

TOWN OF ST. JAMES WORK SESSION MINUTES
July 17, 2025

The St. James Town Council held a Work Session on July 17, 2025 in the Earl Dye Council Chamber. Mayor Toner opened the Work Session at 10:00 am.

Council Members Present: Mayor Jean Toner, Councilors Jim Board, Lynn Dutney, and Dennis Barclay.

Staff Present: Town Manager Jeff Repp, Finance Director Pauline Haran, and Town Clerk Jamie Burns

Absent: Mayor Pro Tem David DeLong

Others Present: State Port Pilot Reporter Eliot Duke, Deputy Director of Emergency Management Diana Kelly, Emergency Management members Karl Goodwin and Steve Altieri, and 12 residents.

Attending Via Zoom: Project Engineer Larry Mitchell with CDM Smith & Bob Tweedy with Brunswick County Utilities.

Administration Update

a. *St. James Water Pressure Improvement Project Update*

Town Manager Jeff Repp provided a brief update on the St. James Water Pressure Improvement Project. He explained that the project was initiated several years ago and is now approaching the construction phase. The last update from CDM Smith was provided in February or April of 2025. The project reached the milestone of 60 percent design drawings last month and is now proceeding towards the awarding of the construction contract for a portion of the work.

Mr. Repp then introduced Project Engineer Larry Mitchell with CDM Smith. Mr. Mitchell shared his PowerPoint presentation with Town Council. He outlined the scope of work, which includes submitting the 90 percent level design drawings, presenting a guaranteed maximum price based on the 60 percent design, submitting permits for regulatory review (including NCDOT and public water supply permits), and constructing the system. He also mentioned ongoing work on a conservation easement and connecting via Highway 906.

The project is divided into three segments:

- Highway 211 improvements-Segment 1
- Highway 906 improvements-Segment 3
- Internal improvements within St. James-Segment 2

Mr. Mitchell discussed challenges with the conservation easement along Highway 906, which is controlled by the state land trust via NCDOT. The easement has restrictive covenants, but Mr. Mitchell expressed optimism about potentially modifying it to allow for water pipe installation via directional drilling.

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Bob Tweedy joined the meeting via Zoom at 10:15.

The county decided to move forward with segments 1 and 2 (Highway 211 improvements and internal St. James connections). Mr. Mitchell presented the guaranteed maximum price for these segments, which includes allowances and contingencies. This does not include the Highway 906 segment.

Mayor Toner inquired about the inclusion of three or four fire hydrants. Two locations have been narrowed down. Mr. Tweedy indicated that they will be done either in-house operationally or added in through the contractor's portion of the work.

Mr. Mitchell presented hydraulic modeling results, showing expected improvements in water pressure throughout the system once the project is completed. He projected that the average pressure increase would be about 15 psi throughout the system.

The construction for segments 1 and 2 is expected to begin in September 2025, with completion targeted for mid-2026 ahead of the December 2026 ARPA deadline. The timeline for the Highway 906 segment remains undetermined due to ongoing easement issues.

Mr. Repp clarified that the town's portion of the funding (\$1.9 million) would be used for the first two phases, while the county would still have money for the third phase (Highway 906 improvements) without the time constraints. There is no restriction on when it can be completed.

After questions from council Mayor Toner allowed time for public comment. A resident asked why pressure can't be increased now and also inquired about the reason for the check valve. Mr. Repp reported that the vaults that control the pressure are not currently in place. There will be a considerable increase in the pressure seen in the plantation once the pressure area is created. The check valve is the pressure point and without it the water pressure is very low in St. James. Mayor Toner thanked the resident for his questions.

Mayor Toner thanked the presenters for their update and requested they provide additional information and updates regarding the easements when there is a better idea of which path they will need to take.

Larry Mitchell and Bob Tweedy left the meeting at 10:36.

b. *St. James Emergency Management Overview and Review of Draft Emergency Operations Plan Update*

Mr. Repp introduced Diana Kelly, Deputy Director of St. James Emergency Management to provide an update on emergency management activities. Copies of the draft Emergency Operations Plan were provided to the council to provide comments. Mr. Repp requested council members provide him with any additional comments on the operations plan which he will include in a marked-up copy. Ms. Kelly presented an overview of the

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department's activities. She thanked the council for voting her in as deputy director five months ago. Key points of her update included:

- The team has three main priorities: improving communications, developing a fully trained team, and reestablishing the damage assessment program.
- Recent communication efforts include the annual storm seminar, website updates, publications in the town newsletter, and distribution of emergency information magnets.
- The team has added six new members in the last five months and is conducting ongoing training. Ms. Kelly emphasized the need for reestablishing tabletop drills and full-scale exercises with partners in the future.
- A damage assessment program is being reestablished, with new software being provided by Brunswick County with implementation expected in August.
- The team is working on various projects, including updating the Emergency Operations Plan, building a database of frequently asked questions, and acquiring new equipment for the EOC.

Ms. Kelly emphasized ongoing efforts to train new team members and improve overall readiness.

Councilor Board inquired whether the team will be able to provide core services in the event of a storm with all the new members to the team. Mr. Repp assured the council that the basic functions of notifying residents before a storm and manning of the EOC during a storm to respond to resident inquiries will be in place.

Mayor Toner and council members stressed the importance of accurate and timely information dissemination and damage assessment capabilities during emergencies. Mayor Toner commended the emergency management team for their efforts. Council members thanked Ms. Kelly for her presentation.

- c. *Consideration of the Adoption of a County Noise Ordinance as Town Noise Ordinance*
Town Manager Jeff Repp introduced the topic, explaining that St. James currently does not have a specific noise ordinance. He presented the option of adopting an ordinance that would mirror Brunswick County's, which would allow the sheriff's office to enforce it within St. James. Mr. Repp stated that POA guidelines are currently the only regulations regarding noise in the town.

Mayor Toner mentioned past issues with noise complaints, particularly from rental properties and ongoing situations that the town was unable to address without an ordinance. She emphasized that while noise complaints are not frequent, having a way of dealing with them when they arise is important.

The council agreed to have the town attorney review the county ordinance and provide recommendations for adapting it to the needs of St. James.

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d. *Brunswick County Planning Board*

Councilor Jim Board provided an update on his role and experiences with the Brunswick County Planning Board. He expressed concerns with the current structure and decision-making process of the board, including:

- The board's limited authority to deny development applications that meet the county Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) requirements. The board has limited influence over infrastructure concerns.
- Rapid development in the county without adequate consideration for infrastructure impacts, such as water availability, wastewater facilities, road conditions, and school capacity.
- The need for a more comprehensive approach to planning that considers schools, roads, and other infrastructure.

Councilor Board suggested the authority to approve or deny developments should reside with the county commissioners rather than the planning board, as commissioners have more control over infrastructure decisions and could better address the overall impact of developments in the county. He also mentioned ongoing efforts to revise the UDO but noted that many developments have already been approved under the current regulations.

The council members thanked Councilor Board for his detailed report and expressed appreciation for his efforts to address these complex issues at the county level.

e. *USA 250th Anniversary Celebration*

Mayor Toner introduced the topic of the country's 250th anniversary celebration in July 2026. She mentioned that the town would be doing fireworks and suggested considering additional activities for St. James, such as inviting the Brunswick Big Band for a patriotic concert at the event center.

Council members discussed the idea, with suggestions to involve military veterans' organizations and ensure any events do not conflict with larger celebrations in nearby towns, such as Southport.

Mayor Toner concluded that they would look into various options and report back to council with more detailed suggestions for the anniversary celebration.

f. *May and June Zoning Report*

Mr. Repp presented the zoning report for May and June 2025. In May, there were 4 new construction permits issued and 7 additions/modifications. In June, there was 1 new construction permit issued and 12 additions/modifications. The running total of permits issued in the last 12 months was 56 residential permits and 93 others.

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Mr. Repp also provided an update on the development around town hall that has been discussed, mentioning that the project is gaining momentum. He anticipates formal activity in the form of a resolution for annexation being proposed to council and also conditional zoning going to the planning board and then council in the near future. No plans have been submitted.

- g. *May and June 2026 Wright Event Center Reports and Surveys*
 This agenda item was not discussed during the meeting.

Finance Update

Finance Director Pauline Haran provided the following updates:

- The town received approximately \$293,000 in sales taxes for May, which will be accrued back to fiscal year 2025.
- The annual debt payment of \$362,000 has been made, with one remaining payment due next July.
- Two projects requiring signatures were mentioned: three message boards (\$42,000) and updated Zoom capacity for the EOC (\$18,500).
- The comprehensive plan survey has received 1,357 responses as of the meeting date, with a reminder to be sent out for additional participation.
- An update on the water pressure project and street lights was provided, noting that payments will be made for completed work dated after July 7th.
- Ms. Haran presented a thank you gift from the fishing derby organizers for their support.
- Ms. Haran requested input on upcoming events for the August/September town newsletter.

Mr. Repp confirmed with the council that consensus is to present the Citizen Recognition Award to both a Citizen of the Year and a Group of the Year, with presentations planned for the September meeting.

Diana Kelly recognized Karl Goodwin and Steve Altieri for their contributions to the Emergency Operations Plan. Council members thanked the emergency management team members.

Adjournment

Mayor Toner adjourned the Work Session at 11:30am.

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved,

Jamie Burns, Town Clerk

Jean R. Toner, Mayor