



## **Town of St. James Comprehensive Plan VI**



## Acknowledgements

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Jean Toner, Mayor  
David DeLong, Mayor Pro Tem  
Dennis Barclay, Councilor  
Lynn Dutney, Councilor  
Jeff Mount, Councilor

### **St. James Plantation Property Owners' Association**

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Special thanks to Cheryl Graham, Pauline Haran, Leslie Clemons, and Susan Peyton for their support of the committee.

### **Photographs**

Courtesy of John Muuss, Photographic Artistic, Inc.

#### **References and abbreviation used in this plan:**

*Town of St. James*: TOSJ, the TOSJ, or the Town, when referring to Town functions  
*St. James Plantation*, when referring to the community's residential areas  
*St. James Plantation Property Owners' Association*: POA, when referring POA functions  
*St. James Fire Department*: SJFD  
*St. James* is used throughout as a generic reference to the community as a whole

## Summary

This is the sixth edition of the Town of St. James (TOSJ) Comprehensive Plan. Like its predecessors, this plan aims to provide both leaders and residents in St. James with a perspective on how the community will evolve through the mid-2020s. It reviews key developments since the 2017 plan, assesses the current status of the community and its major organizations, and considers likely developments over the next several years. Finally, this Comprehensive Plan draws on its findings to recommend strategies to address current and future issues.

An important transition since the last report was the sale of The Clubs by the original developer. In addition, by 2019 the developer had sold all but a handful of its building lots and relinquished voting control over the St. James Plantation Property Owners' Association (POA) board to members elected by property owners. Taken together, these events led to a sharply diminished role for the original developer, which had driven the development in St. James for more than three decades.

As the development phase comes to a close, St. James has grown and become a mature community. At the end of 2020, the population reached an estimated 7,400 residents. The population growth in St. James Plantation was fostered by significant construction and home sales activity within this same period. There were some 900 new home starts from 2017-2020. Real estate transactions within St. James Plantation in 2020 hit an all-time high, with about 475 closings on new homes, lots and resales in 2020.

While similar developments have faltered for financial and other reasons, St. James Plantation has not just survived but thrived for more than three decades to become an attractive, well-managed community popular with long-time and new residents alike. In the near term, St. James Plantation will continue to grow as construction continues for two or three years at a rate that will probably match the recent strong growth. In the five-year timeframe of this report, St. James Plantation seems certain to reach full build-out, adding 600-700 new homes in the next few years and another 1,000 or more residents. Virtually all available vacant lots will have new homes by 2025, and the St. James Plantation population will have grown to around 9,000 persons living in an estimated 5,000 dwelling units.

In contrast, as building within St. James Plantation winds down, the area surrounding the TOSJ is poised for growth by mid-decade. After a long planning phase and several delays, the \$102 million project to widen NC 211 from a two-lane road to a four-lane thoroughfare is set to begin construction in early 2022. With completion scheduled by 2025, the project aligns roughly with the time frame of this plan.

Besides increasing the capacity and safety, the new road will provide a much-improved evacuation route for St. James and the surrounding area. It will also brighten the prospects for development of large tracts of vacant land contiguous to St. James along NC 211 and along

Middleton Boulevard. Plans for these tracts have been discussed for many years, but very little has been completed. Initial plans for most of these projects propose mixed-use developments. Residential offerings include single-family houses, condos, apartments, and senior living. Medical facilities are also in the plans, along with shops, restaurants and office space.

Specific potential developments include 114 acres of land near the Seaside Gate and along E.F. Middleton Boulevard. In addition, Pine Forest and two other projects dominate the north side of NC 211 from the St. James Plantation Main Gate to Midway Road.

- The 2,200-acre **Pine Forest Plantation** is the only mixed-use development that has started construction on the north side of NC 211. At build-out Pine Forest Plantation Phase One will include approximately 1,500 housing units.
- **St. James Center** is a 139-acre project proposed by the original St. James developer. The project wraps around the St. James Town Hall and Community Center. An estimated 53 acres will be devoted to multi-family housing, while 40 acres is designated for commercial and retail development.
- The 138-acre project once named **Marisol** is located midway between St. James Center and Pine Forest Plantation. Marisol occupies 1,500 feet of NC 211 frontage and is now the site of a sand mining enterprise. The current owner of the project wants to continue sand-mining under a contract with NC DOT.

Taken together, these developments could represent an entirely new community encompassing thousands of dwellings, including senior living facilities, new shops, and restaurants and other entertainment and service enterprises. The timing to complete these developments is uncertain; the end of this decade seems more likely than 2025. In general, while the demand to develop these properties appears to be strong, demand still will need to develop further to make them viable. Moreover, new projects will compete with each other so that it is not likely they will develop at the same time. If jurisdictional and zoning issues can be resolved, there is potential for cooperation across these developments.

Considering these potential developments, the Comprehensive Plan Committee formed its recommendations based on a survey of residents – including their additional written comments – along with conversations with friends and neighbors in St. James Plantation, and extensive discussions among Committee members. Input from key St. James organizations was also incorporated in our recommendations.

Survey results show that most residents are happy living in St. James Plantation. This high degree of satisfaction applies to the Town, the Community Center, Emergency Management, the Fire Department and most functions of the POA, with high satisfaction with POA management of the Beach Club, parks and other amenities. About half of survey respondents report they volunteer their time to civic and community organizations within and outside St. James.

The key organizations—the Town, the POA, and the St. James Fire Department (SJFD) are all effective and well managed. Indeed, our first recommendation is that these organizations continue the policies and practices that have made them successful. In particular, they have already taken steps to prepare for the future by building financial reserves, recruiting a cadre of volunteers, and keeping their technology up to date.

Some of our recommendations address longstanding issues. For the most part, however, we aim to prepare leaders in St. James for the changes that we expect over the next five years. Although they reflect the Committee's careful consideration, our recommendations are not binding.

At this stage, plans for the NC 211 project have been finalized. NCDOT and the contractor selected in November 2021 will coordinate with St. James on traffic and other issues as construction proceeds in order to minimize traffic risks and delays. The Town will need to forward these communications to residents and report regularly on the progress of the project.

One important area for the Town to weigh in on is the landscaping of the median that will divide the road. In other major road projects across the state, NCDOT has worked with communities to provide attractive wildflower and landscaped areas. As the NC 211 project begins construction, the Town should begin to plan for the type of landscaping it prefers at the Main and Regency gates.

The prospect of major developments across NC 211 from St. James Plantation in the next several years poses fundamental questions for Town leaders. As of now, these parcels are regulated by Oak Island (Pine Forest Plantation) or by Brunswick County (Mirasol and St. James Center) so that the Town has no official jurisdiction over these developments. The Town could expand its role in these developments if the property owners and Town agree to annexation. St. James Center, as it will be developed by the original developer, presumably would be most receptive to annexation by the Town.

If the Town successfully pursues annexation across NC 211, it would greatly increase the Town's footprint and possibly incur a new set of responsibilities. With these developments in early stages, decisions on annexation and other issues are not on the front burner. The Town, however, should begin to consider the implications of these developments.

As the Community Center returns to full operations, more work is needed to improve the utilization of this valuable Town resource. This could include seeking additional feedback from current users and whether the Center could offer activities outside to accommodate additional groups and their growing needs. It could also examine whether additional activities can be offered such as dance, fitness and other programming. In addition, the Town should carry through with plans to improve interior aesthetics and acoustics to make the Center more appealing.

The Fire Department has presented its equipment replacement plan to the Town and should complete its five-year plan soon in order to help the Town plan for needed expenditures. An important issue to be addressed in the plan is the sustainability of the volunteer model for the Fire Department.

The survey showed that many residents are interested in the Fire Department's offering of safety instruction. It is recommended that the SJFD create an educational program, including town hall meetings and classes to give residents instruction in CPR, Vial of Life, and fire and other safety instruction.

The survey showed that road safety is the greatest concern of St. James Plantation residents. Nearly 900 respondents took the trouble to write comments about the issue. Overcrowding of the roads with cars, commercial vehicles, bicycles, runners and pedestrians are major items of contention. Many comments indicated the need for more sidewalks and bike trails off the roads. Growth has exacerbated congestion on narrow streets and the problem will only worsen as growth continues.

The POA has primary responsibility for road safety. Specific recommendations include:

- Wherever possible, add sidewalks in high-traffic areas.
- Initiate a safety study of roads and sidewalks in St. James Plantation, similar to the one completed several years ago.
- Require contractors to position cones to alert motorists that the road ahead is blocked.
- Update and refresh the POA's excellent "Guidelines for Bicyclists, Pedestrians, and Motorists to Promote Courteous Sharing of Roadways and Sidewalks." The new handbook should be posted on the Town and POA websites as well as in printed form.

St. James enters 2021 in excellent shape. As elected officials and volunteer leaders in St. James continue to navigate the transition to a mature community, external growth will increasingly impact the Town and its residents. The TOSJ already enjoys productive relationships with neighboring towns in the areas of fire protection and emergency medical services. The St. James mayor works regularly with mayors across the county. The Town can build on these relationships to support projects that reflect a shared vision for the NC 211 corridor.

## **Introduction: Context for Comprehensive Plan VI**

This is the sixth comprehensive plan for the Town of St. James (TOSJ). The first plan was published in 2010 and Comprehensive Plan V was published in May 2017. The 2017 plan found that “St. James residents are, for the most part, satisfied with the work and leadership of the Town, the St. James Plantation Property Owners Association (POA), the Fire Department and the Developer.”

The TOSJ Town Council commissioned this Comprehensive Plan in June 2020, appointed the chair of the committee, and approved the charter the following month. Eight committee members were selected in August. The committee met for the first time in September and roughly twice monthly until the Plan was completed.

The purpose of this Plan is to provide leaders and residents in St. James with a perspective on how the community will evolve over the next few years. This Plan reviews key developments since the previous plan, assesses the current status of the community and its major organizations, and considers likely developments in the next several years. Finally, the Comprehensive Plan draws on its findings to recommend strategies that will deal with current issues as well as the future.

The Plan covers not only issues directly affecting the Town, but also addresses the other important organizations in St. James, including the POA and the Fire Department. These organizations coordinated at every step in the preparation of the plan. Each member of the Comprehensive Plan Committee worked with a liaison selected by interested organizations to ensure cooperation and communication.

A major tool in the preparation of this Plan was a survey of residents conducted in November 2020. The survey covered the Town, the POA and the SJFD. The participation of the community was outstanding. Nearly 3,000 people answered the survey, a percentage that is at least 40 percent of potential respondents. That percentage matched the response rate for the 2016 survey. This plan relies heavily on the survey results, including written comments, to assess the current status and to evaluate the performance of the various entities in St. James.

A key theme in this report is the maturation of the community. St. James Plantation has grown from a population of 3,165 in the 2010 Census to an estimated 7,400 residents in 2020. The growth of population and construction has put St. James Plantation within sight of essentially full build-out. Despite rapid growth and change in St. James Plantation over the years, there is a strong continuity across comprehensive plans. As far back as the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, the focus was on 2020 and the earlier plans were remarkably accurate in their projections of

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<sup>1</sup>. For more information about each of these entities, along with details about the Town and POA go to the Town of St. James website at [www.townofstjamesnc.org](http://www.townofstjamesnc.org) and the St. James Plantation Properties Owners’ Association at [www.stjamespoanc.org](http://www.stjamespoanc.org).

<sup>2</sup>. Some survey respondents chose not to answer every question. Survey data cited in this report reflect only the percentages of those who answered each question.

the predicted population and construction in 2020. Moreover, many of the current issues and concerns among residents are the same ones expressed many years ago.

An important transition since the last report was the sale of The Clubs by the original developer. Moreover, the developer essentially sold all but a handful of its building lots by 2019 and relinquished voting power over the POA board to members elected by property owners. Taken together, these events led to a sharply diminished role for the original developer, which had driven the development for more than three decades since the beginning of the community. The developer's fulfillment of commitments to provide an impressive suite of amenities and to guide the development of the community was a key factor in the success of St. James.

The developer, including family members, continues to have an active interest in St. James through ownership of surrounding commercial properties, including the existing St. James Plaza and St. James Square on Executive Park Drive. They also own nearby vacant land around Town Hall, adjacent to the Regency and Seaside gates and along the south side of NC 211, with the potential for commercial and residential development.

A second theme is the impact of the planned project to widen NC 211. After a long planning phase and a period marked by rights-of-way acquisitions, utility relocations and several delays, the project now seems set to begin construction in early 2022. In addition to relieving the traffic burden on this highway, the project could lead to a surge in the long-anticipated development of nearby retail and service enterprises along the north and south sides of NC 211. The general purpose of this plan's assessment is to consider the implications of these changes in the next few years on St. James and the surrounding area.

## **Review of Key Developments Since 2017**

The TOSJ has a lot to offer. Climate, outstanding amenities, proximity to the Atlantic Ocean and a well-managed community provide an active and stable lifestyle. Since the last Comprehensive Plan, St. James has grown rapidly. At the end of 2020, the population of St. James Plantation had grown to more than 7,400 residents living in single family homes, town homes and condominium units.

The population growth in St. James Plantation was fostered by significant construction and home sales activity within this same period. There were some 900 new home starts from 2017-2020. Real estate transactions within St. James Plantation in 2020 hit an all-time high, with about 475 closings on new and existing homes, lots, and resales.

Along with this growth, a number of significant changes shifted control of key elements of the management within the community. First, the number of lots sold within St. James Plantation reached a critical milestone, triggering a transition in the voting control of the POA from the original developer to the residents. For the past 30 years, the POA and its volunteer committees worked with the developer as construction of infrastructure, homes and amenities unfolded, but the developer retained most of the voting rights governing POA activities. With the transition, the POA assumed full ownership and control of the infrastructure, parks, stormwater systems, beach club facility and security within St. James Plantation.

The second major change was the sale in 2018 of The Clubs by the developer to Troon Prive, which now owns and manages the golf courses, racquet sport facilities, club houses, fitness centers, pools and restaurants. These amenities are available to residents who purchase a Club membership. With these holdings, the company is by far the largest property owner in the TOSJ.

Infrastructure and amenities expanded as well. A second firehouse was opened on Oceanic Drive, improving the ability of SJFD to quickly reach more residents in fire or medical emergencies. The second floor of the building houses the Town Emergency Operations Center. This firehouse also assured low fire insurance costs to St. James Plantation residents. The POA expanded parking at the Beach Club by completing a second parking lot. The POA also constructed a new pavilion and amphitheater at the Woodlands Park, complete with extensive landscaping. The Clubs added new pickleball courts to meet demand for this fast-growing sport.

Not all the changes were man made. Between 2018-20, three major hurricanes rolled up the North Carolina coast, causing damage throughout Brunswick County and within St. James. In each of these storms, high winds and heavy rains toppled trees and caused flooding, forcing the closure of roads and bridges and damaging properties. Hurricane Florence caused the most damage, forcing residents to evacuate. Widespread flooding prevented many from returning to their homes for many days.

## St. James in 2021—a Status Report

St. James is a vibrant and well-managed community that relies on the collective strength of its major partners: the TOSJ, the POA, the SJFD and the owner of the Club facilities. While each has its own mission and responsibilities, it is the cooperation and collaboration between these partners and others that make St. James a strong and resilient community. These organizations depend heavily on resident volunteers.

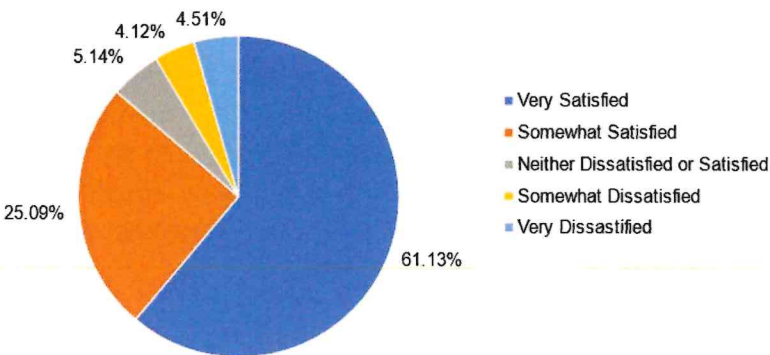
### St. James at a Glance

- Includes nearly 6,000 acres covering 9.35 square miles
- About one third of the land in St. James is protected from development
- More than 7,400 residents in 4,060 completed homes\*
- Woodlands and Waterway Parks
- Beach Club
- Marina
- Chapel, community gardens, library, and two dog parks
- Club facilities include:
  - 81 holes of golf over four courses
  - Four club houses with full dining facilities
  - 13 Tennis courts
  - 10 Pickleball courts
  - Three Fitness & Wellness facilities
  - Three outdoor swimming pools & one indoor swimming pool
- Commercial businesses located at Executive Park

\*As of 12/31/20

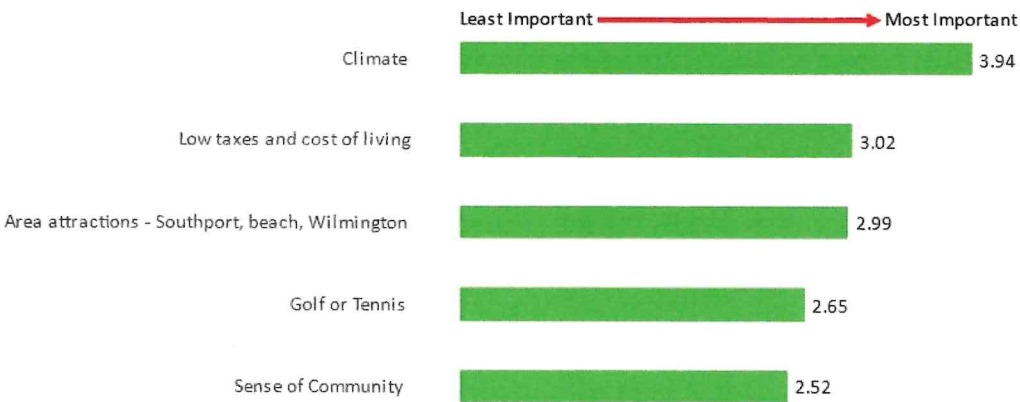
The survey showed that most residents are happy living in St. James Plantation. The survey showed that several factors led residents to choose St. James: climate, golf and tennis, low taxes and cost of living, and the sense of community. The survey recorded 61 percent as very satisfied and another 25 percent were somewhat satisfied with their decision to move to St. James Plantation. These results were very similar to those recorded in the 2016 survey.

## Satisfaction with the move to St. James Plantation



According to a survey of residents, more than 85 percent are full-time residents, and more than 99 percent own their home. Approximately 75 percent of residents are retired. In the same survey, the majority of residents said that they plan to continue living here, and most are satisfied with the amenities in St. James Plantation. There is high satisfaction with the function of the manned entry gates and with the security patrols, both provided by the POA. More than 87 percent of survey respondents say that gate access and control is very important to them.

## Key Factors Influencing Decisions To Move to St. James Plantation



# **Town of St. James**

## **The Town Government**

The TOSJ was incorporated by the State of North Carolina on July 1, 1999 as a Council/Manager form of governance. It is led by an elected Town Council of five members, with the mayor elected by the Council. The Council is responsible for the budget and policies affecting the Town. The town manager performs a range of administrative duties, including managing several salaried employees. The mayor meets frequently with counterparts of neighboring towns.

The Town's functions include emergency management, planning, taxation, zoning and annexation, contracting for the collection of yard waste, maintaining Town boundaries, flood plain management, Community Center operations, animal control, streetlights, and public safety through its funding of the Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services (EMS.) Police protection is provided through the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department.

### **The Town's Strong Finances**

The Town's finances remain in excellent condition, easily meeting the financial requirements set by the state. Annual audits routinely give the Town high marks. The only debt of the Town amounts to \$2.3 million and will be paid off in 2026.

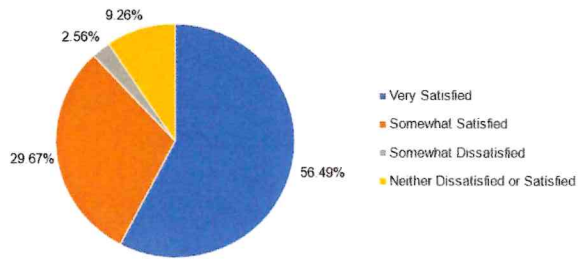
Taxes in the TOSJ are very low. The rate of 6 cents per \$100 is among the lowest in the state and a fraction of the rate of most area towns. Major expenditures are for the fire department, emergency management, streetlights and administration. Other municipalities have higher taxes because they need to spend large sums on a municipal police department and streets—the TOSJ does not provide these services.

After Hurricane Florence in 2018, the property tax rate was raised by one cent in 2019 to establish a fund for storm debris removal. The fund balance has remained low due to the cost of debris removal from more storms in 2019 and 2020. With a property tax base of some \$2 billion—the aggregate appraised value of real estate within the Town—property and sales taxes generate adequate revenue for its municipal operations. The TOSJ also receives sales taxes collected by the State of North Carolina and distributed through Brunswick County. Together, property taxes and sales taxes account for about 80 percent of the Town's revenue, with fees and other taxes making up the remainder.

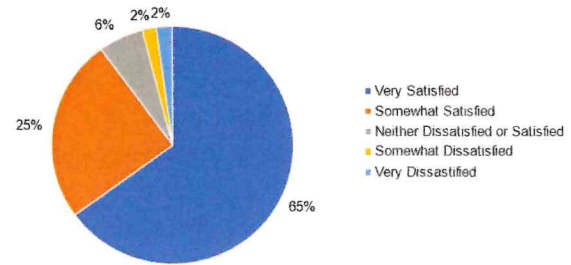
In early 2020, the Town purchased about two acres near the Town Hall and Community Center. The Town will use the land to increase parking for the Community Center, to straighten the road that runs from NC 211 to the Town Hall, and to build a small park.

The Town's services were highly rated in the survey. Nearly 90% of respondents said that they are very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the operations of the Town, and about the same percentage registered satisfaction with Town communications.

**Overall satisfaction with Town of St. James Operations**



**Overall Satisfaction with Town Communications**



## TOSJ Emergency Management: Planning Improves Response to Storms and Emergencies

As a coastal community, St. James is vulnerable to major storms and hurricanes. Accordingly, TOSJ-EM plays an important role in coordinating the community's preparation for and response to severe storms and other emergencies.

***Any situation that threatens the lives, safety, health/welfare of our residents is considered an emergency.***

TOSJ-EM coordinates with the SJFD, POA, The Clubs, and the St. James Marina to ensure each entity meets its requirements in the Emergency Management Plan. Outside St. James, TOSJ-EM participates in Brunswick County Emergency Management partner conference calls and provides appropriate information prior to, during, and after an emergency event.

### How Emergency Management Responds to a Hurricane

As a hurricane approaches, TOSJ-EM begins coordination with Brunswick County Emergency Services, the National Weather Service, and others as needed.

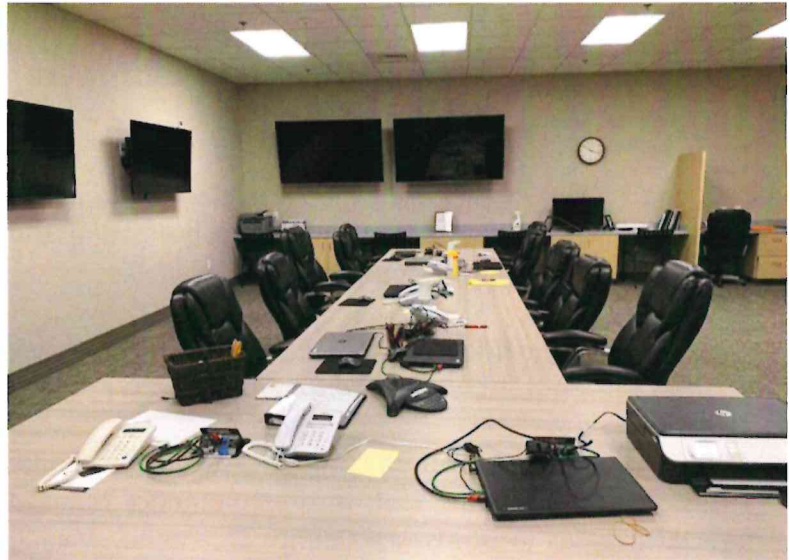
Using the town's **Emergency Notification System**, it begins sending messages to residents' telephones and email addresses in the notification database, including texts to TTY devices. TOSJ-EM advises the POA of the storm's anticipated rainfall, so the POA can check storm water handling structures, decide if pond levels should be drawn down, and to require contractors to shut down and secure construction sites. Emergency plans for the marina and the golf courses may be activated. The mayor may issue either a voluntary or mandatory evacuation order.

The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is located in the new fire station and is activated when the TOSJ mayor declares a State of Emergency. Depending on the severity of the storm event, the EOC may be staffed during normal business hours or move to 24-hour staffing. After a storm, as directed by the mayor, TOSJ-EM conducts a preliminary damage assessment, and assists the town manager in developing plans for debris removal. TOSJ-EM regularly reviews its work to incorporate any lessons learned into planning for future events.

St. James Plantation residents are pleased with the services provided by TOSJ-EM based on survey data. More than 90 percent reported being satisfied or very satisfied with preparedness and communication. Some 87 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with overall response by TOSJ-EM to hurricanes in 2017-20. Just under half said they attended storm briefings or received storm packets and those who did generally found the information useful. Reaching more residents with this information represents an opportunity for the TOSJ-EM team.

***Critical emergency information is sent to phone and email listings in the POA database. Make sure your POA contact profile is up to date.***

*TOSJ-EM moved into this state-of-the-art Emergency Operations Center at Fire Station #2 in 2019. The EOC is equipped with laptops for EOC personnel, large TV displays to monitor National Hurricane Center broadcasts, local and national news reports and weather updates, and incident reports from the WebEOC emergency management system. TOSJ-EM also monitors local webcams at several locations in St. James and other regional locations. Hand-held radios and phone banks provide communication links to and from the center, and large local maps and white boards keep EOC staff informed of critical information, while a radio tower on top of the fire station provides a link to Brunswick County emergency personnel.*



TOSJ-EM works with a damage reporting system called Crisis Track, an online portal used by emergency agencies to speed damage assessments and reporting. Information in Crisis Track is aggregated by Brunswick County to support applications for state or federal disaster aid.

## **TOSJ Community Center: Welcoming Visitors Again**

The Town operates and maintains the TOSJ Community Center, which opened in 2010. It serves as an amenity for the residents and property owners of St. James. The Center includes meeting rooms, an arts and crafts room, and a large multipurpose room. It can accommodate large and small groups for a variety of social activities and entertainment purposes. The Town subsidizes costs that are not covered by user fees. Under the fee schedule, groups and organizations outside of St. James can also rent the facility at higher costs than residents pay. Twice a year the Center has a Blood Drive sponsored by Red Cross and a drive-up Shred-It event for St. James Plantation residents.

The Community Center was closed for almost all of 2020 due to the pandemic. The staff took advantage of the closing to ensure guests will return to a clean and safe Community Center. The staff made several updates including the addition of a new HVAC air filtration system.



*Town of St. James Community Center*

The Community Center management is making every attempt to keep everyone safe by stepping up housekeeping and sanitizing measures and limiting group sizes based on current restrictions. The Center boasts a new state-of-the-art virus-killing electrostatic sprayer to provide an additional layer of protection. A new scheduling software allows for residents to easily request space and pay fees online. The Community Center reopened in January 2021 on a limited basis.

The Town Council approved a new fee schedule in December 2020 designed to keep costs low for residents. The Community Center has adjusted fees which now include two categories of pricing (non-profit and standard) for non-resident groups and two categories of pricing that apply to residents. In addition, no-fee operating hours have been expanded. Rates and fees are loaded in the scheduling software.

The survey feedback for the Center overall was very good. The survey showed that 30 percent of residents had used the Center on a regular basis (1-4 times a month). There were comments that praised the Center for adding to the quality of life in St. James Plantation and on the quality of the facility as well managed, clean and easily accessible for caterers. There were other mixed comments that dealt with size, acoustics, hours and pricing. However, while the majority of those who had used the center were satisfied, approximately 32 percent of respondents had never used the Center.

TOSJ recently purchased about two acres of land around its Town Hall to provide permanent open space, create additional parking, and to provide enhanced vehicle access to the Town Hall complex. Other improvements to the Center are being considered to address concerns expressed in the survey, such as improving housekeeping, interior aesthetics, and acoustics.

## **Firewise: Preventing Wildfire Risks**

Fire is the enemy of both humans and wildlife. The TOSJ became a Firewise USA Community in 2003, and the TOSJ Firewise Committee works closely with the SJFD, the POA and county and state officials to identify risks and maintain its Firewise Certification. The committee

focuses on how St. James Plantation residents can mitigate wildfire risks in selecting building materials, landscape plants and mulch. The removal of yard debris, maintaining clean roofs and gutters, managing trees and shrubs, keeping plantings watered during hot weather, and the removal of dead wood are all part of the program of “defensible space”.

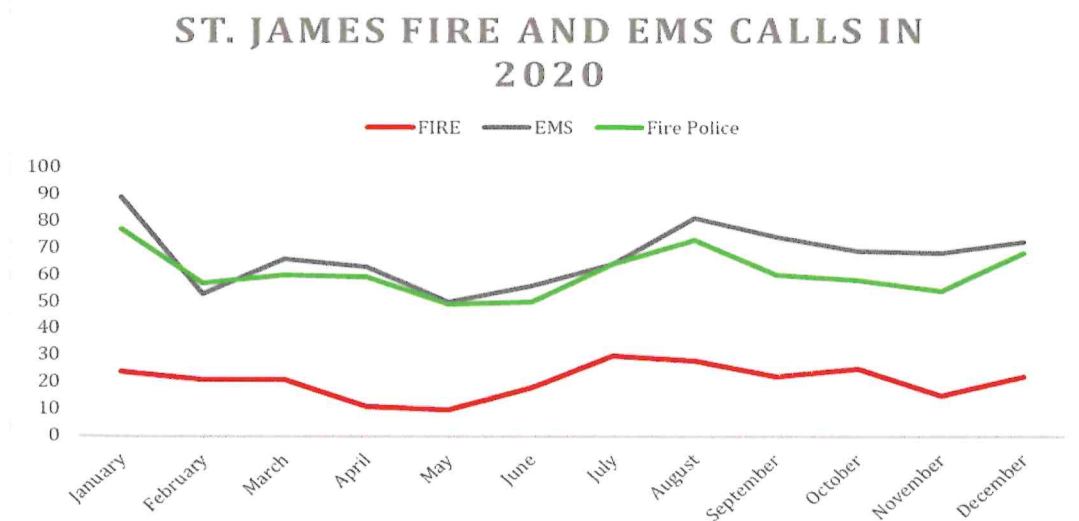
### St. James Cares: Litter Clean Up

St. James Cares is a highway clean-up organization funded by the TOSJ. Resident volunteers remove litter along the 3.5 miles of NC 211 roadway bordering the TOSJ.

### St. James Fire Department: On Call

The SJFD is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501 (c) 3 organization established to provide fire protection and emergency medical services to the TOSJ. The Town funds most of the costs of SJFD through about \$800,000 in annual grants. In addition to serving the Town, the SJFD participates in a rural fire district located outside of the TOSJ that includes Arbor Creek, parts of Southport Supply Road, and Midway Road. The SJFD also serves the rest of Brunswick County under mutual aid agreements with other fire departments.

As an all-volunteer force with its own staffing, equipment, maintenance, and training/certification regimens, the SJFD operates two stations: one on St. James Drive and another on Oceanic Drive. Its fire suppression inventory consists of three engines, a tower ladder, a light rescue truck and a brush truck. The department is staffed by 40 firefighters, 35 Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and 20 Fire Police, plus administrative personnel. All are highly trained volunteers. EMS first responders operate two ambulances from Station 1. All EMTs are certified by the State of North Carolina and must undergo continued state mandated classroom and field training after they are certified. A new ambulance was placed in-service in 2020 and the 13-year-old ambulance is still used for consecutive calls and as backup for the new ambulance.



### **SJFD's High Ratings Lower Insurance Premiums**

A community's investment in fire mitigation is a reliable predictor of future fire losses. That investment pays off in lower premiums for homeowners' insurance. The Insurance Services Office (ISO) of the North Carolina Department of Insurance and Office of the State Fire Marshal rate local departments on a scale of 1–10, with 1 as the highest rating. When SJFD was chartered in December 1999 the rating was 9. By 2001, the rating improved to 5, reducing homeowner's premiums by 40-50%. In 2020, due to the construction of the second fire station and other factors, the rating further improved to 3, again reducing premiums.



*SJFD Firehouse #2*

Residents who needed emergency services are very pleased with responses by the Fire Department and EMS. In the recent survey, less than 15 percent of respondents had called the SJFD with an emergency, while about 20 percent called for EMS assistance (including some with multiple calls.) Of those that called the Fire Department or EMS, the satisfaction with response time was extremely high: more than 97 percent said the SJFD responded quickly. More than 98 percent of those needing EMS assistance felt that EMS volunteers were professional and provided excellent care.

Finally, the survey revealed that residents are eager to learn more about fire and injury prevention, with the vast majority requesting more information on home fire safety and escape planning. Due to Covid-19, the SJFD curtailed community CPR training, residential fire safety, and other activities in accordance with state guidelines. Residents hope that such services can resume when it is safe to do so.

### St. James Fire Department Safety Survey Results

	NOT INTERESTED	SOMEWHAT INTERESTED	VERY INTERESTED	NEEDS MORE INFORMATION	TOTAL
Information on fire and injury prevention	29.23% 745	48.37% 1,233	17.65% 450	4.75% 121	2,549
CPR Training	22.69% 567	41.78% 1,044	33.05% 826	2.48% 62	2,499
A home safety checklist to assess risk of fire or injury in your home	26.10% 666	42.75% 1,091	28.33% 723	2.82% 72	2,552
A "Vial of Life" in your home to provide first responders with crucial information if you are unable to communicate	14.21% 361	36.52% 928	42.15% 1,071	7.12% 181	2,541

# St. James Plantation Property Owners' Association

## St. James POA: Fulfilling Major Responsibilities

The POA was established in 1990 with the filing of documents with the North Carolina Secretary of State. These lay out a broad set of functions and responsibilities. The POA performs several functions that are usually carried out by local government. Maintaining infrastructure within St. James Plantation is its biggest responsibility. More specifically, the POA:

- maintains and repairs the 82-plus miles of roads and streets as well as the entrances, bridges, sidewalks, and walking paths in the common areas within St. James Plantation,
- provides stormwater management within St. James Plantation,
- staffs four gate houses,
- contracts for the landscaping and maintenance of the common areas and green space and regulates usage of common areas. The POA also promotes community involvement through neighborhood landscape groups and volunteer litter pick-up efforts,
- through the Architectural Control Committee (ACC), reviews new house plans and exterior changes to existing homes and landscaping in order to ensure harmonious and aesthetically pleasing designs throughout the development,
- through the Ponds Committee, enhances and maintains the health, water quality, beauty, and recreational use of the ponds within St. James Plantation,<sup>[3]</sup>
- maintains a database of all property owners and residents that is used for communication by the Town and the POA,
- maintains mass communications capabilities for the POA and the Town to use for blast emails to property owners and residents,
- provides communications to property owners through a variety of platforms, including the monthly *Cat-Tails* magazine, the POA website, the weekly *'What's Up St. James'*, and *A Guide to Living in St. James*, which is revised annually, and
- contracts with a security company to provide security and traffic control. Security personnel man the gates to control access to St. James Plantation and patrol the streets.

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<sup>3</sup> As a planned community, the developers and builders in St. James Plantation were required throughout the permitting process to comply with a host of federal, state, and local environmental regulations. Meeting those requirements—along with the continued efforts of residents volunteering on a host of environmental committees and projects—helps St. James Plantation preserve its natural environment and manage its open spaces, ponds, and wetlands. For more information on environmental initiatives within St. James Plantation, see Appendix A.



### ***St. James POA Beach Club***

The POA also manages a number of popular amenities in St. James Plantation, including Waterway Park and Pavilion, Woodlands Park and Pavilion, the Beach Club, dog parks, the library, and two community vegetable gardens. An Activities Committee plans social events for residents to become better acquainted with each other and the surrounding community.

The POA accomplishes these responsibilities through an elected board of six resident property owners. A contracted Community Manager, located at the Town Hall, manages the day-to-day operation. Contracted staff administers contracts, assists property owners, maintains multiple databases, and provides engineering support. Thirteen committees, staffed by a total of 114 resident volunteers, oversee specific POA activities. Property owners pay annual dues that fund all of POA's activities. The association is in very good financial condition, with a reserve fund of more than \$5.3 million at the end of 2020.

In the survey, residents expressed high satisfaction with the services and management provided by the POA:

	<b>Very/somewhat Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat/very satisfied</b>
<b>Board Mgt</b>	6.68%	79.48%
<b>POA Committees</b>	4.52%	76.88%
<b>Services Provided by POA Staff</b>	4.65%	82.51%
<b>POA Communications</b>	3.56%	87.21%

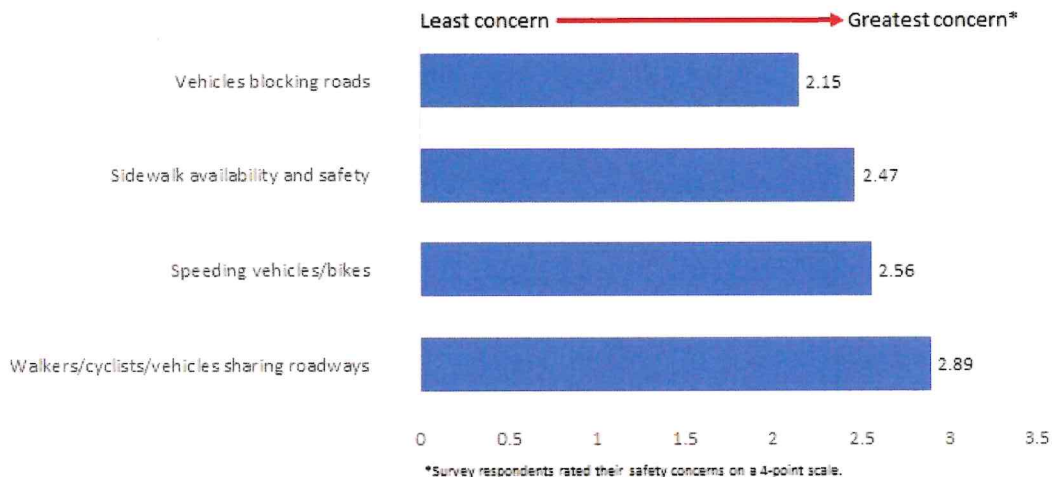
The COVID-19 pandemic forced changes in POA operations in early 2020, most of which continued into 2021. The POA office was closed to customer traffic and handled requests for service by phone or email. Committee meetings were held via Zoom, outdoors, or by phone, and open meetings were conducted by electronic means. The Beach Club pool closed and large group activities were canceled.

In terms of amenities, landscaping and the Beach Club ranked very high in importance:

	Not important /somewhat important	Somewhat/very important
<b>Landscaping of common areas</b>	1.95%	97.12%
<b>Beach Club and pool facilities</b>	1.34%	97.04%

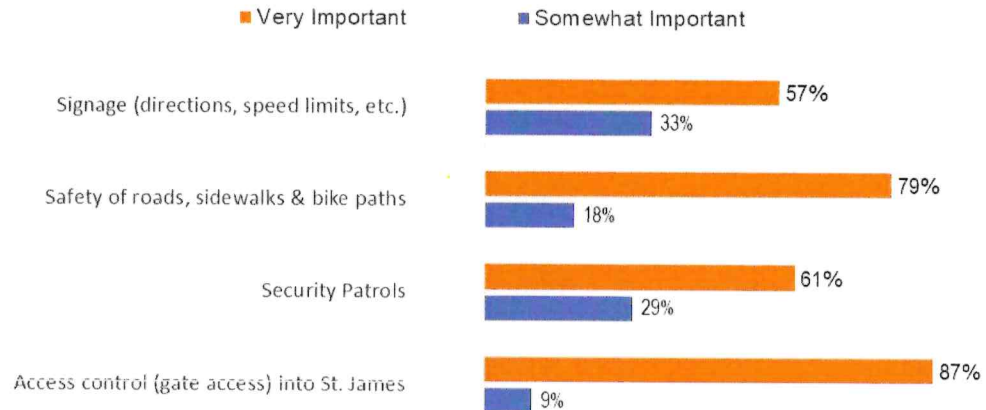
Overall, more than 7 out of 10 survey respondents expressed satisfaction with POA safety services. A significant number of respondents expressed concern with traffic safety in St. James Plantation. Overcrowding of the roads with cars, commercial vehicles, bicycles, runners and pedestrians were of major concern. Many comments indicated the need for more sidewalks. Bike trails off the roads were mentioned as desirable. Negative comments on roads include crumbling edges, potholes, and road construction materials.

### Concerns about Safety within St. James Plantation

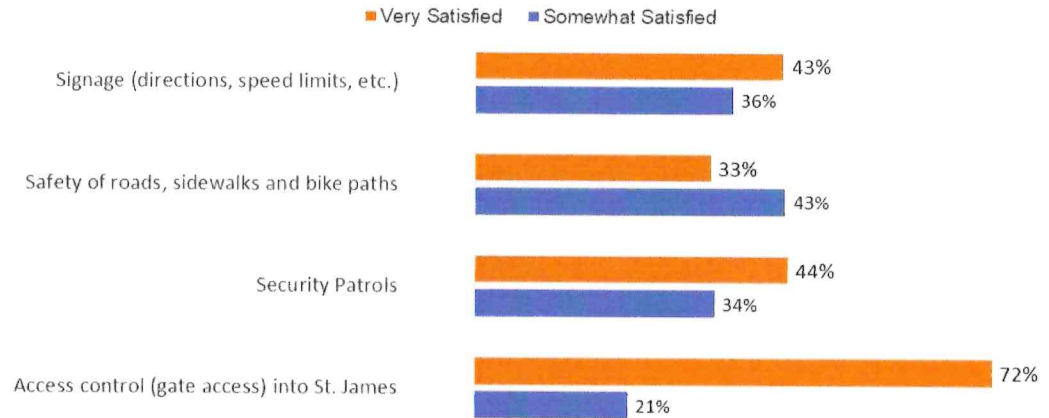


## Residents' Views of POA Safety Services

### Importance of POA Safety Services

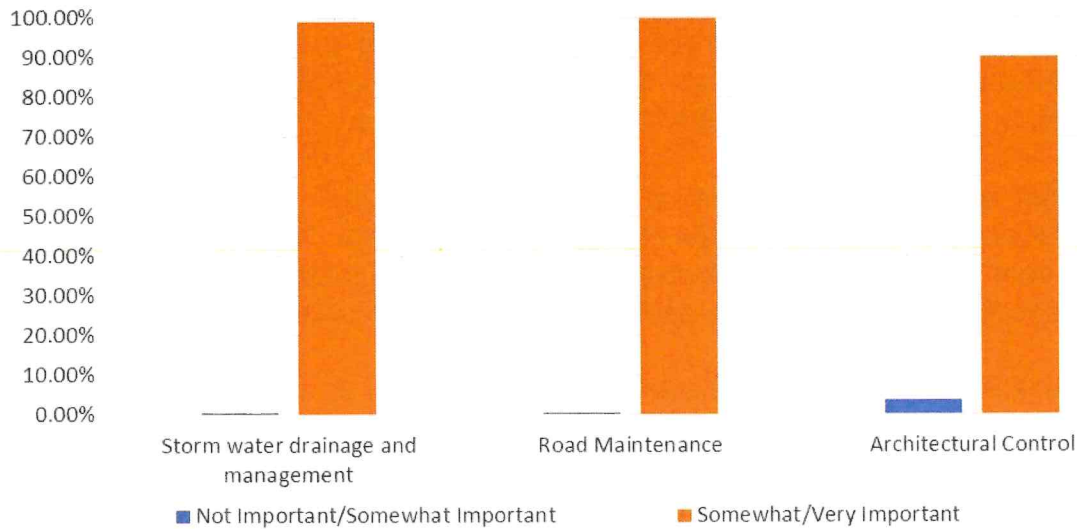


### Satisfaction with POA Safety Services



## Residents' Views on POA Infrastructure, Maintenance and Oversight

**Importance of POA infrastructure, maintenance and oversight services**



**Satisfaction with POA infrastructure, maintenance and oversight services**



\* Note: 20.16% of respondents were neither satisfied or dissatisfied with Architectural Control Committee services

*Storm water and road maintenance were a concern to homeowners. The survey showed some dissatisfaction with these two areas in the perceived lack of assistance to individual homeowners concerning storm water issues.*

## **Outlook through 2025**

### **St. James Has Grown Up**

St. James has not just survived but thrived for more than three decades to become an attractive, well-managed community popular with long-time and new residents alike. Over the same period, many similar developments have faltered for financial and other reasons.

In the near term, the TOSJ will continue to grow as home construction continues for two or three years at what will probably match the recent strong growth rate. The Town will use the parcel it purchased in 2020 to rework the road to the Town Hall and the Community Center. The new land will also allow an increase in parking for the Community Center.

The end of the worst of the pandemic could alleviate pressure on St. James amenities. The Community Center has already reopened and is seeing steadily increased use. In 2020, the pandemic increased usage of The Clubs and other amenities dramatically as residents were forced to stay home. Members played a record 221,000 rounds of golf on Club courses. The tennis and pickleball courts also registered all-time highs in reservations. Once the pandemic passes, more residents likely will travel and pursue other activities that will reduce the strain on St. James amenities.

### **The Longer Run**

What will the TOSJ look like in 2025 and beyond? In the five-year timeframe of this report, St. James seems certain to transition from rapid growth to maturity. The community will continue to grow for the next few years, adding more than 1,000 residents and 600-700 new homes. Virtually all available vacant lots within St. James Plantation will have new homes by 2025, and the population will have grown to around 9,000 persons living in an estimated 5,000 dwelling units, all built between 1991 and 2026.

The past year has seen an acceleration of home building, sales and renovations. The boom has continued into the early months of 2021. Some St. James residents have opted to sell their home and downsize to smaller houses in the Seaside area and along Oceanic Drive. These homes generally require no maintenance of the exterior and landscaping by the owners. At the same time, many new residents continue to purchase or build large and luxurious homes.

A key change by mid-decade is that the boom in new home construction in St. James Plantation is likely to run its course as the number of buildable lots runs out. As a result, within a few years, the construction of new homes is likely to end—or slow to a trickle. Some builders are already seeing a shift from construction of new homes to remodeling older ones. A leading indicator would be a decline in applications for approval of house plans to the POA ACC.

The full build-out also means that population will top out at around 9,000 residents. This assumes a) a 2020 population estimated at 7,400 and b) the construction of 200 homes annually from 2021 to 2023. It also assumes that the additional planned and approved 46 town homes and 36 condo units will be built. Even if building slows from the recent rate, build-out will take only a year or two longer.

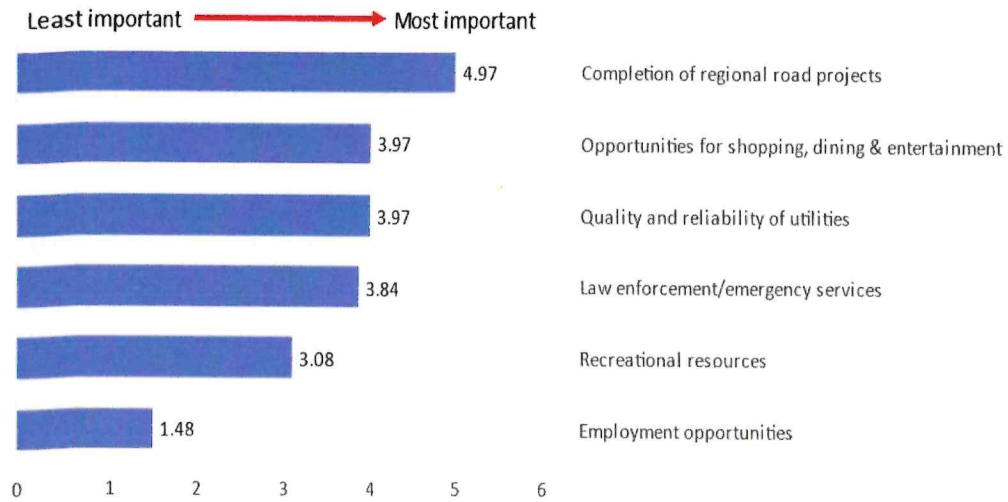
An important element of maturity is the aging of the housing stock. More than 800 homes were built before 2000, and another 900-1,000 fall in the 10-to-20-year age bracket. While St. James Plantation homeowners continue to keep their properties in good condition, maintaining the outside appearance will be a growing challenge and expense. This includes maintaining landscaping and updating the exterior of homes with fresh paint and new roofs. The POA will play an increasingly important role in keeping housing standards high and enforcing them.

At the same time, the infrastructure in St. James Plantation is aging, and planning for growing costs to update and maintain infrastructure and facilities is essential. Roads in particular are a growing expense for the POA, which has established a large reserve fund to cover this and other expenses. Besides ensuring that the funds are available, the POA has a detailed, long-run schedule for road maintenance. The Beach Club also needs substantial upkeep every year due to the harsh environment near the ocean.

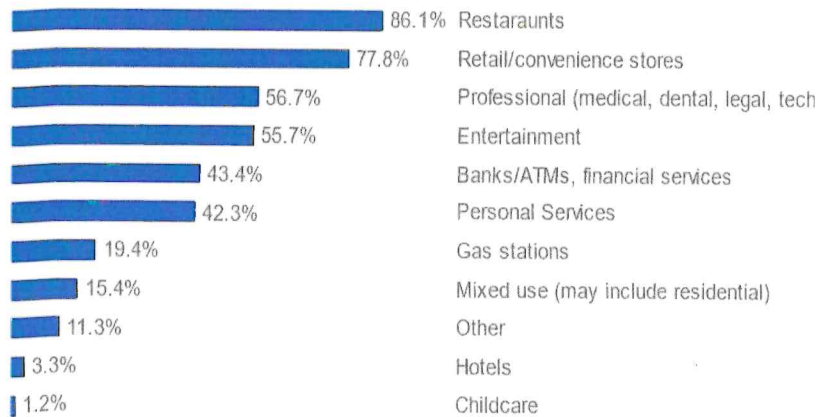
The Town, for its part, has recently needed to repair or replace HVAC systems, furnishings, and a number of technology systems at the Town Hall and Community Center, which are now more than ten years old. The Town also maintains Maxwell Drive. The owners of The Clubs have also needed to update HVAC systems and refurbish buildings and recreational facilities.

St. James is a community run by volunteers, who will continue to be a major asset to the community as residents with free time, key skills and experience, as well as motivation, devote time and energy to the important tasks of unpaid leadership in the POA, the Town, the Fire Department and to the various social clubs that have been a mainstay of life in St. James. Residents undoubtedly will continue to donate time and resources to support Brunswick County residents, schools, churches and environmental projects.

## Residents' ranking of needs around TOSJ



## Residents' preferences for development, services or amenities surrounding TOSJ



## At Long Last, a Green Light to Widen NC 211

*“The widening of NC 211 has been in the discussion stages for several years.”*

—St. James Comprehensive Plan IV, March 2014

While dramatic changes are not expected within St. James, the surrounding area, in contrast, will look much different by mid-decade. The \$102 million expansion of NC 211 from a two-lane road to a four-lane thoroughfare has been on the Department of Transportation books for several years. Construction was originally scheduled to begin in 2017 but was delayed for lack of funding. NCDOT announced that bids for construction would be awarded in November 2021, and construction could start six weeks later. With completion scheduled in three or four years, the project aligns roughly with the timeframe of this plan.

The new highway is designed to accommodate the large flow of traffic that now moves on NC 211 from Middleton Boulevard and Midway Road to NC 87/River Road. The new NC 211 will be five miles long, with four lanes of moving traffic and turning lanes. At both the Middleton Boulevard and Long Beach Road intersections, overpasses will carry north and south bound traffic over NC 211.

In sum, by 2025 the project to widen NC 211 should be completed or nearly so, and in turn that likely will trigger commercial and residential development surrounding the Town on now vacant property. While the project is sure to cause years of disruption, the finished product will improve accessibility to St. James Plantation. Besides increasing capacity and safety, the new road will be elevated significantly and provide a much-improved evacuation route for St. James and the surrounding area. The Town will provide updates on construction schedules and traffic issues during the project.

A member of the St. James Town Council serves as the liaison with NCDOT for the project to promote open communication between the Town, NCDOT and the construction contractor. In addition, NCDOT is examining further widening NC 211 beyond Midway Road.

In conjunction with the widening of NC 211, the POA will be moving the St. James Drive gatehouse farther back on St. James Drive.

## Brighter Prospects for Development Along NC 211?

Vacant land both north and south of NC 211 as well as along Middleton Boulevard offers opportunities for commercial and residential development (See map, Potential Future Development.) Plans for these tracts have been discussed for many years, but very little has been completed. The NC 211 project may finally lead to action on these parcels. While prospects for these developments are still uncertain and they may move slowly once begun, the NC 211 project makes progress on these developments more likely than ever. The sheer

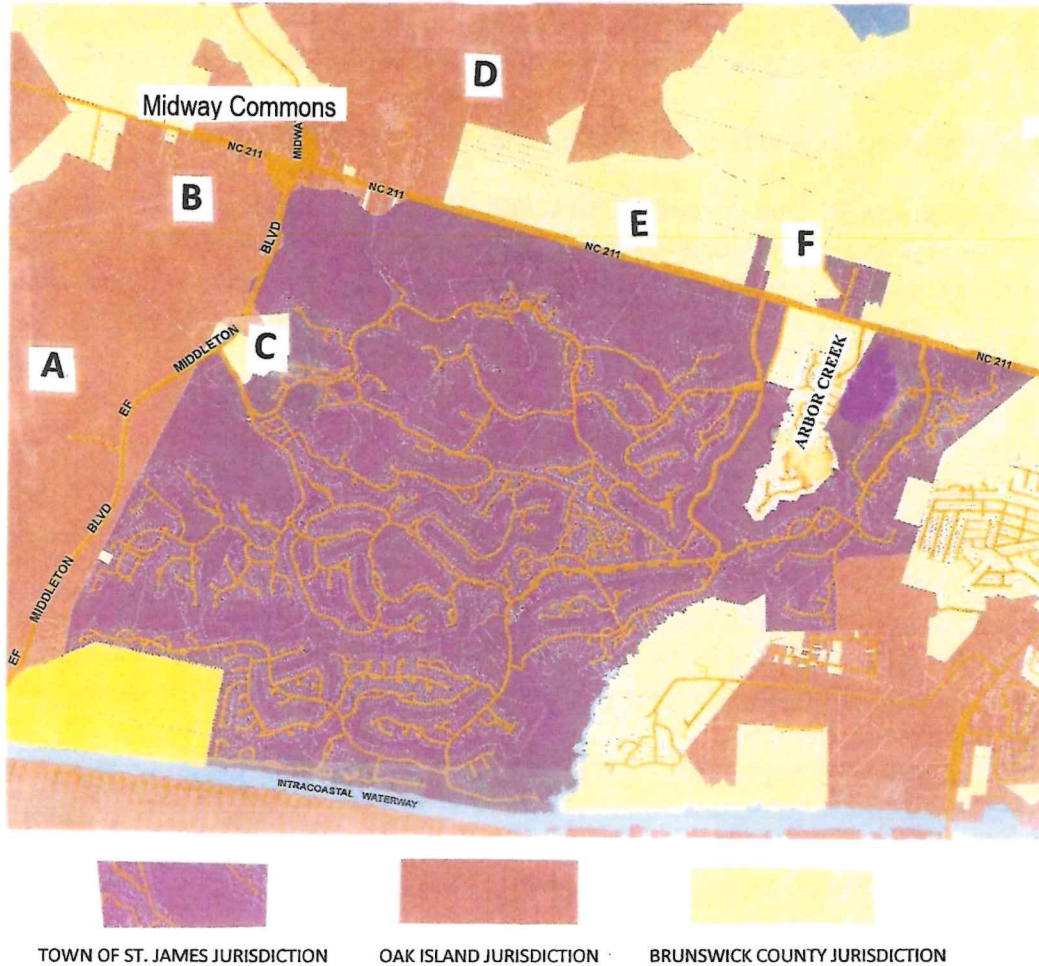
quantity of land available for new development outside St. James gates suggests a very long development horizon.

There are several reasons for caution about the potential of all of these developments. In general, while the demand to develop these properties appears to be strong, demand still will need to develop further to make them viable. The Midway Commons and Southport Crossing shopping centers, for example, still have a number of spaces that are not leased. Moreover, new projects will in effect compete with each other so that it is not likely they will develop at the same time.

There are several opportunities for new developments contiguous to St. James. Initial plans for most of these projects propose mixed-use developments. Residential offerings include single-family houses, condos, apartments, and senior living. Senior living and medical facilities are also in the plans, along with shops, restaurants and office space. In 2020 survey responses, residents desired to have more restaurants and shops convenient to our residents.

Business conditions will also play a role. If the economy falters or interest rates rise, development will most likely lag. Investors also will need to be confident that the worst of the pandemic has passed. The ability to hire enough workers and the rising cost of new construction could serve as other drags on new development. Many people who now work in or near St. James endure long commutes in large part because of the lack of affordable housing nearby.

## POTENTIAL FUTURE DEVELOPMENT



**A** 3,335 ACRES, ACCESS FROM EF MIDDLETON BLVD.  
PROPOSED PLANNED RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY

**B** 384 ACRES, ACCESS FROM NC 211  
PROPOSED HOUSING & COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

**C** 52 ACRES, ACCESS FROM SEASIDE GATE  
PROPOSED MEDICAL CARE & SENIOR HOUSING

**D** PINE FOREST, 2,200 ACRES (FIRST PHASE 564 ACRES)  
ACCESS FROM NC 211. FIRST PHASE 168 APARTMENTS,  
108 SINGLE FAMILY HOMES, 80 SENIOR HOUSING UNITS,  
NOVANT CLINIC

**E** MIRASOL 138 ACRES ACCESS FROM NC 211  
SAND MINING AND MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

**F** ST. JAMES CENTER, 137 ACRES  
ACCESS FROM NC 211. 37 ACRES COMMERCIAL,  
53 ACRES MULTI FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

## **Development Opportunities within the Town of St. James**

The 114 acres of land near the Seaside Gate and along E.F. Middleton Boulevard is partially within the TOSJ. Much of it has been cleared with a 300-foot conservation easement along Middleton Boulevard. The Doshier Medical Plaza was the first building constructed in the area. Other parts of this area are designated for senior living accommodations and future housing.

## **More Progress is Expected on the North Side of 211**

Plans for large tracts of land across NC 211 and Middleton Boulevard from St. James are ripening. Several planned and underway development projects dominate the north side of NC 211 from the St. James Plantation Main Gate to Midway Road. These large parcels fall under the oversight of Brunswick County and the City of Oak Island. As such, the TOSJ has a limited formal role in their development.

### **Pine Forest Plantation: Steady Progress**

The 2,200-acre Pine Forest Plantation is the only large-scale mixed-use development that has started construction on the north side of NC 211. At build-out Pine Forest Plantation Phase One will include approximately 1,500 housing units.

- The Novant Family Medical Center opened in 2017.
- Pine Forest Plantation recently added the 168-unit Hawthorne apartment complex.
- The first units of single-family homes were recently completed in The Lakes, with plans for 108 homes eventually.
- The Landings of Brunswick, a 43,000-square-foot senior living facility is nearing occupancy.

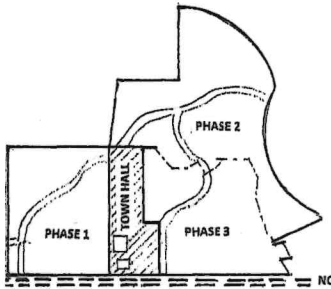
If this first phase is successful, the developer will likely begin a second phase of the project.

### **St. James Center: Plans of the Original Developer**

St. James Center is a 139-acre project proposed by the original St. James Plantation developer and approved by Brunswick County (see map, St. James Center.) The project wraps around the TOSJ Town Hall and Community Center and connects to the existing St. James Square office development and Generations Church. St. James Drive will be extended northerly from the Main Gate across NC 211 to become the traffic entry spine of the new project. The design, approved in January 2021, includes a town center, multi-family housing, significant ponds and wetlands, and some commercial development. An estimated 53 acres will be devoted to multi-family housing, while 40 acres is designated for commercial and retail development.

This complex has the potential to respond to St. James residents' desire to see nearby retail and restaurants. Significantly, one of the parcels on NC 211 in St. James Center promises land that could be *"future commercial development with a town center feel"* and that connects with the TOSJ Town Hall and Community Center.

## St. James Center

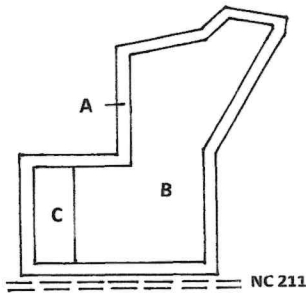


- Phase One: 15 Acres Multi-Family Housing  
13 Acres Commercial
- Phase Two: 38 Acres Multi-Family Housing  
6 Acres Commercial
- Phase Three: 17 Acres Commercial

## The Former Mirasol Property

The project once named Mirasol is located midway between St. James Center and Pine Forest Plantation and occupies 1,500 feet of NC 211 frontage. It is now the site of a sand mining enterprise. One proposal is to divide the parcel into three discrete uses: a 10-acre mixed-use development parcel for residential, commercial and public uses; a 98-acre parcel that includes the sand mining effort; and a 100-foot-wide perimeter buffer for pedestrian and bike paths. The buffer may eventually include the 10-foot-wide Brunswick County Greenway. The project will also include a 100-foot-wide and 12-foot-high earth berm along NC 211 landscaped with trees and shrubs.

### Mirasol Property



- A—100-foot-wide Perimeter Buffer/Greenway
- B—98-acre Sand Mining & Mixed-use Development
- C—10-acre Mixed-Use Development

Several smaller properties are located on either side of the former Mirasol property. Little is known about the intent of these property owners. Zoning for these properties is a mixture of Commercial-Low Density (C-LD) and Commercial-Industrial (C-I). C-LD zoning leans heavily toward residential and commercial development, while C-I zoning does not include housing and favors manufacturing and other non-commercial business enterprises.

Taken together, if implemented these developments could represent an entirely new community encompassing thousands of dwellings, new shops, restaurants and other entertainment and service venues, along with new commercial enterprises. The timing to complete these developments is uncertain; the end of this decade seems more likely than 2025 for them to come to fruition. Such a community would offer restaurants, retail, and

services that many St. James residents desire. Affordable housing for the local labor force would be another benefit. Significant downsides include increased congestion and traffic.

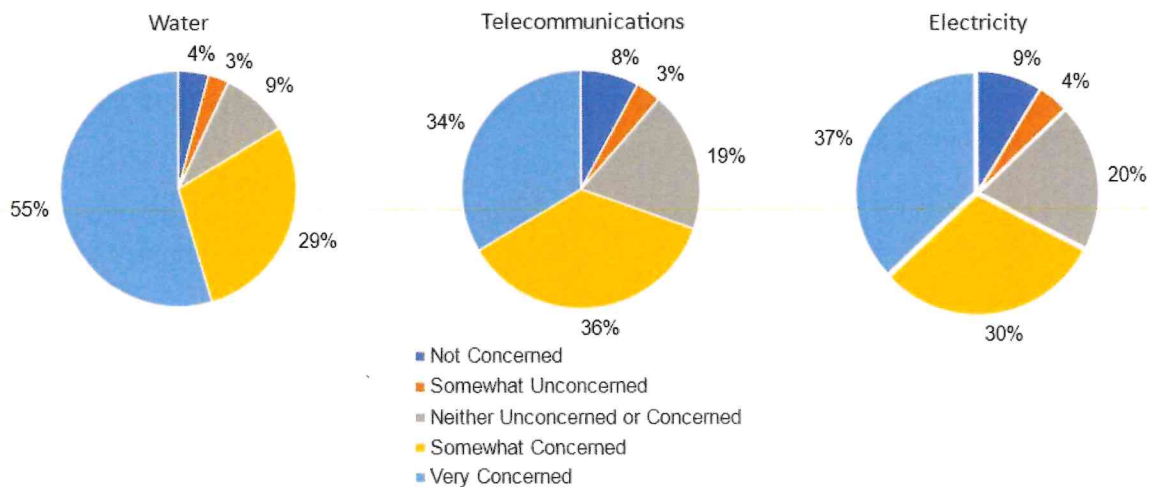
If jurisdictional and zoning issues can be resolved, there is potential for cooperation across these developments.

The proposed **Brunswick County Greenway** will connect many of these parcels. The Greenway is a \$17-million plan to construct a 12.5 mile safe, scenic and healthy pathway to accommodate walkers, runners and bicyclists. The proposed path of the Greenway begins in Boiling Spring Lakes and passes through Pine Forest Plantation, then travels along NC 211 past the Mirasol project to the TOSJ Town Hall and Community Center. Pine Forest developers have pledged \$1.58 million worth of land easements and \$250,000 cash toward the Greenway. Brunswick County has promised more than \$3 million worth of in-kind services, and Oak Island and Boiling Spring Lakes have each offered \$15,000 of in-kind services. Construction of the Greenway will take many years to complete, but it will be a nearby asset to residents of St. James.

### **Middleton Boulevard: Huge Parcels for Development in the Long Run**

A huge area of vacant land lies across Middleton Boulevard from St. James. The 3,335-acre property stretches along Middleton Boulevard from NC 211 to the Intracoastal Waterway. An adjacent 387-acre property near the southwest corner of Middleton Boulevard and NC 211 is also a development opportunity, building on the success of the nearby Lowe's center. About 100 acres are designated for commercial development and the rest for housing. The development of these tracts is assumed to be far in the future. In total, this area is on a par with the Pine Forest and St. James Plantation and could become planned residential and mixed-use communities in the distant future. Although there were plans for a major mixed-use development floated several years ago, there has been no visible progress since.

### Residents' concerns about access, dependability and quality of utilities



*Area developments will require regional planning for area roads, gas, electric, water and sewer, phone, cable and Internet services. In the survey, more than 86 percent of respondents said they were somewhat or very concerned about the quality and availability of water in St. James Plantation. Another two thirds expressed similar concerns about electricity and telecommunications services.*

## **Recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan Committee**

The Comprehensive Plan Committee agreed on the recommendations presented below. These recommendations grew out of the survey of residents – including their additional written comments – conversations with friends and neighbors in St. James, and extensive discussions among Committee members. In addition, input from key St. James organizations was also incorporated in our recommendations.

St. James enters 2021 in excellent shape. The key organizations—the Town, the POA, and the Fire Department are all effective and well managed. Indeed, our first recommendation is that these organizations continue the policies and practices that have made them successful. In particular, they have already taken steps to prepare for the future by building financial reserves, building a cadre of volunteers, and keeping their technology up to date.

In addition, elected officials and leaders in St. James need to continue to meet with elected officials and planning officials of Brunswick County and surrounding municipalities. St. James already enjoys productive relationships in the areas of fire protection and emergency medical services. The TOSJ mayor meets with surrounding mayors monthly and County mayors quarterly. The Town can build on these relationships, for example, to support projects that reflect a shared vision for the NC 211 corridor.

Some of our recommendations address longstanding issues. For the most part, however, we aim to prepare leaders in St. James for the changes that we expect over the next five years. We have used the luxury of a focus on the future to carefully consider the implications of the changes we see on the horizon.

The following recommendations are in order of highest priority. Although they reflect the Committee’s careful consideration, our recommendations are not binding.

### **Town of St. James**

#### **The Widening of NC 211**

NC DOT has completed the design of the boulevard and TOSJ has limited ability to influence the project. DOT and the contractor that will be selected in November, however, will coordinate with the TOSJ on traffic and other issues as construction proceeds in order to minimize traffic risks and delays. The Town will need to report regularly on the progress of the project.

One important area for the Town to weigh in is the landscaping of the median that will divide the road. In other major road projects across the state, NCDOT has worked with communities

to provide attractive wildflower and landscaped areas. The Town should begin to plan for the type of landscaping it prefers at the main entrance and the Regency gate.

### **Developments Nearby**

The prospect of major developments across NC 211 from St. James Plantation in the next several years poses fundamental questions for Town officials. As of now, these parcels are regulated by Oak Island (Pine Forest Plantation) or by Brunswick County (Mirasol and St. James Center) so that the Town thus has no official jurisdiction over these developments. The Town could expand its role in these developments if it and the property owners agree to annexation.

Annexation of property across NC 211, would greatly increase the Town's footprint and possibly incur a new set of responsibilities. The Town probably would enjoy an increase in tax revenues greater than the associated new expenses for fire/EMS coverage, etc.

These developments are in early stages. The Town, however, should begin soon to consider the implications of these developments.

In addition, as future demand builds, the Town should continue to encourage the expansion of quality worker housing, retail and restaurant projects, parks and open space, and regional bike and pedestrian pathways along NC 211.

### **Fire Department**

The Fire Department should complete its five-year plan soon to help the Town plan for needed expenditures. The Fire Department has completed and presented its vehicle replacement schedule to the Town, which is establishing a dedicated reserve for the project.

An important issue to be addressed in the plan is the sustainability of the volunteer model for the Fire Department. The Fire Department is justly proud of being an effective, all-volunteer force. Most organizations and residents in St. James hope that it can continue but they also expect the Fire Department to lay out its plans to attract enough volunteers to continue for the next several years.

The survey showed that many residents are interested in the Fire Department's offering of safety instruction. It is recommended that the SJFD create an educational program, including town hall meetings and classes to give residents instruction in CPR, Vial of Life, and fire and other safety instruction.

### **Emergency Management**

As evidenced by the survey feedback, TOSJ-EM has done an exceptional job preparing St. James for emergencies, and residents feel well informed. Continuing these efforts, including storm preparedness webinars or other communications aimed at St. James residents, will help TOSJ-EM maintain its role as a key part of the community.

Given the critical need for reliable communications and technology to reach residents and other emergency agencies, the Town should continue to support emergency communications upgrades. With the continued use of virtual technology, as well as residents increasing reliance on electronic communications of all types, regular technology upgrades will ensure that TOSJ-EM continues its safety mission.

Finally, St. James residents must take personal responsibility to ensure they are adequately informed and prepared by keeping the POA informed of current email and phone contact information. This helps to improve TOSJ-EM's ability to reach every resident via phone or email with critical and updated information on storms and other emergencies.

### **Community Center**

As the Community Center returns to full operations, more work is needed to improve the utilization of this valuable Town resource. This could include seeking additional feedback from current users and whether the Center could offer outside activities with tents to accommodate additional groups and their growing needs. It could also examine whether additional activities can be offered such as dance, fitness and other programming. In addition, the Town should carry through with its plans to improve interior aesthetics and acoustics to make the Center more appealing.

### **Continued Support of Environmental Efforts**

The TOSJ should continue its funding of the "Living Shoreline" project and work with the project sponsors to encourage volunteers from within the St. James community. (For more information on this project and other environmental efforts within St. James, see Appendix A.)

### **Monitoring Other Key Infrastructure**

As development continues inside and around St. James, the Town and the POA need to work with infrastructure providers to ensure that the utilities serving the TOSJ continue to have the quality and capacity to serve the community, the resiliency to operate in an area susceptible to storms and hurricanes, and that installations and repairs to utilities in the TOSJ have minimal impact on existing roads and properties. This includes plans by Piedmont Natural Gas to bring natural gas into St. James, and efforts by Brunswick County to improve the quality of the County's water system by installing a reverse osmosis system.

## **St. James Plantation Property Owners' Association**

### **Road Safety**

The survey showed that road safety within St. James Plantation is the greatest concern of St. James residents. Nearly 900 respondents took the trouble to write comments about the issue. Main concerns relate to road sharing among motor vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Growth has exacerbated congestion on St. James Plantation's narrow streets and the problem will only worsen as growth continues.

Specific recommendations include:

- Wherever possible, add sidewalks in high-traffic areas.
- Initiate a safety study of roads and sidewalks in St. James Plantation, similar to the one completed several years ago.
- Require contractors to position cones to alert motorists that the road ahead is blocked.
- Update and refresh the excellent "Guidelines for Bicyclists, Pedestrians, and Motorists to Promote Courteous Sharing of Roadways and Sidewalks." The new handbook should be posted on the Town and POA websites as well as in printed form.

## **Community-wide Recommendations**

### **Communications**

The Town and POA have recently improved their websites, which offer a wealth of information. They should continue to post important developments and routine announcements on their websites. The survey found that many people do not visit the Town website regularly.

Some entities could benefit from greater communication to inform residents of their operations. Emergency Management is a more robust operation than residents likely realize. Small group tours of the Emergency Operations Center, for example, would be popular and educational for residents. Similarly, POA committees probably do much more than residents realize. Committees could use *Cat-Tales* for regular articles featuring individual committees. Committees could also announce news or changes in *What's Up St. James*.

### **Volunteerism**

The survey indicated that almost half of residents volunteer their time, either within the community (e.g., Fire Department/EMT, Service Club, and POA or town committees) or outside St. James. The committee reached out to the St James Service Club, and the Brunswick County volunteer coordinator to assess the state of volunteering and confirm that volunteering by St. James residents within and outside the town has a real impact.

For 30 years volunteering has been the pattern of life in St. James and it has worked extremely well. But it too, must be sustained. In the event that volunteerism wanes in Town or POA functions, the cost of St. James services will rise. It is recommended that the Town and POA continue to promote and encourage volunteerism among residents, and encourage expanded coordination with the Brunswick County volunteer coordinator.

## **Appendix A**

### **Contributions to the Natural Environment**

#### **A Unique Mix of Natural and Open Space**

St. James has been active in preserving the natural environment, which is a key attraction for current and prospective property owners. The original developer was careful to respect its many natural features: the Intracoastal Waterway, Beaver Dam Creek, acres of wetlands, ponds, and a canopy of mature trees. In addition, the course designers gave the 81 holes of golf a natural atmosphere, preserving an enormous number of trees and retaining or creating ponds.

The community supports and protects its wildlife through programs developed by St. James volunteers and leaders, including the Living Shoreline program, the preservation of Carolina Bays and wetlands, several nature trails, and the regulation of tree retention and landscaping on residential lots. Home sites in St. James Plantation retain significant vegetation, particularly the tall pines planted decades ago by tree farmers who planned to harvest the trees for lumber.

The POA requires that builders and owners who file plans for new homes or additions preserve trees whenever possible. The ACC continues to regulate the removal of trees only when deemed necessary.

#### **Preserving the Intracoastal Waterway: The Southern Border of St. James**

The TOSJ “Living Shoreline” Project aims to conserve and improve the natural environment along the St. James Waterway Park shoreline by conserving and restoring the natural habitat for water birds and marine life including oysters, blue crabs, shrimp and fish while stabilizing the shoreline. The program started in 2004 and is funded each year by the TOSJ. It has been highly successful in using bagged oyster shells and marsh grasses to prevent erosion, reduce boat wake damage, and restore habitat for marine life while enhancing oyster habitat.

In the 16-year history of the project, which is a partnership with the University of North Carolina-Wilmington, volunteers have built two new bagged oyster shell reefs (about 1,000 bags) each season and planted about 4,500 plugs of *Spartina Alterniflora* along the banks of the Intracoastal Waterway. Some 540 feet of shoreline restoration and stabilization has been completed at Waterway Park with an additional 2,360 feet planned.

#### **Nearly 2,500 acres of Protected Lands and Carolina Bays in St. James**

Carolina Bays are elliptical or oval depressions found mostly in North and South Carolina. Each is considered to be a freshwater wetland, mostly isolated, that fills with rainwater in the

winter and spring. In St. James Plantation, Carolina Bays are mostly found in the far northwest corner of the community where no future development will occur. They offer refuge for wetlands species including rare plants, amphibians, reptiles, wading birds and mammals.

Roughly one third of the area of the Town is under Preservation/Conservation Stewardship, with the cooperation of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the North American Land Trust, the Audubon Society and the NC DOT. There are another 500 acres devoted to parks and common areas which are also considered undevelopable.

### **POA Ponds and Architectural Control Committees: Caring for Ponds and Trees**

The St. James Plantation Ponds Committee was formed by the POA in September 2014 to enhance the health, beauty and recreational usage of the St. James ponds for the enjoyment of our residents. It manages the fishing and recreational opportunities of the POA-owned ponds throughout St. James.

Existing trees on building sites and in common areas are among the community's most valuable assets. The POA, through its own staff and the ACC, regulates the removal of trees. Home builders and owners are required to file tree removal plans for review, with the clear understanding that mature trees are to be preserved unless the trees are dead, impose imminent liability to persons or structures, or when root growth is causing structural damage to adjacent driveways or foundations.

### **St. James Plantation Wildlife: Diverse and Thriving Species**

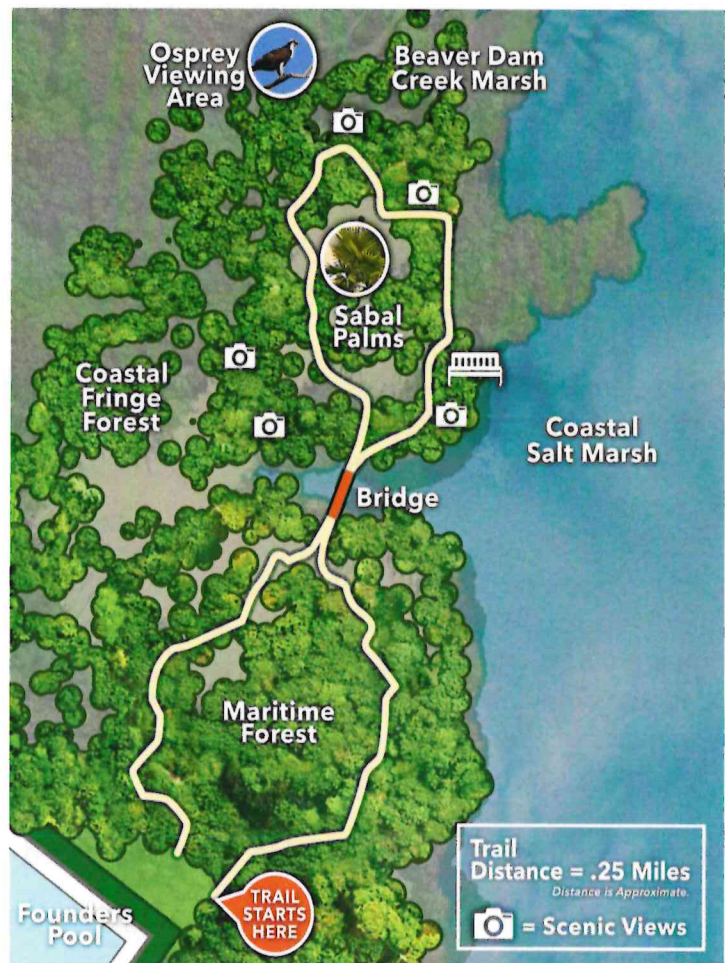
St. James Plantation is a nature preserve in which residents have built homes, developers have built golf courses and recreational amenities, and in which wildlife thrives. The freshwater ponds and streams, Beaver Dam Creek, the Intracoastal Waterway, the Carolina Bays and extensive wetlands attract and support wild birds, mammals and amphibians. Deer, fox, wild turkeys, owls and the occasional coyote or bobcat can be found outside the protected areas from time to time. Alligators appear periodically in golf course ponds, along with turtles, ibis, herons, ducks, geese and all manner of aquatic life.

### **POA Landscape Committee: Enhancing Common Areas and Nature Trails**

The POA Landscape Committee is responsible for ongoing efforts to beautify, maintain and extend the common areas and green space within St. James Plantation, and to promote community involvement through initiatives such as neighborhood landscape groups and Earth Day. The goal is to create a safe and aesthetically pleasing environment for all residents. The POA has supported and funded all trail projects in conjunction with the Landscape Committee.

The newest nature walk opened in the Woodlands Park beginning at the dog park off Pepperbush Drive and ending at the Woodlands Park pond. The walk features both a Carnivorous Trail and a Pollinator Garden. The Pollinator Garden showcases natural vegetation that is important to birds and butterflies. The Carnivorous Trail is built along a pocasin, which is an evergreen wetland bog with sandy peat soil and woody evergreen shrubs throughout. Pocasins are generally found along the Atlantic coastline, particularly in North Carolina. The Carnivorous section of the trail features dozens of plants including venus fly traps, pitcher plants, iris, lilies and holly. The Woodlands pond is a fish habitat stocked with largemouth bass, bluegills, sunfish and carp.

The nature walk at Waterway Park begins at the bocce courts and ends at the marina dry dock boat storage. It is a shaded path along a water retention pond. The native plants along the walk are well marked.



### *The Founders Marsh Trail*

The Founders Marsh Trail is located behind the swimming pool. This trail was damaged by hurricane Florence and is now being restored. The trail is along the Beaver Dam Marsh, a tidal salt marsh where land meets marine waters. Salt marshes provide abundant food and cover for wildlife and nursing grounds for many species of fish and shellfish. Osprey, woodpeckers, painted bunting and clapper rail can also be seen here, and the trail features bird photo opportunities. St. James Birders have been instrumental in providing nesting boxes for birds and education to residents on the care of birds, both permanent and migratory. St. James Plantation is on the Atlantic Migratory Flyway.

The TOSJ is a Bird Sanctuary encouraging a safe, nurturing and supportive environment for both migratory birds and year-around bird species, following federal, state and North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission regulations.