

TOWN OF ST. JAMES WORK SESSION MINUTES
January 22, 2026

The St. James Town Council held a Work Session on January 22, 2026 in the Earl Dye Council Chamber. Mayor Toner opened the Work Session at 10:02 a.m.

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

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

Others Present: State Port Pilot Reporter Eliot Duke, Deputy Director of Emergency Management Diana Kelly, Emergency Management and Firewise member Steve Altieri, and 3 residents.

Town Manager Jeff Repp notified the Town Council that he and Mayor Toner attended a meeting with the SJFD Board of Directors on January 13th to discuss ongoing development in the department's fire district outside the town limits and a proposed new agreement between the SJFD and Brunswick County.

Administration Update

a. *Modified SJEM Seminar Agenda – SJEM Team*

Town Manager Jeff Repp provided background information on the proposed changes to the format of the annual hurricane seminar before turning the presentation over to Deputy Director Diana Kelly from the Emergency Management group. He explained that traditionally the town has held an annual hurricane seminar in June targeting new residents or those wanting a refresher on hurricane preparation procedures. He noted that as housing starts have slowed and residents have become more familiar with hurricane preparedness, the team wanted to expand the scope of the seminar to include other emergency preparedness topics. He explained that Ms. Kelly would be reviewing the updated seminar agenda to obtain feedback from Council before beginning to finalize and prepare for the seminar.

Diana Kelly, Deputy Director of Emergency Management presented the updated seminar agenda, explaining they wanted to change the name from “Storm Seminar” to “Emergency Preparedness Seminar”. Council members were in agreement. The new format would focus on what various organizations and individuals would do during different types of emergencies. Speakers would address their specific roles during emergencies rather than providing general updates about their departments.

Ms. Kelly outlined the proposed seminar agenda which would include the following components:

- Opening remarks by the mayor
- Town Manager Jeff Repp to speak about Emergency Management
- St. James POA presentation about their preparation and support during events

TOWN OF ST. JAMES WORK SESSION MINUTES
January 22, 2026

- Fire Department discussion about their emergency response
- Communications and weather alerts with Steve Pfaff
- Information about various emergency alert resources
- How to develop an emergency response plan (possibly with FEMA or Red Cross)
- Severe weather event preparation
- Wildfire preparation (despite having a separate wildfire seminar in February)

Mayor Pro Tem Board recommended that the team define an emergency event to help people understand that it covers events beyond just storms/hurricanes. Ms. Kelly was in agreement. Steve Altieri, the Planning Section Chief for Emergency Management and a committee member of Firewise, who was responsible for organizing the seminar, added that that they want to make the seminar more functional and provocative to attract more residents.

Mayor Pro Tem Board recommended to publicize the event “early and often”. Ms. Kelly mentioned they were looking at additional ways to promote the event, including using electronic boards, posting notices at restaurants and golf courses, and potentially offering giveaways like weather radios or emergency preparedness kits to attract attendance. Mayor Toner suggested putting together a budget for these items.

Ms. Kelly agreed to prepare an article for the “Cat-Tales” publication by the end of March. The team also discussed plans for an upcoming wildfire seminar scheduled for February 16th from 2-4 p.m.

The council also discussed arranging an open house at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for council to view the facility to which Ms. Kelly agreed to schedule.

b. *Draft 2026 POA Lease*

Mr. Repp presented the revised POA lease from the town’s attorneys that incorporated previously requested council comments. He noted that the most significant change was on page eight (8) where a section on service animals was added. Mayor Toner confirmed that staff had checked lease costs in the area and that they would maintain the same billing structure as previously used. There were no questions from council.

c. *2026 St. James Classification and Pay Study – Cape Fear Council of Governments (CFCOG)*

Mr. Repp presented a proposal for a classification and pay study to be conducted by the Cape Fear Council of Governments. The arrangement involves working with the Piedmont Area Council of Governments which staff employees with human resource experience. He explained it had been many years since the town had a classification study done, with the last one performed by the MAPS Group. Mr. Repp explained that for \$3,000, the Council of Governments would conduct a pay classification compensation study with results expected by May, in time to be incorporated into this year’s budget.

TOWN OF ST. JAMES WORK SESSION MINUTES
January 22, 2026

Council was in agreement with the classification and pay study.

Mayor Pro Tem Board asked if this is being done outside their regular agreement with the Council of Governments and Mr. Repp confirmed it is an additional one-time project. Council supported proceeding with the study

d. *St. James Event Center Expansion – Financing Options*

Town Manager Repp presented the revised Debt Issuance Options and Considerations options prepared by Davenport Public Finance for the event center expansion project. He noted that the only change was that the mayor had requested 4.5 million be used instead of 4.1 million. He explained that the previous council had tabled the matter until the new council took office. Now they are bringing it back for consideration and seeking guidance on whether to proceed to the next phase, which would involve retaining an architectural firm to do engineering drawings based on the needs analysis.

Mr. Repp noted that it was also previously requested that council look at debt obligations that would be necessary to fund the proposed option. He explained that the financing document before council showed debt obligations that would be necessary to fund the recommended expansion option. The new debt would replace the current \$376,000 debt that had been in place for the past 15 years for the construction of Town Hall building and Event Center.

The discussion clarified that the next step would be to prepare a request for proposals to solicit an engineering/architectural firm to do design work based on the needs analysis and Option 2, which was the preferred option from previous discussions.

Mr. Repp explained that Davenport Public Finance had prepared the financing documents and would assist with navigating the North Carolina requirements for local government borrowing, which requires approval from the Local Government Commission for any issuance of public debt. Mayor Toner noted that they had asked staff to prepare these financing options to see what the difference would be in terms of debt service compared to their existing obligations, to determine if it would be a substantial amount or something they could manage without increasing property taxes.

There was a discussion about the needs analysis that had been conducted last year, which included council meetings, a resident survey, and a public presentation at the event center. The analysis had taken into account future growth, including potential annexation of new development around the municipal complex. Mr. Repp explained that the architectural firm would review and fine-tune the needs analysis, taking into account any changes since it was completed.

TOWN OF ST. JAMES WORK SESSION MINUTES
January 22, 2026

There was a discussion regarding potentially modifying the plans to include the space between the two buildings, which currently has an underutilized outdoor kitchen area. Mayor Toner noted this might be considered as a potential Phase 2 rather than part of the initial project.

The council discussed timing considerations, with staff noting that it would likely take a year before they would be ready to go out for construction bids. Councilor Barclay suggested not borrowing the full amount for the project but instead paying for a portion directly and financing the remainder.

The council agreed to move forward with initiating the search for an architectural firm, recognizing that the process would take significant time and to avoid having the information become outdated. More detailed financing discussions will occur at the upcoming budget retreat.

e. *Reserve and Street Sign Lighting – Mayor Pro Tem Board*

Mayor Pro Tem Board reported that he noticed inconsistencies in the street lighting, particularly near the entrance to the Reserve. He observed that while most areas had been converted to LED lights, there is a section of six old colonial lantern-style lights between the plantation entrance and Ridgecrest that should be converted to LED to maintain consistency.

Mayor Pro Tem Board also mentioned that a light just before the wooden bridge on St. James Drive was out, which was particularly concerning as it is located at a dangerous curve. Mayor Toner noted this pole has been replaced multiple times due to accidents at that curve.

Additionally, Mayor Pro Tem Board reported that several residents have asked about illuminating street signs at night to improve visibility. Mayor Toner and Steve Altieri explained that the Firewise committee had recommended reflective street signs rather than illuminated ones, noting that while the signs were originally reflective, this quality diminishes over time. They clarified that streets signs would be a POA responsibility.

f. *2025 Zoning Report*

Town Manager Repp presented the zoning report for November and December. For the 2025 calendar year, the town issued 39 residential permits and 98 other permits. He noted there has been a slowdown in building activity.

g. *2025 Wright Event Center Reports*

Town Manager Jeff Repp reported that the Event Center held 2,709 events during the year, with 2,300 (approximately 88%) being Category 1 events held for residents at no charge. Despite this, the Event Center billed \$102,769 in revenue for the year, up

TOWN OF ST. JAMES WORK SESSION MINUTES
January 22, 2026

approximately \$5,000 from the previous year and a significant increase from 2022 when revenue was \$48,022.

Finance Director Pauling Haran reported that through January 15th, the Event Center had received \$41,555, plus an additional \$2,000 in donations for coffee and soda service. Mayor Pro Tem Board commended Lorna for doing an admirable job managing the Event Center.

Finance Update:

Finance Director Pauline Haran reported that while property tax payments were due the first week of January without penalties, the town was still about \$200,000 short of expected collections. She noted that otherwise finances were in good shape, with local sales tax revenues between \$200,000 and \$300,000 coming in each month.

She also mentioned several ongoing projects and expenditures:

- The town has engaged an AV consultant to assess needs for both buildings, including a potential AV wall in multipurpose room B at the Event Center that might cost around \$100,000, if approved.
- The town has experienced two major water leaks. One was near the new access road but fortunately that was on Brunswick County's side, so the town wasn't responsible for water costs. The second was a sprinkler fire pump leak that caused water to gush from the fire pump closet. This has been fixed but the water bill impact is yet unknown.
- The town is investigating drone show companies as a substitute for traditional fireworks, with an estimated cost of about \$25,000 for a 13-minute show with 150-200 drones.

Mayor Toner explained that the town has only done fireworks three times in its history and had planned to do a final show for the United States' 250th anniversary, but the POA has prohibited fireworks in the area. She also mentioned that the Brunswick Big Band would perform a free patriotic concert at the Event Center on July 2nd.

Ms. Haran also reported that she would be meeting with the security company that afternoon to assess the feasibility of installing cameras at entrances to both buildings. Mayor Toner explained this was prompted by an incident at the Event Center that required sheriff's department response. The lack of interior cameras hampered the investigation and the sheriff's department suggested the need for cameras.

Ms. Haran reminded everyone of an upcoming UNCW speaker event on January 27th featuring Karl Racinek, an artificial intelligence specialist. She also noted that early voting would take place in the building from February 12th through February 28th, so no meetings can be held in council chamber during that period.

The council discussed scheduling their budget retreat for Thursday, February 26th from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in multipurpose room A, and tentatively keeping February 19th open for a regular work session if needed.

**TOWN OF ST. JAMES WORK SESSION MINUTES
January 22, 2026**

Adjournment

Mayor Toner adjourned the Work Session at 11:02 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved,

Jamie Burns, Town Clerk

Jean R. Toner, Mayor