

TOWN OF ST. JAMES REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
January 7, 2026

The St. James Town Council met in Regular Session at 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, January 7, 2026 in the Earl Dye Council Chamber.

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

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

Others Present: State Port Pilot Reporter Eliot Duke, and 9 residents.
Attending via Zoom: Greg Adams of Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams & Co., PA

Absent: Councilor Bill Miller (Excused)

CALL TO ORDER

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

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

All in attendance joined Mayor Toner in honoring our flag.

Before moving to the agenda, Mayor Toner provided information about public comment. She explained that public comments are taken at two specific times: during discussions of items requiring a vote on a financial action by the Council and at the end of the meeting. Each public comment period is limited to 30 minutes unless extended by Council, with individual speakers allowed three (3) minutes each. Speakers representing groups may be allotted up to eight (8) minutes. Mayor Toner emphasized that comments should be addressed to the Council as a whole, not to staff or audience members, and that dignity and decorum are expected during the meeting.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Toner asked if there were any changes to the agenda as submitted. Hearing none she asked for a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Mayor Pro Tem Board moved to approve the agenda. The motion passed unanimously (Vote: 4/0)

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Toner asked if there were any changes or corrections to the minutes from the December 3, 2025, Regular Meeting or the December 16, 2025 Special Work Session included in the consent agenda. There were none. Councilor Dutney moved to approve the consent agenda. The motion passed unanimously (Vote: 4/0)

PRESENTATIONS

- a. *FY 2025 Financial Statements-Greg Adams of Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams & Co., PA*
Town Manager Jeff Repp introduced the presentation of the previous fiscal year's audit ending on June 30, 2025, which was filed on time and submitted to the Local Government Commission (LGC). He then turned the presentation over to Finance Director Pauline Haran to introduce the auditor.

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Ms. Haran introduced Mr. Greg Adams, a partner with Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams & Co. in Wilmington, who served as lead partner on the town's audit.

Mr. Adams presented the Fiscal Year 2025 Audit results for the Town of St. James. He first covered required communications. Mr. Adams reported that GASB 101 was implemented this year regarding the accrual of sick leave during the fiscal year, representing a change that affected financial statements.

Key financial highlights from the audit included:

- Total cash and cash equivalents: \$11,032,323
- Total revenues and other sources: \$6,533,929
- Total expenditures and other uses: \$3,793,099
- Net change/Increase in fund balance: \$2,740,830

Mr. Adams noted that the town's unassigned fund balance of \$6,535,808 represents 289.67% of general fund expenditures, well above the state average of 34% for municipalities of similar population. The property tax collection rate was 99.94%, up slightly from the previous year's 99.87%.

Revenue sources were reported as: 60% from unrestricted intergovernmental revenues (mainly sales tax), 33% from property taxes, 5% from investment earnings, and 2% from other sources.

Expenditures were distributed as: 40% for general government, 32% for public safety, 11% for the community center, and 17% for other expenses.

The fund balance analysis showed a total of \$11,693,689, with \$5,157,881 restricted (including \$2,983,000 for fire department future capital improvements and \$1,468,533 for disaster recovery) and \$6,535,808 unrestricted or unassigned.

Mr. Adams concluded by reiterating that the audit was completed on time and submitted to the LGC. He thanked Ms. Haran and the finance office for their help, which made the audit process smoother. Councilor Lynn Dutney also expressed appreciation to Ms. Haran for her hard work in the audit process.

Mr. Adams left the meeting at 4:16 p.m.

MAYOR/COUNCIL/STAFF REPORTS

a. Appointments to Boards and Committees – Mayor Toner

Mayor Toner explained that council members are assigned to various boards, committees, and projects annually. These assignments are made available to the public so residents know whom to contact with questions or concerns about particular projects or town initiatives.

The following 2026 appointments were reviewed:

- *Board of Adjustment:* Mayor Toner explained this quasi-judicial board comprised of council members hears appeals from zoning issues. Mr. Repp added that while the

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council could create and appoint members to a Board of Adjustments, St. James has always had the council act as the board to hear appeals or requests for variances.

- *Brunswick Electric Advisory Board:* Councilor Dennis Barclay stated that he has been on this board for several years. They meet quarterly and hear presentations from senior BEMC officials. They have been very helpful with the comprehensive plan.
- *Cape Fear Council of Governments:* Mayor Toner serves as representative to this council that oversees social services provided in Brunswick, New Hanover, Columbus, and Pender Counties. She explained it is not a governing board but a guiding and oversight board for social services projects in the four-county area.
- *Community Programs:* Various council members monitor and coordinate miscellaneous citizen engagement programs, including flu shots, shredding events, and the UNCW Speaker Series.
- *Emergency Management:* Councilor Bill Miller (absent) serves as liaison. Mr. Repp explained this committee includes up to 20 volunteers appointed by the mayor and council who staff the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) during emergencies. They answer calls and emails, develop publications on natural disasters and response procedures, and host an annual seminar in June on hurricane events. This year's seminar will be expanded to include other natural disasters, such as wildfires.
- *Firewise Committee:* Mayor Toner serves as liaison and invited residents to attend the committee's annual presentation to council, noting it's very informative. She noted that North Carolina ranks behind California for wildfires, and the committee works on education initiatives for residents and ordinances to mitigate the possibilities of fires from recreational use.
- *Fire Department Board of Directors:* Councilor Lynn Dutney explained that the board consists of elected directors, the fire chief, one council representative, and one POA representative. They meet monthly to provide oversight on budgeting, equipment plans and needs, retention, recruitment, and other important matters related to the fire department.
- *Planning Board:* Mayor Pro Tem Jim Board has been the council's representative for the past four years. He noted that while they had little to do until recently, they have become busy with the St. James North development application. He mentioned that recent planning board meetings have been well-attended due to concerns among residents, which he attributed to misinformation and speculation. He clarified that he represents the town council on the planning board without voting rights but can guide discussions. He added that the planning board members keep citizens' interests in mind.
- *Route 211 Widening Project:* Councilor Barclay has taken over this liaison role from David DeLong. He stated the project is still a couple of years from completion. He plans to keep residents informed about the project status and will try to have DOT officials provide updates at least twice a year.
- *Water Pressure Improvement Project:* Mayor Pro Tem Board explained that certain sections within the plantation have relatively low water pressure. The town was granted almost \$2 million from ARPA funds and opted to use this money in a cooperative project with the county. The town provided the funds to the county with an agreement that the county would handle engineering and implementation. Two-

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thirds of the project has been approved, with logistical right-of-way problems on Middleton Boulevard delaying the final third. The two approved phases are expected to be completed by mid-year, with improvements in water pressure anticipated by fall in the affected areas.

OLD BUSINESS – None

NEW BUSINESS - None

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Lance Flint, 3882 Big Magnolia Way, reminded attendees that the Harbor and Canal developers (of the proposed St. James North development) are the families of Homer Wright and John Atkinson, the original developers of St. James Plantation. Mr. Flint questioned the town's argument that annexing the development would allow enforcement of its Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), noting that the town has agreed to numerous variances including building height, reduced setbacks, narrower streets and parking spaces, and exemptions from tree preservation and landscaping requirements. He described the proposed development as a dense urban development with extensive pavement, minimal landscaping, and potential stormwater problems. He called on council members to disclose any relationships with the developers, including endorsements or campaign contributions, and urged them not to annex the development. He concluded by congratulating Ms. Haran and the town on their strong financial position and suggested setting next year's tax rate to zero.

Ms. Diane Bergan, 3104 Moss Hammock Wynd, stated that St. James is the gold standard of lifestyle and community in the area, which is why she and others are puzzled about the potential annexation. She appreciated the health and transparency of the town and POA financials that she reviewed before making St. James her home. Ms. Bergan expressed concern about the "opaqueness" of the potential annexation. She called on the Town Council and Planning Board to provide clear, comprehensive, and detailed information on four aspects of the proposed annexation: costs to St. James, purported benefits, risks, and risk mitigation contingencies. She suggested that such clarity could help address misinformation and rumors.

In response to public comments, Mayor Toner asked Town Manager Jeff Repp to comment on communications provided thus far and the number of meetings held regarding the proposed development. Mr. Repp stated that after the first planning board meeting and the public hearing on annexation, the town had provided responses to questions received via email and verbal comments. He acknowledged that some residents felt the information wasn't detailed enough but noted that the town has attempted to address concerns as best they can with the level of detail available at this stage. The town is being asked to annex property and provide zoning and rezoning to the newly annexed lands. At this point concept plans, not detailed subdivision plans, are all that is required by law. Mr. Repp explained they've been asked to consider annexation and rezoning to allow for development plans to be submitted, after which detailed financial plans may be generated based on the zoning. He explained that without submitted subdivision plans detailing exactly what would be constructed, the town has made financial projections based on estimated revenues from property and sales taxes from the concept plans. He stated that the only perceived cost to the town would be

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the maintenance of approximately two miles of public roads, which would be constructed to standards exceeding NCDOT requirements and would not need maintenance for several years.

Mayor Pro Tem Board stated that to his knowledge no Council members have any relationships with the developers. He noted that Council members sign a code of ethics requiring recusal from discussions where conflicts exist, and no one has recused themselves from discussion on the development.

Mayor Toner emphasized the Town Council aims to make decisions in the best interest of the majority of residents, with it being difficult to make over 8,500 residents happy. She noted that they manage finances conservatively and plan for the future to avoid major expenditures down the road. She expressed frustration at suggestions that Council members would act inappropriately, noting they are unpaid volunteers who sign ethics statements.

Mayor Pro Tem Board addressed several points about the development, including:

- The town has put all available information on the town website.
- Town Council does not have the specific information that is being requested from residents as the plan is still conceptual.
- The plan has not been approved or annexed.
- The town is developing agreements with the developer should annexation occur.
- The process is guided by state statutes with town legal counsel involvement.
- Estimated revenue from property and sales taxes due to the increased population could exceed \$500,000.
- Expenses would be minimal, with only about two (2) miles of roads (main arteries) to maintain.
- The roads would be built to standards exceeding state requirements.
- The town is trying to be transparent but cannot provide information it does not have.
- The town has adopted ordinance changes that the development would be required to use burn boxes, not open burning, to dispose of vegetation at higher temperatures with less smoke. This would be in the commercial and residential areas.
- The town was able to negotiate on 100-year storm level standards for stormwater management instead of the 25-year level in the current UDO.
- There is no plan for the development to have access to the plantation or become part of the POA.

Town Manager Jeff Repp added that when St. James Plantation was originally approved by Brunswick County commissioners decades ago and if the county had a UDO in place at that time, similar exceptions to the county's UDO were granted. He explained that it is common for planned unit developments to request variances, and the planning board's role is to review these requests and make recommendations to the Town Council on whether those variances would in their opinion cause a problem.

Mayor Pro Tem Board noted that the development would be built whether annexed or not, and if developed under county jurisdiction, it would not be subject to the additional requirements the town is attempting to impose, such as the burn box requirement and the 100-year stormwater standard. He

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explained that since the development was approved by the county in 2018, it would be governed by the regulations in effect at that time as a vested property.

Mayor Toner also clarified that regardless of annexation the town's fire department would provide services to the development since it falls within the town's fire district.

The council also discussed the town's finances:

- Mayor Pro Tem Board explained that dropping the property tax to zero would cause the town to lose sales tax revenue, which is its largest source of income
- Mayor Toner noted that the restricted funds mentioned in the audit are for disaster recovery (\$1.5 million) and fire department equipment replacement
- The town has been saving for fire equipment purchases for years, which allowed them to pay \$832,000 for a recent pumper truck without a tax increase or loan
- They are now planning for a \$2.1 million ladder truck purchase and already have \$1.9 million saved
- Mayor Pro Tem Board pointed out that a similar pumper truck purchased a few years ago for \$400,000 now costs \$830,000, demonstrating the wisdom of their fiscal planning.

Councilor Barclay added that it's too early to complain about information not being available since negotiations are underway and nothing has been agreed upon. He also noted that the project would take significant time to develop, possibly five (5) years before houses are built in Phase 1, with the entire project spanning about 20 years.

ADJOURNMENT

At 5:00 p.m. Mayor Pro Tem Board made a motion to adjourn the meeting. All were in favor.
(Vote: 4/0)

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved,

Jamie Burns, Town Clerk

Jean R. Toner, Mayor