

**TOWN OF ST. JAMES REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
May 6, 2026**

The St. James Town Council met in Regular Session at 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 6, 2026 in the Earl Dye Council Chamber.

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

**Staff Present:** Town Manager Jeff Repp and Finance Director Pauline Haran

**Staff Absent:** Jamie Burns, Town Clerk

**Others Present:** State Port Pilot Reporter Eliot Duke and 15 residents.

**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.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Mayor Toner announced one change to the agenda: moving the Operation at Ease proclamation and presentation (Item 26-12) after the approval of the consent agenda and before the public hearing at the request of the organization's representative. There were no other changes. Mayor Pro Tem 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 included in the consent agenda. There were none. Councilor Dutney made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda, which consists of the minutes from the April 1, 2026 Regular Meeting and the minutes from the April 16, 2026 Work Session. The motion passed unanimously (Vote 5-0).

**NEW BUSINESS**

**26-12 Proclamation Proclaiming May 2026 as Operation at Ease Month in the Town of St. James**

*Mayor Toner read the proclamation designating May 2026 as Operation at Ease month. The proclamation was presented to Eric Holmes, the Operation at Ease representative. Mr. Holmes addressed the Council, noting that approximately 40 military families are being hosted this year, supported by over 300 St. James volunteer residents, with activities including meals, beach access, and use of town recreational facilities.*

**PUBLIC HEARING**

Mayor Pro Tem Board made a motion at 4:07pm to enter into the Public Hearing regarding the Fiscal Year 2027 Proposed Budget. The motion passed unanimously. (Vote 5-0)

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Town Manager Repp introduced Finance Director Pauline Haran to present the proposed budget overview. Ms. Haran explained that this was the public hearing as required by state statutes for the proposed budget, with final adoption scheduled for June 3<sup>rd</sup>. She noted that changes between now and then are typically minor. The budget process began in February with a retreat involving council, staff, and the fire department to identify needs and priorities.

Ms. Haran presented key points of the proposed budget:

- The proposed FY 2027 budget is fully balanced at \$5,765,600 in both revenues and expenditures.
- Total revenues represent approximately a 3% decrease from the prior year attributable to the elimination of the 1-cent disaster recovery tax and the absence of a one-time \$320,000 streetlight grant. Local option sales taxes are projected to increase by approximately 15%, and other taxes by approximately 13%
- The property tax rate is proposed to decrease from 6 cents to 5 cents per \$100 of assessed value. The dedicated 1-cent disaster recovery tax will sunset, as the disaster recovery fund has reached its target balance.
- Two significant new expenditures are planned:
  - Architectural drawings for a potential expansion of the Event Center (estimated at approximately \$400,000)
  - Comprehensive audio-visual upgrade for both Town Hall and the Event Center.
- Total personnel costs are projected at just under \$1,000,000, representing approximately 17% of the total budget, up from 13% in FY2026. This increase reflects a proposed 2.5% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), merit increases of up to 4%, increased retirement contributions and a notable increase in health insurance costs (\$2,000 per employee). Town Manager Jeff Repp explained that the State Health Plan has carried a significant deficit for several years. The new State Treasurer proposed a 2.4% surcharge on salaries of all municipalities and counties participating in the plan.
- Although the mandatory 1-cent tax is sunsetting, the Town will voluntarily set aside \$250,000 toward the disaster recovery fund in FY 2027 and intends to continue doing so as long as funds are available. Mayor Toner noted that when the disaster recovery program was established after Hurricane Florence, \$1,500,000 was considered sufficient; however, a cost analysis using current rates indicated that the same debris collection event today would cost approximately \$1,100,000 compared to just under \$500,000 at the time of Florence.
- Debt service remains steady, with the Town's final payment scheduled for July 2026.

Town Manager Jeff Repp explained the COLA rate, noting that while the proposed budget reflected 2.5% (based on the January-December 2025 CPI for Southeast North Carolina), the most recent 12-month period through April 2026 reflected a rate of 3.3%. Mayor Pro Tem Board raised concerns about the 2.5% cost of living adjustment and suggested it should be increased to at least 3.3% or 3.5% to provide adequate coverage and avoid placing a financial burden on staff. Councilor Bill Miller concurred, noting that staying ahead of inflation prevents the burden of catching up from

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falling on employees. Town Manager Repp confirmed that increasing the rate to 3.5% would add approximately \$7,000 and could be absorbed within the existing budget contingencies without changing the total budget figures. Council reached consensus to direct staff to increase the COLA rate to 3.5% prior to the final budget adoption on June 3.

The final budget is scheduled for adoption on June 3, 2026.

*Public Comment:* Mayor Toner opened the floor for public comment. No community members signed up for public comment.

*With no further public comments, Mayor Toner called for a motion to close the public hearing. Mayor Pro Tem Board moved to close the Public Hearing at 4:26pm. The motion passed unanimously. (Vote: 5-0)*

**MAYOR/COUNCIL/STAFF REPORTS**

Town Manager Jeff Repp reported no formal staff updates. He explained that a vacancy exists on the planning board and at Council's direction, candidates were invited to appear in person at either this meeting or the May 19 work session to provide a brief statement of interest. The following three candidates appeared at this meeting: Merry MacBarb, Gary Anderton, and Robert Arthur. Additional candidates will present at the May 19, 2026 work session. Mayor Toner thanked all three candidates for their time and interest in serving in a volunteer capacity.

**OLD BUSINESS** – None.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**26-06 Motion to Accept the Proposal for Debris Monitoring and Public Assistance Consulting Services from Tetra Tech Disaster Recovery**

Town Manager Repp explained that there were two items involving disaster recovery, debris monitoring and debris collection. The monitoring firm would follow trucks to verify accurate quantities and create records for FEMA reimbursement. Both services are FEMA reimbursable costs.

The town advertised to about 15 firms and received 3 responses. Mr. Repp thanked Steve Altieri and Tom Dibugno for assisting with the review panel. Using FEMA's recommended point system based on various criteria beyond just cost, Tetra Tech scored highest in all reviewers' assessments and is being recommended by staff.

Mayor Pro Tem Board asked about priority in case of a large storm, given that the county also uses Tetra Tech. Mr. Repp assured Council that the town would be treated as a direct customer with the same priority as the county.

Mayor Toner explained that for several years the town had contracted separately for monitoring and collection, but last year joined the county contract. They have since

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decided it was in the town's best interest to be a separate entity to avoid potential priority issues, even though the county contract was slightly less expensive.

*Councilor Miller moved to accept the proposal for debris monitoring and public assistance consulting services from Tetra Tech Disaster Recovery. The motion was approved unanimously. (Vote: 5-0)*

**26-07 Motion to Accept the Proposal for Debris Management and Removal Services from CERES Environmental**

Mr. Repp explained that this firm would pick up debris and prepare it for disposal. The town sent requests to about 20 firms and received 6 submissions. After review, staff recommended CERES Environmental, who has been the town's previous contractor, though some personnel have changed since Hurricane Florence.

Mayor Toner noted that CERES was the firm used for Hurricane Florence and residents were extremely pleased with their performance. The cleanup was completed quickly and efficiently.

*Mayor Pro Tem Board moved to accept the proposal for debris management and removal services from CERES Environmental. The motion passed unanimously. (Vote: 5-0)*

**26-08 Motion to Authorize and the Mayor and Town Manager to Execute an Engagement Letter with Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams, & Co., PA for Auditing Services**

Town Manager Jeff Repp explained that at a prior budget workshop, council directed staff to seek proposals from other auditing firms to ensure the town is receiving competitive and quality services. Finance Director Pauline Haran contacted 43 firms, of whom 9 responded to the RFP. Proposals were evaluated on office proximity to the town, municipal client experience, and price. Staff recommended retaining the town's current auditor, Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams, & Co., PA, for a base term of three years with two one-year renewal options. Although another firm initially ranked higher and would have saved a potential \$5,000, reference checks revealed concerns.

*Councilor Dutney moved to approve Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams, & Company as the auditor for the next 3 years. The motion carried unanimously (Vote: 5-0)*

**26-09 Motion to Adopt Resolution 2026-03 Assigning \$250,000 from General Fund Balance to the St. James Fire Department**

Town Manager Jeff Repp explained that the town has historically transferred funds from excess general fund balance to the St. James Fire Department for capital needs when those funds are available beyond what is budgeted. The staff recommendation

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for the current fiscal year is a transfer of \$250,000. Mr. Repp noted that the FY 2027 budget proposes increasing this annual contribution to \$500,000.

*Councilor Dutney moved to adopt Resolution 2026-03 assigning \$250,000 from the General Fund Balance to the St. James Fire Department. The motion passed unanimously (Vote: 5-0)*

**26-10 Motion to Adopt Resolution 2026-04 Assigning \$531,467 from General Fund Balance to the Disaster Recovery Fund**

Mr. Repp explained that since Hurricane Florence, the town has been transferring the equivalent of 1 percent from general fund balance to disaster recovery, funded by raising taxes from 5 cents to 6 cents with the intent to reach \$1.5 million and then sunset the 1 cent tax.

The recommended transfer of \$531,467 would bring the disaster recovery fund to over \$2 million, well above the \$1.5 million target, allowing the 1 cent tax to end as scheduled on July 1<sup>st</sup>. Going forward, council would make annual discretionary decisions about adding funds to disaster recovery, similar to the fire department funding.

Mayor Pro Tem Board asked about the final fund balance, with Finance Director Haran confirming it would be approximately \$2 million at the end of June 30, 2026.

*Councilor Miller moved to adopt Resolution 2026-04 assigning \$531,467 from general fund balance to the disaster recovery fund. The motion passed unanimously (Vote: 5-0)*

**26-11 Motion to Approve Ordinance 2026-04 Adopting Chapter 93-Parades, Picket Lines, and Group Demonstrations**

Mr. Repp explained that over the past three years there have been instances of group demonstrations that the town had no capability to regulate without this ordinance. One involved a controversial candidate's fundraiser at the event center, and more recently a "No Kings" protest in the town hall parking lot.

The town's attorney recommended adopting regulations if the town wanted any input into these demonstrations. The ordinance would require permits at least 72 hours in advance, with applicants identifying proposed time, place, purpose, and number of attendees. The town manager can refuse permits that would unreasonably hinder traffic movement, violate ordinances, or laws, or pose significant danger to public health, safety or welfare. Both previous events would have been permitted as free speech expressions, but the town could have controlled their location for safety and to avoid interference with other activities. No permit fee is contemplated, given the rarity of such events. The town would be able to notify the Brunswick County Sheriff's Office for public safety support as needed.

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*Mayor Pro Tem Board moved to approve Ordinance 2026-04 Adopting Chapter 93-Parades, Picket Lines, and Group Demonstrations. The motion passed unanimously (Vote: 5-0)*

**26-12 Proclamation Proclaiming May 2026 as Operation at Ease month in the Town of St. James.**

*This item was taken out of order and presented following the Approval of the Consent Agenda. See above.*

**26-13 Proclamation Proclaiming May 17-23, 2026 Emergency Medical Services Week in the Town of St. James.**

*Mayor Toner read the proclamation recognizing Emergency Medical Services Week. Mayor Toner then recognized the St. James Fire Department’s EMS division and the exceptional volume of service they provide, noting that over 1,000 calls have been received in each of the past two years. Retired Chief Boyer accepted the proclamation on behalf of the department, noting that the department’s 48 EMTs and paramedics, 45 firefighters, and 28 Fire Police responded to 1,028 EMS calls and 310 fire calls in the past year, including mutual aid to neighboring communities. He encouraged community members to thank their volunteer first responders.*

**26-14 Proclamation Proclaiming May 16-22, 2026 National Safe Boating Week in the Town of St. James**

*Mayor Pro Tem Board read the proclamation on behalf of Mayor Toner.*

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mayor Toner asked if there was any public comment. There was no public comment on any other subjects.

**ADJOURNMENT**

At 5:02pm 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,

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Jamie Burns, Town Clerk

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Jean R. Toner, Mayor