

TOWN OF ST. JAMES WORK SESSION MINUTES
November 20, 2025

The St. James Town Council held a Work Session on November 20, 2025 in the Earl Dye Council Chamber. Mayor Toner opened the Work Session at 10:01 am.

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

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

Others Present: State Port Pilot Reporter Eliot Duke and 5 residents.

Administration Update

a. *Proposed Amendments to Fire Ordinance*

Town Manager Jeff Repp presented proposed amendments to the Fire Prevention ordinance (Chapter 92 of the code ordinances). He explained that the current fire prevention ordinance makes it difficult to issue permits for commercial properties to dispose of vegetation removed during construction. The amendment would provide a mechanism for applicants to apply to the town for a permit to conduct open burning for commercial development and land-clearing purposes, with terms and conditions to control the burning.

Mr. Repp clarified that this amendment does not change the ordinance for existing residential properties within town limits, where open burning remains prohibited. The amendment specifically addresses commercial development and subdivision projects. He noted this issue arose when a condition was proposed to the Planning Board by developers, but town attorneys advised it was a code ordinance issue, making it the Town Council's responsibility.

Councilor Board noted that many town ordinances were primarily focused on residential properties inside the gates and suggested the Planning Board review existing ordinances with commercial development in mind. Mayor Toner agreed and recommended having the Planning Board review any ordinances that might need revision based on commercial development considerations.

The Council agreed to put this amendment on the agenda for the January meeting, when it will be considered along with the development package. Mr. Repp noted that fees could be established and the fee structure amended at the same time as ordinance changes are adopted, rather than waiting for the budget process.

b. *PWI Proposed Contract Amendment – Definition of Approved Tote Cart*

Town Manager Jeff Repp explained an issue with Priority Waste's contract regarding approved totes for yard debris pick up. Some residents were using old Waste Industries totes for vegetative debris, which Priority Waste did not want to service. The proposed contract amendment would define an "approved tote", which currently exists in the

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contract but without defining what is an approved tote, as either a Priority Waste/Brush Bandit logoed container or a tote without another company's logo visible.

Priority Waste offered to provide stickers to cover competing logos on existing containers at no cost to residents. They will also offer totes for purchase to residents who prefer using containers instead of bags.

Council discussed that while the contract expires soon, the amendment is needed now because Priority Waste was insistent on clarifying this issue. Mr. Repp noted the clarification would prevent confusion about which containers should be emptied. Finance Director Pauline Haran noted that the amendment would carry forward into the next contract as well.

c. *Review of Proposed 2026 Public Meeting and Work Session Resolution*

Council reviewed the proposed meeting schedule for 2026, which sets regular council meetings for the first Wednesday of the month at 4:00 p.m. and work sessions for the third Thursday of each month at 10:00 a.m. unless the public meeting and work session occur within eight days of each other which then moved the work session back a week. The council found no issues with the schedule, which will be on the agenda for formal approval at the December meeting.

d. *Resident Obituaries on Town Webpage – Mayor Toner*

Mayor Toner shared that several residents have requested a section on the town website for posting obituaries of St. James residents. She explained that currently obituary information is scattered across various platforms, such as Just Judy or the State Port Pilot, or sometimes not posted at all. This creates difficulty for residents learning about the passing of neighbors, especially when survivors are out-of-state family members unfamiliar with local publications.

Council discussed potential guidelines for such postings, such as:

- Submissions would need to come from family members, not neighbors
- Establishing a word count limit
- Setting a timeframe on how long obituaries would remain posted
- Guidelines should be clearly posted on the webpage

Staff will develop a structure and policy with guidelines for the council's review.

e. *September/October 2025 Zoning Reports*

Mr. Repp presented the zoning activity reports noting that in September there were 12 permits, but none for new construction. October saw 11 permits, including 4 new construction. The 12-month average showed 45 residential permits for new construction and 98 other permits.

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f. *September/October 2025 Wright Event Center Reports*

Town Manager Jeff Repp reported that the Event Center is maintaining consistent usage with 2,300 events held in the first 10 months of 2025, compared to 2,316 for the same period in 2024. Revenue has increased from \$76,000 to \$89,000 year-to-date.

The Council discussed the Event Center reports and agreed they no longer needed the detailed 13-page itemized listing of all events in their packets. They will continue to receive the summary report, with the detailed listings available electronically.

g. *Volunteers Holiday Lunch – Town Manager*

Mr. Repp proposed hosting a town-sponsored holiday lunch for volunteers, including the planning board, emergency management, and Firewise volunteers. The lunch would be held on January 15th at the Event Center following the Council's work session. The Council agreed this would be an appropriate way to recognize volunteers' contributions. Although not currently in the budget, the town will find funds to support this event estimated to cost a couple of thousand dollars.

Finance Update:

a. *20-20 Design & Modernization Phase Proposal*

Finance Director Pauline Haran presented a proposal from 20-20, a local technology company out of Wilmington, NC, for a comprehensive redesign of the town's audio-visual (AV) system. The \$27,000 proposal would involve evaluating both the Council Chambers and Event Center systems to develop a standardized, more reliable platform.

Ms. Haran explained that currently the facilities use different control platforms (Extron in Council Chambers and a mix of Extron and Crestron in the Event Center) installed at different times by different vendors, creating compatibility and support challenges. The Event Center has ongoing AV issues, particularly with the proprietary Crestron system, which requires special training to service.

Mayor Toner expressed frustration over 10 years of ongoing AV issues and advocated for a comprehensive fix rather than continual piecemeal repairs.

John Garrett, who was attending the meeting, has industry experience and advised the council to develop thorough requirements documentation before proceeding.

The Council requested that staff work with 20-20 to develop detailed requirements before proceeding with the design phase, and to share these with Council for review. The Council was particularly interested in the following:

- Video and audio integration between Town Hall and the Event Center, including remote viewing capabilities for overflow crowds
- Improved display options, including bigger television display screens
- Better microphone system

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- Possible digital signage for announcements

b. Finance Director Report

Ms. Haran reported that through November 15th, the town had collected \$2,160,881 in revenue and had expenses of \$2,580,854. The higher expenses this month were due to an \$832,000 payment to the fire department for a new pumper truck, which had been delayed due to quality issues including a cracked chassis that needed repair. At the Council's suggestion, Ms. Haran agreed to ask about extended warranty options for the truck given the issues encountered during production.

She also reported that:

- The town's audit for fiscal year 2025 has been completed and submitted to the Local Government Commission (LGC).
- This year's Veterans Breakfast had fewer attendees than expected, and they would likely reduce headcount for next year's event from 150 to 100. The Council discussed better coordination with the Legion in the future.
- 400 new chairs have been delivered to the Event Center. The old chairs were sold through GovDeals. Ms. Haran mentioned that some chairs with arms were kept because residents preferred them, but they would eventually be replaced next fiscal year to match the new chairs. The chairs with arms have the old fabric and are being used in the smaller rooms.
- The oyster project on Monday, November 17th was a success.
- Brunswick Electric was paid \$144,000 for streetlights in September but no additional invoices have been received. Ms. Haran is expecting another \$200,000 worth of invoices. Mr. Repp reported that the lights for the Seaside area were awaiting delivery. Council discussed how trees are blocking streetlights in some areas. Mr. Repp will reach out to BEMC to ask about trimming the trees.
- The town has a new part-time employee, Jacob Schoffield, at the Event Center, who is replacing Stephen Ash.

Ms. Haran noted the town's finances remain on track with the budget, with no unexpected issues beyond the planned fire truck expenditures.

Before adjourning, Mr. Repp informed the Council that construction on the Reserve Townhomes at Lakeside would begin construction soon, likely before the end of the year. This is a development of 13 townhome units on St. James Drive by Founders, which was approved in a 2018 development agreement. Dirt will likely be brought in for floodplain compliance work.

The Council also briefly discussed branding consistency after Councilor Board shared feedback from a POA meeting about font styles across St. James entities.

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Adjournment

Mayor Toner adjourned the Work Session at 11:21a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved,

Jamie Burns, Town Clerk

Jean R. Toner, Mayor