISCUSSION: There was no discussion

VOTE: The motion carried 6-0 (Ward 2 Vacancy)

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – September 2, 2025**D. Committee/Board Reports**

1. There were no committee/board reports.

E. City Manager's Comments

- CML District meeting is coming up on the 25th this month in Las Animas.
- The water tie-in on 14th Street is about to wrap up.
- New fire hydrants have been installed on Park and Raton Avenue.
- The sludge press is complete and we're waiting on the building. It is about 6-8 weeks out.
- Flu shots for employees are available in September.
- Martin and the crew will be fixing the curb on the north side on 10th Street between Barnes and Maple Avenue. They will also be doing a stormwater inlet as well.
- City Clean-Up in October. A list of do's and don'ts is getting put together.
- Fire Prevention week is also in October.
- Early Settler's Day is this weekend.
- Brock and I are still putting together the Property Management bus tour for council.

F. Community Events/Council Reports

1. Council Member Velasquez:
 - The Tour de Santa Fe Trail will be Saturday, September 27th. Check-in is at 6:00 a.m. and the ride starts at 8:00 a.m. It's a 50-mile bike ride from La Junta to Las Animas and back. Registration fee is \$75.00. All proceeds go to the Arkansas Valley Medical Regional Center to help fund essential health care programs, medical equipment, community health initiative that directly benefit the Arkansas Valley region.
2. Council Member Pantoya:
 - Early Settler's Day is Saturday, September 6th. "Better Together" is the theme. There will be a 3-on-3 basketball tournament beginning at 8:00 a.m. followed by the community breakfast and 9:00 a.m. and the parade starting at 10:00 a.m.

G. Governing Body Reports

1. Mayor Ayala:
 - Paul will have a letter to email out after we get further clarification from the hospital. After meeting with Ron Hogue, we will be getting monthly information.
 - I also got and updated audit that I will send out to you guys.
2. Council Member Rikhof:
 - Question about the vacancy that we have. It doesn't seem like there's much direction in the code for how to fill a vacancy other than the city council can vote on a vacancy and I'm assuming then we make nominations.

Mayor Ayala: The vacancy will be opened tomorrow until the 11th for anybody that's interested. The letters of interest will be included in the 15th packet for us to make nominations at that meeting. That still puts us within the thirty days. We do have an open spot on the Utility Board but it doesn't say thirty days on that one in the Charter.

Council Member Pantoya: When they put their letter of intent in, they would just serve until the election?

Mayor Ayala: Yes. We would do that at the front of the meeting. They would have the rest of that meeting, October 6th, 20th and the first meeting in November before the election.

Council Member Rikhof: So, in the past with Elaine's resignation, we got zero interest?

Mayor Ayala: I don't have the greatest memory. We did have a different City Attorney at that point. They would have worked with Mel.

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – September 2, 2025

Council Member Rikhof: I suggest that we put some other things in writing. This seems like something that should be in writing. It's very ambiguous and I think we're doing something totally different than was done last time.

City Attorney Harris: I think that's done when we talk about the resolution. We could certainly entertain anything that anyone wants to suggest and I can draft one. We used a draft resolution that was at least circulated to Mel and to our mayor when we were preparing for the Thursday meeting. We didn't really discuss how we would memorialize what happened on Thursday. My assumption though is that we would circulate a resolution for the next packet. If there are other things that you would like to offer, send them to Joe and we will try to understand what the discussion might look like and what the resolution might need if we're going to expand the discussion to further issues regarding filling the vacancy. Whatever we decide, we should be thorough and specific about what it is that we've done because it is true that I have no idea what happened with the Elaine vacancy. There's nothing that was made of record so that we could follow it.

3. Council Member Rikhof:

- Question about planning ahead for meetings with the budget hearing for the public. It is in the code that there needs to be at least a ten-day notice and I think it has to be done by October 15th. So, there's not a whole lot of dates that would work between now and then and I think that we can do a better job of announcing. We meet twice a month. I think it's reasonable. If we're doing something that's important like putting out the city council vacancy, or we're having a proposed budget hearing, that we put it out in a council meeting that it's happening in the future instead of things being posted without them being discussed at council meetings. I think it improves our ability to be transparent if we talk about them in council meetings.

Council Member Pantoya: I think they have been in the past when we've had openings. Just like you did now with the Utility Board. It's not something that we don't bring up.

Mayor Ayala: We will put some dates together with a doodle poll and see what works for the budget hearing.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF LA JUNTA

Melanie R. Scofield, City Clerk

Joseph Ayala, Mayor

Christina Tozzie
16 Mountview Drive
La Junta, CO 81050

September 2, 2025

Mayor Ayala and City Council Members Damon Ramirez, Paul Velasquez, Lisa Pantoya, Chandra Ochoa, and Maureen Rikhof

City of La Junta
601 Colorado Avenue
La Junta, CO 81050

RE: Letter of Interest – Interim Appointment, City Council Ward 2

Dear Mayor Ayala and Councilmembers Ramirez, Velasquez, Pantoya, Ochoa, and Rikhof,

I am writing to express my interest in the interim appointment to the La Junta City Council representing Ward 2. As both a longtime resident and a small business owner in Ward 2, I am deeply invested in our community and eager to serve.

I have lived in La Junta for more than 20 years throughout my life and currently serve as President of the La Junta Chamber of Commerce. My professional background spans education, food and beverage, manufacturing, the public sector, and the non-profit sector. This range of experience has equipped me to collaborate across industries, listen to diverse perspectives, and develop practical solutions to community challenges.

My motivation for seeking this role is to help make La Junta a vibrant, welcoming city by supporting small businesses, fostering economic growth, and creating an inviting environment for families and residents. I believe strong collaboration between Council, local organizations, and citizens is key to building on our strengths and shaping a thriving future.

Serving on City Council would allow me to further contribute to shaping La Junta's future, ensuring that we build on our strengths while embracing opportunities for growth and improvement.

I understand this is an interim appointment until the upcoming election, and I am prepared to dedicate my time and energy to effectively represent Ward 2 during this period. It would be an honor to serve alongside you on behalf of our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome the opportunity to discuss my qualifications further.

Sincerely,



Christina Tozzie
720-244-7476
christina.tozzie@gmail.com



Melanie Scofield <melanie.scofield@lajuntacolorado.org>

Letter of Interest – Ward 2 City Council Vacancy

1 message

Carly Johnson <johnsonec65@gmail.com>

Mon, Sep 8, 2025 at 9:33 AM

To: Melanie Scofield <melanie.scofield@lajuntacolorado.org>

Dear Members of the La Junta City Council,

I am writing to formally express my interest in filling the Ward 2 seat vacancy on La Junta City Council. As a resident, small business owner, and active civic leader, I am deeply committed to strengthening our community and ensuring that La Junta continues to grow as a vibrant, welcoming place to live and work.

Through my work as the owner of Wild Roots Kava Company in downtown La Junta, I have invested directly in our local economy, transforming a vacant and deteriorated property into a thriving community space. This experience has given me firsthand knowledge of the challenges and opportunities facing small businesses and local development.

Beyond entrepreneurship, I currently serve as a commissioner on the La Junta Urban Renewal Authority, where I work to address blight and support revitalization through responsible redevelopment policies. I am also honored to serve as President of the La Junta Kiwanis Club, where I help lead service projects that benefit families and youth in our community. In addition, I serve on the Arkansas Valley Hospice fundraising committee and am developing a nonprofit initiative focused on empowering, underserved individuals and strengthening the role of the creative arts in LaJunta's future.

I believe these roles have prepared me to contribute thoughtfully and effectively on City Council. My priorities include supporting small business growth, encouraging responsible redevelopment, expanding community engagement, and strengthening opportunities for families and young people. I am eager to collaborate with fellow council members, city staff, and residents to address current challenges and build a strong future for Ward 2 and the city as a whole.

Thank you for your consideration of my application. I would be honored to serve Ward 2 and represent our community on the La Junta City Council. I welcome the opportunity to discuss my qualifications

Respectfully,

Carly Johnson

Sent from my iPhone



Melanie Scofield <melanie.scofield@lajuntacolorado.org>

Ward 2 City Council Vacancy

2 messages

Julie Worley <julieworley49@gmail.com>

Wed, Sep 10, 2025 at 1:32 PM

To: Melanie Scofield <melanie.scofield@lajuntacolorado.org>

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Please accept this email message sent on Wednesday, September 10, 2025, at approximately 1: 30 p.m., as my "Letter of Interest" in filling the short-term Ward 2 vacancy on the La Junta City Council.

I am a registered voter; I have resided in Ward 2 for over 13 years; and in SE Colorado for almost 50 years.

Thank you for your consideration of my desire to fill the vacancy. If you have further questions, please feel free to contact me by phone or email. ...julie worley ;o)

Julie Worley
2417 San Juan Avenue
La Junta, CO 81050
T: 719.468.9297
E: julieworley49@gmail.com

Melanie Scofield <melanie.scofield@lajuntacolorado.org>

Wed, Sep 10, 2025 at 2:15 PM

To: Julie Worley <julieworley49@gmail.com>

Received.

Thank you.

[Quoted text hidden]

--

Melanie R. Scofield

City Clerk

City of La Junta

P O Box 489

La Junta CO 81050

719.384.5991

Office Hours

Monday - Thursday

7:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.