

TOWN OF ST. JAMES REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
September 3, 2025

The St. James Town Council met in Regular Session at 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 3, 2025 in the Earl Dye Council Chamber.

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

Staff Present: Town Manager Jeff Repp and Town Clerk Jamie Burns

Others Present: State Port Pilot Reporter Eliot Duke and many residents

Absent: Finance Director Pauline Haran

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Toner opened the meeting at 4:02 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

All in attendance joined Mayor Toner in honoring our flag.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Toner asked if there were any changes or additions to the agenda. There were none. Mayor Toner requested a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Councilor Board moved to approve the agenda. The motion passed unanimously (Vote: 5/0)

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Toner asked if there were any corrections to the minutes included in the consent agenda. There were none. Mayor Pro Tem DeLong made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda, which consists of the minutes from the July 24, 2025 Special Work Session, the August 6, 2025 Regular Meeting and the August 21, 2025 Work Session. The motion passed unanimously (Vote: 5/0)

PRESENTATIONS

Mayor Toner explained that this is the town's second Citizen of the Year award presentation. She noted that selecting a recipient has been difficult due to the numerous worthy nominees, which led to the decision to present both a citizen of the year award and a group of the year award.

a. 2025 St. James Citizens of the Year – Dave and Janey Pearce

Mayor Toner announced the presentation of the 2025 St. James Citizens of the Year award to Dave and Janey Pearce. She highlighted their over 20 years of service in the community, including their support of various organizations and their contributions to fundraising events. Mayor Toner noted that the Pearce's were awarded the Cape Fear Outstanding Philanthropist of 2024 award and exemplified volunteerism and giving back to the community.

Mayor Toner presented Dave and Janey Pearce with a certificate and award recognizing their significant contributions to the Town of St. James and surrounding community, as well as their selfless service and financial giving to various local organizations.

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Dave and Janey Pearce accepted the award. Mr. Pearce addressed the audience, expressing concern about declining volunteerism rates in the town based on recent survey results. He presented a chart showcasing the organizations and events they have supported emphasizing that their work is only possible because of the community's involvement. Mr. Pearce thanked the community for providing them with the opportunity to develop a rewarding life in return. Several council members offered personal thanks and expressed their appreciation and gratitude.

- b. 2025 St. James Group of the Year – Brunswick County Band of Brothers
 Mayor Toner presented the 2025 St. James Group of the Year award to the Brunswick County Band of Brothers. She explained that the group consists of retirees who rehabilitate homes for low-income families throughout Brunswick County, in collaboration with WARM (Wilmington Area Rebuilding Ministry). The group, led by St. James residents Bruce Ivers and Craig Thompson, includes 33 town residents who focus on safety, health-related home repairs, and accessibility upgrades at no cost to homeowners.

Mayor Toner presented the Brunswick County Band of Brothers with a certificate and award recognizing their significant contributions to the town and surrounding community, as well as their generosity of sharing their time and talents to rehabilitate homes for low-income families in Brunswick County and assisting St. James residents who are in need.

Bruce Ivers accepted the award on behalf of the group, thanking the mayor and council members for their support and Jim Crum for nominating them. He expressed the group's commitment to allowing financially challenged homeowners to safely stay in their homes and to inspire service, generosity, and hope. Mr. Ivers acknowledged the 38 brothers, many of whom were present, and expressed appreciation for their recognition. He provided updated statistics on their work which includes over 28,420 volunteer hours valued at more than \$900,000, with 213 homes completed as of August 2025. Council members commended the group for their work and expressed their appreciation.

MAYOR/COUNCIL/STAFF REPORTS

- a. Town Manager Project Update Report
 Town Manager, Jeff Repp, provided updates on several projects:
- *Event Center Management:* Mr. Repp announced that Event Center Manager, Steve Brennan, would be retiring on September 30, 2025, after five years of service, during which time he increased activities and revenues annually. Following a selection process, Lorna Brennan (no relation), who has worked under Steve for several years will take over as manager on October 1st. The Event Center is currently in the process of interviewing for Lorna's replacement.
 - *Streetlight Project:* Mr. Repp reported that the project is 34% complete based on funding, with invoices submitted for about 34% of the \$399,000 project cost. The rest of the project is expected to be completed by the end of the calendar year.
 - *Highway 211 Construction:* Mr. Repp provided an update on the Regency gate. Work is expected to begin shortly after the start of the new calendar year during

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which time the Regency gate will be shut down for up to 30 days. He clarified that the main gate would remain operational during construction.

- *Unique Places to Save*: Mr. Repp discussed the potential acquisition of six parcels along Highway 211 by the Unique Places to Save organization. He mentioned that the town has confirmed with them its understanding of the conservation easement restrictions and is awaiting a decision from the Land and Water Conservation board on October 1, 2025 as to what will be funded.
- *St. James Water Pressure Project*: Mr. Repp updated the council on the progress of the water pressure improvement project. He reported that the guaranteed maximum price for the project was submitted to the county on July 15, 2025, and is expected to go before the county commissioners on October 6, 2025 for their approval. The project timeline includes permits to be completed by November 2025, on-site work to begin in December 2025, and construction of the first two phases to be completed by June 2026. This project aims to increase water pressure throughout town, especially during spring months when pressure is low due to lawn watering.
- *Fire Department Funding*: Mr. Repp informed the council about the county's consideration of changing the funding of volunteer fire departments from a fire fee basis to a fire tax basis. For St. James, this would allow the town to continue funding the fire department through ad valorem taxes while the county would levy a tax on properties in the fire district outside town limits. The Brunswick County Fire Chiefs Association has recommended this approach to the county, and meetings between the county and municipalities are expected soon. Mr. Repp noted that the county is still in the process of finalizing the recommendation and setting up meetings with mayors and municipalities to discuss the proposed changes.

Mayor Pro Tem DeLong provided additional information about the Regency gate construction, clarifying that outside traffic will not be routed off 211 through St. James. He also explained that after completion, residents will only be able to make right turns when exiting.

Councilor Board asked for clarification on the reason for closing the Regency gate during construction. Mr. Repp explained that it was necessary for reconstruction and elevation adjustments. He also asked about the basis for the fire tax. Mr. Repp explained that it would be an ad valorem tax based on assessed property value.

b. Councilor Barclay Comprehensive Plan Update

Councilor Barclay presented an update on the town's comprehensive plan. He distributed an outline of the plan to the council and requested feedback by the end of the following week. Councilor Barclay highlighted several key points about the plan:

- Unlike previous plans, this one does not include information about the POA or clubs, concentrating solely on the town.
- The plan includes some basic information about the town to help clarify misconceptions, including a section on the Castle Hayne aquifer.

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- Structure: The plan is divided into three chronological parts: St. James in 2025, the next few years through 2029, and the long-term future from 2030 and beyond.
- St. James has reached build-out, with new home construction permits significantly decreasing since peak construction in 2022.
- The importance of St. James Center, noting uncertainty about its future development.
- Concerns about growth in the surrounding community and its impact on the town.

Councilor Barclay emphasized that the plan is still in development and welcomed input from other council members.

Mayor Toner added that this comprehensive planning process occurs every five years and is crucial for guiding town policies, procedures, and initiatives. She stressed the importance of aligning the plan with the town's financial resources to ensure fiscal responsibility.

OLD BUSINESS – None

NEW BUSINESS - None

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Toner opened the floor for public comment.

Resident Jerry Iverson raised a question about signage related to the Highway 211 construction project. Mayor Pro Tem DeLong clarified that decisions about signage were part of the overall planning seven years ago and is left to the POA (Property Owners Association). He explained that the DOT (Department of Transportation) had already communicated with the POA about signage, and at this point, the POA had determined that additional signage was not necessary.

Mayor Pro Tem DeLong further explained that the detour signs shown in earlier plans were intended for St. James residents only and not to reroute general traffic through the town. He emphasized that this decision was still in place and that the plans would be executed as previously determined.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Toner thanked the attendees for coming and invited them to return for future meetings, particularly the work sessions held on the third Thursday of each month at 10am. She explained that these work sessions are where the council discusses policies, procedures, and initiatives in detail before they are brought forward for action at regular meetings.

At 4:41 pm Mayor Pro Tem DeLong made a motion to adjourn the meeting. All were in favor.
(Vote: 5/0)

Mayor Toner adjourned the meeting.

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Respectfully Submitted,

Approved,

Jamie Burns, Town Clerk

Jean R. Toner, Mayor