

**TOWN OF ST. JAMES REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
December 3, 2025**

The St. James Town Council met in Regular Session at 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 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, Finance Director Pauline Haran, and Town Clerk Jamie Burns

Others Present: Emily Sullivan and Allen Trask III of Ward and Smith, David Hopkins of Riverbrook Builders, Neal Robinette of C.F. Smith Property Group, Jay Atkinson of St. James Properties, State Port Pilot Reporter Eliot Duke, and approximately 80+ residents.

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Toner opened the meeting at 4:00 p.m.

All in attendance joined Mayor Toner in honoring our flag.

Before beginning the meeting, Mayor Toner reviewed the requirements regarding public comment. She explained there would be two public comment periods: one during the public hearing related only to the subject of the hearing and one at the end of the meeting for any topic related to town functions and responsibilities. She outlined that each speaker would be allowed three minutes, with a total of 30 minutes for each session. For speakers representing a group, eight minutes would be allowed. Mayor Toner reminded speakers that when called, they should come to the podium and state their name and address.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Toner asked if there were any changes or corrections to the agenda as submitted. Hearing none she asked for 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 changes or corrections to the minutes from the November 5, 2025 Regular Meeting and the November 20, 2025 Work Session included in the consent agenda. There were none. Mayor Pro Tem DeLong moved to approve the consent agenda. The motion passed unanimously (Vote: 5/0)

PUBLIC HEARING

Voluntary annexation of approximately 137.4 acres of property owned by Harbor Development Corp., Canal Associates, LLC, and D.R. Development Corporation.

Councilor Dutney made a motion to enter into the Public Hearing. All were in favor. Mayor Toner opened the Public Hearing at 4:03 p.m.

Town Manager Jeff Repp presented information about the voluntary annexation request that was received a couple of months ago. He entered several items into the public record for the hearing, including:

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- The petition for voluntary annexation dated September 24, 2025.
- The certificate of sufficiency from the town clerk dated November 5, 2025, confirming the validity of the annexation petition.
- The resolution adopted by the town council at the previous meeting (Resolution 2025-09) establishing the public hearing for the annexation.
- An amendment to the petition for voluntary annexation dated November 26, 2025, correcting the legal description of the property (noting the property was actually 139.85 acres, approximately 0.4 acres larger than initially described).
- The notice of public hearing published in the State Port Pilot on November 19, 2025.

Following Mr. Repp's presentation, Mayor Toner opened the floor for public comment.

Allen Trask from Ward and Smith spoke first on behalf of the petitioners. Mr. Trask indicated that he represented Harbor Development Corp., Canal Associates, LLC, and D.R. Development Corporation. He noted that their full client team was present, which he stated underscored their commitment to the town and their long-standing collaborative relationship. He explained that the property proposed for annexation is currently governed by a planned unit development approval issued by Brunswick County in 2018, which remains active and vested. He explained that despite having independent approval for development through the county, the petitioners have elected to pursue voluntary annexation to ensure future residents and businesses would be part of the Town of St. James. Mr. Trask expressed hope that the annexation would align governance and services, promote coordinated planning, and bring tax revenue to the town while imposing only modest demand on public services.

Several residents spoke during the public comment portion of the hearing, expressing concerns about the annexation.

Jerry Iverson (2696 Four Oak Road) stated that in reading the town's documentation about the annexation and recent newspaper coverage he realized changes would need to be made to the UDO. Mr. Iverson questioned if this meant there would be a UDO for inside the gates and another for outside the gates. His primary concern is that the town has not articulated how the annexation would benefit the citizens of St. James. He said the development would happen regardless of annexation, and he believes there would be more detriment than benefit for current residents. Mr. Iverson suggested that although tax revenue would increase, expenses would also increase, resulting in minimal impact to current tax rates. He requested that the town explain the specific benefits of annexation to residents.

Robert Bonomo (3723 Currie Court) read from a prepared statement. He expressed his view that based on the documents on the town website, the annexation appeared to be a "done deal" with the public hearing merely fulfilling legal requirements. He cited passages from the town's website related to the annexation and offered comments on each. Regarding fire services, he noted that without annexation, the town would still receive up to 70% of the projected tax revenue from fire fees. He expressed concern about the potential cost of a third firehouse if needed, suggesting the town should extract an impact fee from the developer to mitigate costs. Mr. Bonomo also raised concerns about the maintenance of the two miles of public roads that would come with the development. He noted that road maintenance costs in St. James South have led to POA dues

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increases of 15% per year. He was unable to finish his comments within the three-minute time limit. Mr. Repp accepted a copy of Mr. Bonomo's written statement to put in the record.

Jim Knight (4029 Traditions Court) raised concerns about the impact on the Beach Club, noting that it is already difficult to park there on busy weekends and holidays. He suggested that adding another 3,000 homes would overwhelm this amenity and questioned what amenities the town would provide to future residents.

Heidi Heifetz (3659 Battery Lane) questioned why the process couldn't be slowed down to give residents more time to consider that annexation. She stated that many residents were unaware of what was happening and didn't understand the ramifications. Ms. Heifetz requested a large joint meeting with representatives from the POA, the Town, Troon, and possibly the developers so residents could ask questions.

Lance Flint (3882 Big Magnolia Way) who identified himself as a former finance director for the City of Southport, spoke against the annexation. He called the entire conversation "disingenuous" with four factions (the Town, POA, fire department and Troon) saying "not me" while all being related and together. He urged everyone to read the fire department's five-year plan, which he said indicated a third station would happen and would likely transition the department from volunteer to paid. He stated that in this year's budget St. James spent \$2.2 million on the fire department for its operations, with the five-year plan projecting an increase to \$3 million a year, which would double the tax rate. Mr. Flint argued that the projected \$524,000 in revenue from the development would be insufficient to cover the estimated \$1.5 million cost of a third station. He also began to raise concerns about burning before his three-minute time expired.

Kathleen Ragan (3800 Bancroft Place) asked for information about the ongoing planning for expansion of the Event Center, referring to the fact-finding survey conducted several months earlier regarding desired amenities. She inquired whether consideration had been given to the additional residents who would potentially use the currently undersized Event Center. Ms. Ragan asked if there would be any funding support from the development to help with the expansion, and if not, whether new residents would contribute alongside existing residents when expansion costs were assessed.

Patricia Greene (3277 Wild Azalea Way) expressed concern about what would happen if the development failed, asking if the town would be responsible for roads and amenities in that scenario. She also requested that each council member state their position on the annexation so residents would know who supported or opposed it. Ms. Greene concluded by stating her opposition to burning.

Bob DeMarino (3995 Baynard Court) noted that according to information provided regarding the annexation, the current population of St. James was approximately 8,500. He noted that at full build-out, the town would receive approximately \$524,000 in additional revenues from the annexation, not including possible offsets from street lighting, yard debris, and road maintenance. He calculated that this amount of revenue could be generated by taxing current residents approximately \$61 per person or \$120 per household, without incurring additional expenses. Mr. DeMarino asked the Town Council to clarify what additional value or benefit the annexation would

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provide to current residents beyond a small revenue increase that could be achieved through other means.

Edward (Ted) Steen (3894 Fairhaven Drive) questioned the purported tax revenue advantage. He expressed doubt that there was profit to be derived from someone else's taxes, arguing that if that were the case, someone was paying too much in taxes. Mr. Steen raised concerns about potential failed developments and how that would affect tax forecasts. He also suggested that residents of the annexed area might eventually seek to join the Property Owners Association (POA), creating tensions as current facilities are already overused. Mr. Steen noted demographic differences, suggesting new residents in St. James North would likely have children and want a school district.

After all speakers concluded, Mayor Toner thanked everyone for their input and acknowledged that speaking before a crowd can be difficult. She assured residents that council members would take their comments into consideration. Mayor Pro Tem DeLong made a motion to adjourn the Public Hearing at 4:27 p.m. The motion passed unanimously. (Vote: 5/0)

MAYOR/COUNCIL/STAFF REPORTS

a. 2025 Municipal Election Abstract of Votes -Town Clerk

Town Manager Jeff Repp stated that the council's packet contained a copy of the official election results certified by the Board of Elections. The results were sent to the town council and town clerk. No action is required on this item.

Mayor Toner acknowledged the results and noted they would be losing Mayor Pro Tem DeLong, adding it would be a loss for the town. She mentioned that new members would be sworn in later in the meeting.

OLD BUSINESS – None

NEW BUSINESS

25-26 Motion to Adopt Ordinance 2025-04 Amending Chapter 92 – Fire Prevention of the St. James Code of Ordinances.

Town Manager Jeff Repp explained that the proposed amendment to the fire prevention ordinance would permit burning of vegetative debris on commercial property for land clearing purposes. This would apply only to properties on the Town Hall side of Highway 211 and potentially to the commercial property across from Evolve Apartments, though Mr. Repp noted that there were likely no trees in that area requiring burning. Mr. Repp emphasized that no open burning would be permitted without a town permit and that the county defers to municipalities to adopt their own burn ordinances.

Mr. Repp outlined that the process would require staff to create a permit application process. The town would first provide a definition of land clearing. Applicants would first need to obtain a permit from the NC Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) for air quality purposes before submitting to the town for any open burning on their property. The town application would include payment of a permit

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fee, a copy of the NCDEQ air quality permit, a site plan showing the location of the burning activity, a written description of the burning process including mitigation efforts to address any smoke issues, and coordination with the St. James Fire Department for fire prevention. The state requires five acres or larger for commercial burning.

Mayor Toner asked about the county's requirements and if they are similar to what the town would implement. Mr. Repp clarified that the county has no requirements and defers solely to the NC Department of Environment and Quality for open burning permits in the county. The mayor also asked about DEQ mitigation actions. Mr. Repp explained that applicants would suggest mitigation actions in the applications and noted that the state recommends air curtain burners which create higher temperatures to reduce smoke. Mayor Toner clarified that this ordinance would put into effect higher requirements than what would be under the county, which is no requirements.

Councilor Board asked if there would be a notification requirement based on wind direction on the proposed day of burning. Mr. Repp confirmed that the state requires checking with the weather service before burning to ensure smoke is blown away from populated areas. Mr. Board also expressed concerns about embers, not just smoke, stating that the area can be a "tinderbox" especially during drought conditions. Mr. Repp noted that applicants would likely have difficulty obtaining a state permit during drought periods as Brunswick County is classified as a high-risk county for burning.

Councilor Board asked about the difference between open burning of debris piles versus fire curtains with higher temperature and whether the town could require the use of burn curtains. Mayor Toner and Mr. Repp confirmed the town would require the burn curtain if the state did not.

Regarding the fire department's involvement, Mr. Repp explained that they would be notified of burning activity and could choose to dispatch equipment to stand by if desired. Both the fire department and the county 911 center would be notified before any burning. Mr. Board also asked if the public would be advised prior to a burn as a courtesy, and Mr. Repp indicated that though it is not required the town could include that in the process.

Mayor Pro Tem DeLong made a motion to adopt ordinance 2025-04 amending Chapter 92, Fire Prevention of the St. James Code of Ordinances. The motion passed unanimously (Vote: 5/0).

25-27 Motion to Amend the Zoning Department Fee Schedule Creating an Application Fee of \$250.00 for a Commercial Burning Permit.

Town Manager Jeff Repp explained that concurrent with the adoption of the burn ordinance, staff recommended amending the fee schedule to establish a \$250 fee for filing a burning permit with the town. Councilor Board asked if this was a one-time

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permit, and Mr. Repp clarified it would apply to each burn event, not per pile of debris. Councilor Board expressed preference for the fee to be for each specific burn rather than a daily fee and asked if there was a maximum size requirement for burn piles. Mr. Repp indicated he would need to check with DEQ on their standards regarding pile size.

Mr. Repp emphasized that the purpose of the permit was for the town to review and approve the activity, not to generate revenue. He noted that applications could be denied if staff deemed the proposed burning activity dangerous, in which case developers would need to haul away debris or take it off site.

After some discussion about whether to modify the fee structure, the Council decided to proceed with the proposal as presented.

Councilor Board made a motion to amend the zoning department fee schedule creating an application fee of \$250.00 for a commercial burning permit. The motion passed unanimously. (Vote: 5/0)

25-28 *Motion to Approve Resolution 2025-10 Adopting Calendar Year 2026 Regular Meeting and Work Session Dates*

Town Manager Jeff Repp explained that annually the Town Council establishes public meeting dates and work session dates in advance for the upcoming calendar year. The resolution specifies the dates for the upcoming year, with council meetings to be held at 4:00 p.m. and work sessions at 10 a.m., the same times as currently scheduled. Mayor Toner noted there did not appear to be any conflicts with the proposed calendar.

Councilor Dutney made a motion to approve the calendar for the upcoming year for the town council meetings and work sessions. The motion passed unanimously. (Vote: 5/0)

25-29 *Motion to Accept the Proposal of Twenty Twenty of Wilmington, NC for Needs Assessment, Design and Modernization of Town Hall and Event Center Information Technology.*

Town Manager Jeff Repp explained that at the previous work session, the Town Council had reviewed a proposal from the firm Twenty Twenty to assess the audio and visual needs of both the Town Hall meeting room and Event Center. During that presentation, they received public feedback requesting a formal needs analysis as part of the process, which has been incorporated into the proposal before the council.

Mr. Repp explained that the consultant would meet with staff and council members (if desired) and then return with a proposed redesign that incorporated everyone's expectations. He emphasized that this was for design work only, not the actual construction, which would follow based on the design.

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At Councilor Board's request, Mr. Repp provided additional context for the audience. He explained that the primary issue at the event center was that over its lifetime, at least two or three different manufacturing systems (Crestron, Extron, and others) had been installed, and these systems do not work well together. This limits what can be done by users and groups at the event center. The intent is to have a consultant who has previously worked for the town design a system that would meet the expectations of both the town and public, essentially cleaning up almost 18 years of patchwork solutions.

Councilor Board made a motion to approve the Twenty Twenty agreement subject to the removal of the words "up to" on page 1, paragraph 3, design fee, so that the proposal would read: "If the client proceeds with Twenty Twenty for system integration, 50 percent of the design fee will be credited toward the final integration contract". Twenty Twenty verbally agreed to the change, though it has not yet been documented in writing. The motion passed unanimously. (Vote: 5/0)

25-30 Motion to Approve Contract Amendment with Priority Waste Inc. Providing for a Definition of an Approved Tote Cart

Town Manager Jeff Repp explained that the current agreement with Priority Waste includes language stating that yard waste disposal in St. James would be in either bags or an approved tote can. However, the contract does not describe what constitutes an approved tote can, only specifying that it cannot be a GFL trash can.

The company proposed amending the contract to define an approved tote can as one of the following: 1) A Brush Bandit (the original yard waste contractor that was acquired by Priority Waste) logoed can, 2) a can without any visible logo, or 3) a can that Priority Waste would provide at cost to residents. Mr. Repp emphasized that there would be no change to the current program, only clarification of what containers could be used. He noted that some residents have been using Waste Industries cans that the contractor did not want to pick up, and Priority Waste has been providing stickers to cover those logos.

Mayor Pro Tem DeLong made a motion to approve the contract amendment with Priority Waste providing for a definition of the approved tote can. The motion passed unanimously. (Vote: 5/0)

25-31 Oath of Office and Swearing In of Jim Board, Dennis Barclay, and Bill Miller to Town Council

Before proceeding with the swearing in of council members, Mayor Toner recognized outgoing council member, Mayor Pro Tem David DeLong who has served eight years as Town Councilor and Mayor Pro Tem. She noted his significant contributions, including serving as the town's representative to the Rural Transportation Advisory Committee and as liaison for the Route 211 project, coordinating with Barnhill and the DOT for project updates. Mayor Toner presented

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Mayor Pro Tem DeLong with a certificate of appreciation and a crystal paperweight with a wave design, acknowledging his Navy background.

Mayor Pro Tem DeLong briefly thanked everyone and acknowledged the hard work of the Town Council and staff. Following his recognition, Mayor Pro Tem DeLong left the meeting.

Following the recognition, Mayor Toner introduced the council members to be sworn in: Jim Board, Dennis Barclay, and Bill Miller.

Jamie Burns, Town Clerk, administered the Oath of Office of Town Councilor individually to Jim Board, Dennis Barclay, and Bill Miller.

Councilor Miller took his seat on the dais.

25-32 Election and Swearing In of Mayor

Town Manager Jeff Repp explained the process of electing a mayor. Every two years following an election the town council will elect one of their own to become mayor. According to the Town Charter, the mayor is elected by the council from among its membership every two years following the biennial election.

Councilor Board nominated Jean Toner as mayor. Councilor Barclay seconded the motion. There were no other nominations. A show of hands demonstrated the appointment was unanimous. (Vote: 4/0)

25-33 Election and Swearing In of Mayor Pro Tem

Mr. Repp stated that the Town Charter does not specify that you must have a Mayor Pro Tem but does specify the office exists in the event the mayor is not available. Councilor Dutney nominated Jim Board as Mayor Pro Tem. Mayor Toner seconded the motion. There were no other nominations. A show of hands demonstrated the appointment to be unanimous. (Vote: 4/0)

Town Clerk Jamie Burns administered the Oath of Office of Mayor to Jean Toner.

Town Clerk Jamie Burns administered the Oath of Office of Mayor Pro Tem to Jim Board.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Several residents spoke during public comment.

Paul Ryan (3178 Sea Grass Court) stated that he was unclear whether the approval or rejection of the annexation would be decided by the town council or by the residents of St. James. He suggested it should be decided by the property owners of St. James.

Charlene Monroe (Wexford Way) recalled that when she first moved to St. James, residents voted on whether to eliminate "Plantation" from the town's name. She questioned why residents weren't

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given a vote on the annexation issue and suggested it should require a three-quarter majority vote of residents rather than just a council decision.

Marcy Newman (3784 Club Cottage Drive) asked when, where, and how residents would receive answers to the questions raised during the meeting. She also expressed confusion about whether discussions concerned St. James Plantation or the Town of St. James and requested clarification in future communications. She also sought clarification about the fire burning ordinance provisions, such as whether the “land clearing purposes” provision had a minimum land requirement, wondering whether small land clearing operations would require permits. She also inquired about the Twenty Twenty contract, noting it specified a \$150 per hour fee but did not indicate a maximum number of hours or total dollar amount. Finally she asked how a burn started without permission would be stopped by the town.

Mayor Toner responded that the town had previously distributed a comprehensive summary via email blast attempting to answer questions raised at earlier meetings. She acknowledged there were still questions that need answers and stated the town would address them.

ADJOURNMENT

At 5:11 p.m. Mayor Pro Tem Board made a motion to adjourn the meeting. All were in favor.
(Vote: 5/0)

Mayor Toner adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved,

Jamie Burns, Town Clerk

Jean R. Toner, Mayor