

**TOWN OF ST. JAMES SPECIAL WORK SESSION MINUTES**  
**July 24, 2025**

The St. James Town Council held a Special Work Session on July 24, 2025 in the Earl Dye Council Chamber. Mayor Toner opened the Work Session at 2:02pm.

**Council Members Present:** Mayor Jean Toner, Mayor Pro Tem David DeLong, Councilors Jim Board, and Lynn Dutney.

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

**Others Present:** Homer E. Wright Event Center Manager Steve Brennan, Michael Norton of McGill Associates, Doug Sherwood of Sawyer Sherwood and Associate Architecture, State Port Pilot Reporter Eliot Duke and 8 residents.

**Absent:** Councilor Dennis Barclay

**Administration Update**

*Presentation from McGill Associates on Wright Event Center Feedback and Feasibility Plans*

Jeff Repp, Town Manager, introduced the single agenda item for the special work session, explaining that McGill Associates and Sawyer Sherwood and Associate Architecture would present information they had gathered regarding the event center. Mr. Repp noted that surveys and public input sessions had been conducted, and the purpose of today's meeting was to summarize those findings and present conceptual ideas. He emphasized this was not the final meeting but an opportunity to gather council input before a final meeting in the near future.

Michael Norton from McGill Associates began the presentation by thanking the council for the opportunity to present their initial assessment and findings from the survey for the Homer E. Wright Event Center. He highlighted the excellent survey data obtained from the community through multiple online survey rounds and a public meeting. Mr. Norton explained that these input sessions were intended to inform and gather information to supplement what was already known about the event center. He explained that the data they had gathered came from speaking with users both individually and in groups.

Mr. Norton discussed the visual preference sheet used during community meetings, which provided valuable information on what was important to the community. He then highlighted some key takeaways from the survey data, including:

- Age distribution demographics of facility users
- Group size comfort showed preferences for a mix of large, small, and mid-size groups
- Barriers to use, including parking, lighting, dance floor space, and accessibility concerns
- Renovation and addition needs, particularly regarding dance floor space and flex space
- Insufficient small meeting rooms
- AV and sound system concerns
- Parking aesthetics and comfort

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Mr. Norton noted that the facility is well-liked overall and well-managed and maintained.

Doug Sherwood of Sawyer, Sherwood and Associates Architecture (previously known as John Sawyer Architects) continued the presentation, noting that his firm was involved in the original design of the event center facility in 2009. He commended the town on how well the facility has been maintained despite heavy use. He then discussed some of the priorities identified through the survey and analysis, including:

- Parking availability
- Accommodating activities of interest
- Providing ample space for various activities
- Security features, including Wi-Fi and fire safety security needs

Mr. Sherwood explained that the current facility is fully utilized, with no unused space that could be repurposed. He determined that additional space would be needed to meet growing demands. During discussions with the town, it was identified that this is an event center not a recreation center. There are no plans to recreate activities that are provided at adjacent senior centers.

Mr. Sherwood presented a space needs analysis that included:

- Flexible meeting spaces that could be subdivided to accommodate smaller groups of 4-8 people
- A dedicated dance space of approximately 1,750 square feet
- Three office spaces for current and future staff
- Family restrooms to address accessibility needs

The presentation then moved to a site plan discussion, where Mr. Sherwood and Mr. Norton explained the challenges and opportunities for expansion. They proposed an addition to the front of the building, which would add approximately 5,275 square feet of space.

Mr. Sherwood explained that they had evaluated multiple locations for the addition and determined the front was most suitable for the following reasons:

- It would avoid utility easements that surround other parts of the building
- It would preserve the catering access at the rear of the building
- It would avoid interfering with the natural light that comes into the existing space between buildings
- It could allow for a redesign of the front façade to improve aesthetics.

During discussion, council members raised several questions and concerns.

Ms. Haran inquired whether the dance space would be large enough for what the dancers wanted. Mr. Sherwood confirmed that it would be large enough based on what they heard from the dancers during the public input session.

Mayor Toner questioned the need for a separate dance space rather than expanding the existing dance area. Flex spaces can accommodate both small and large groups. She also expressed concern about the aesthetic impact of the proposed addition, noting it would eliminate green

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space in front of the building and create a “warehouse” appearance with the building extending to the sidewalk.

There was a brief discussion regarding office space. New office space would offer a window to greet people before they enter the event center. Current office space could then be used as potential storage or mechanical space. There was also discussion about the addition of a new conference room for business use and overflow. Mr. Brennan confirmed that there is a need for a moderately sized conference space.

Councilor Jim Board asked about permitting requirements for the expansion, particularly regarding parking. Mr. Repp explained that while permitted spaces were sufficient, convenience parking would remain an issue for larger events, potentially requiring arrangements with neighboring properties.

Mayor Toner expressed concern about access through the proposed entrance, noting the difficulty of moving large items, such as Christmas trees, through the current doorways, especially with the central mullion. Mr. Sherwood acknowledged these concerns and noted that improved access could be incorporated into any design.

Mr. Brennan noted the underutilized outdoor space between the buildings. Mayor Toner suggested finding better ways to utilize this currently unused space between the town hall and event center buildings. Council discussed removing the fixed bar and tables in that area to create more flexible outdoor space that could be used for yoga, plant sales, and other activities. Mayor Toner inquired about the possibility of space for two billiard tables since this showed up frequently in the survey. Mr. Sherwood indicated that they would determine if a billiards area could be accommodated.

Steve Brennan, the event center manager, suggested considering a different configuration that would create an L-shaped pre-function area that would wrap around the multipurpose room allowing the room to be entered from multiple directions and providing more flexibility for events with exhibits or cocktail receptions.

Mr. Sherwood provided a rough cost estimate of approximately \$4 million for the proposed addition. He estimated a construction cost of around \$500 per square foot plus approximately \$315,000 for site work. Mayor Toner noted that the town would be making its final debt service payment on the existing facility in January and suggested that a new project of similar cost might be manageable within their existing budget, though interest rates are now significantly higher.

Mr. Repp summarized that the square footage proposed and the intended uses seemed appropriate, with possibly some reconfiguration based on the discussion. He requested that Mr. Sherwood and Mr. Norton provide an updated version of the plan incorporating the Council’s feedback and discussion into their next iteration of the plan. It was noted that if the project moves forward, the town will need to go through a formal request for qualifications process to select a design team due to the project’s scale.

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**Adjournment**

Mayor Toner adjourned the Work Session at 3:16pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved,

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Jamie Burns, Town Clerk

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Jean R. Toner, Mayor