

TOWN OF ST. JAMES WORK SESSION MINUTES
June 18, 2026

The St. James Town Council held a Work Session on June 18, 2026, in the Earl Dye Council Chamber. Mayor Toner opened the Work Session at 09:59 a.m.

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

Staff Present: Town Manager Jeff Repp and Town Clerk Jamie Burns

Staff Absent: Finance Director Pauline Haran

Others Present: 7 residents

Administration Update

a. *Public Comment Policy Review*

Mayor Toner opened a review of the Public Comment Policy, noting that the existing public comment policy had last been formally reviewed in April 2022. There have recently been resident requests to review the policy again, specifically requesting the ability to comment on agenda items at the beginning of meetings, rather than only at the end. Mayor Toner clarified that this request was distinct from general public comment, which allows residents to discuss anything whether on the agenda or not, and is why general public comment is traditionally held at the end of the meeting. She explained that if a comment period were added at the beginning of the meeting, it would be limited to agenda items only, while the general public comment at the end would be retained. The current policy allows for substantive items to be discussed during old/new business on the public meeting agenda and standard practice has been to open comment on agenda items involving an expenditure of funds.

Town Manager Jeff Repp noted that a resident emailed requesting the ability to comment on an issue prior to the council's vote. The concern being that existing policy, which defers to the mayor to determine whether an issue is substantive, is too restrictive, since a mayor could decide an item is not substantive and thereby deny public comment before a vote. Mr. Repp noted that he responded to the resident explaining that a request could be made to the Town Clerk, mayor, or any council member prior to the meeting's start if they wish to speak on a particular agenda item, and that such requests have never been denied previously.

Council discussed the merits of relocating general public comment to the start of meetings but found no compelling reason to do so. Councilor Miller cautioned that front-loading non-agenda commentary could distract focus from the items at hand. The council affirmed that the existing policy, which already permits comments on substantive and financial agenda items prior to a vote, is adequate. The consensus was that no formal policy change is needed; instead, language will be added to the published agenda and displayed on the council chamber monitors at the start of the meeting clearly informing residents that they may notify the Town Clerk prior to the start of any meeting if they wish to speak on a specific agenda item. Mr. Repp confirmed this change could be implemented at the next regular meeting.

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b. *Route 211 Speed Limit*

Mayor Toner provided an update on safety concerns along Route 211, including a history of accidents and near misses at the Town's main gate intersection (NC 211/St. James Drive). The Town had previously requested that NCDOT install flashing caution lights on either side of the traffic light at the St. James intersection to warn approaching drivers of an upcoming red light. The Town had been led to believe that it would be considered closer to project completion. Mr. Repp reported that NCDOT's current response indicated no changes to the speed limit and no plans for advanced warning lights, though they indicated they would look into what the current standard is for warning light installation.

Council discussion noted that the elimination of the traffic signal at Middleton upon completion of the overpass would effectively create a high-speed corridor from NC-17 to the main gate intersection, heightening safety concerns. Town Council also expressed frustration that NCDOT traffic counts do not appear to include the stretch immediately in front of the main gate, despite the volume of residential, visitor, and construction traffic entering and exiting the community. Mayor Pro Tem Board and Councilor Miller acknowledged that speed limit reductions are unlikely to be observed in practice and that advanced warning lights represent the more impactful request. Concerns were also raised regarding the Seaside Gate intersection. Although traffic volume is increasing a traffic signal has been denied three times.

The council directed staff to obtain gate traffic count data from the POA and accident data from Brunswick County, and to compile a formal written request to NCDOT for both a speed limit reduction to 45mph and/or the installation of caution warning lights. Mayor Toner indicated she would also address concerns with Senator Rabon and Delegate Miller at upcoming meetings. Mr. Repp suggested the documentation also be presented to the Rural Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) for inclusion in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) if funding becomes a factor.

c. *2026 Classification and Pay Study*

Town Manager Jeff Repp presented the results of the 2025-2026 Classification and Pay Study. He explained that it had been a substantial amount of time since the town last conducted a salary survey and position study. The town contracted with Cape Fear Council of Governments for \$3000, which subcontracted the work to the Piedmont Triad Regional Council, whose HR professionals generated the report. The study involved employees completing detailed position questionnaires which were reviewed through desk audits and meetings with staff. The resulting report established a recommended pay table with grades and salary midpoints representing current market rates for comparable positions in the region. For event center positions, comparables were drawn from the Raleigh-Durham area due to the lack of comparable roles locally.

The key finding was that all employees are currently compensated within their newly recommended grade. No employees were found to be below the grade minimum, which

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Mr. Repp noted as a favorable outcome in comparison to similar studies he has conducted elsewhere. However, all employees are below the midpoint, which the study defines as the market rate pay for the position, with the exception of a few event center specialist positions. The study provides a framework for progressively moving employees toward the midpoint through the existing performance evaluation and merit/cost-of-living increase mechanisms already in the Town's personnel policy.

Mayor Toner noted that the quality and thoroughness of this study was superior to the previous classification study the Town had commissioned. Mr. Repp indicated that the new pay table and employee grade placements would be formally incorporated into updated personnel policies to be presented to the council. He also advised that maintaining the pay table's relevance over time is essential to avoid the need for another full study within a few years. The NC League of Municipalities publishes an annual statewide pay survey that can be used for interim benchmarking.

The study, when adopted by the council, will be used to inform future personnel policy updates and merit-based progression plans. All implementation costs were noted to have been included in the adopted FY 2027 budget and that a resolution will be placed on the August public meeting agenda to implement the study.

d. *May 2026 Zoning Report*

Town Manager Jeff Repp reported that 15 total zoning permits were issued in May 2026, comprising two (2) new construction permits and 13 others, such as pool and fence installations and deck extensions. Mayor Pro Tem Board observed that the number of permits for home additions and upgrades appeared low given the age of some homes in the community. Town Manager Repp clarified that renovations that do not alter the footprint, height or external structure of a building do not require a zoning permit and would instead be captured under county building permits. He offered to request data on building permits issued in St. James from Brunswick County.

Town Manager Repp also provided a brief update on St. James North, noting that the engineers are expected to resubmit revised shopping center parcel plans to the Town by approximately July 8th, with a likely town sign-off by the end of July. Discussions have also begun regarding the road that will loop behind the Town Hall parking lot to connect the new development to the existing entrance on Route 211. Mr. Repp clarified that this road would cross over, but not provide access to, the Town's cell tower access road.

e. *May 2026 Wright Event Center Report*

Town Manager Jeff Repp presented the year-to-date Wright Event Center summary for January through May 2026. A total of 1,237 events were held during this period, generating \$51,208 in billed revenue, an increase over the comparable period in each of the prior four years. Of the year-to-date total, 1,048 events (approximately 85%) were Tier 1 non-paying resident activities.

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Mr. Repp informed the council that the Brunswick County Board of Elections had submitted its expected request to use the event center for early voting. Notably, the Board of Elections has agreed to pay the nonprofit rate per Town policy, for the use of the facility. Council received this development positively. Staff confirmed that resident groups that would be displaced during that period would be accommodated in alternate rooms. The Board of Elections also inquired about reserving space for the 2028 election cycle, but given the event center expansion timeline, they were advised to maintain an alternate plan.

Mr. Repp provided town council with a projected schedule for the event center expansion, which had been requested by Councilor Miller. He noted that it reflected both the engineering and construction timeline, which are subject to change.

Finance Update:

a. April 2026 Finance Report

Town Manager Jeff Repp provided several administrative updates under the Finance Update.

Mr. Repp reported that the Town's annual emergency preparedness seminar had been held the prior week with good attendance. Staff had subsequently met with the emergency management group and provided feedback, noting that the redundancy in speakers covering the same topic, a recurring issue in past years, had been meaningfully reduced.

Mr. Repp advised council of a new BEMC policy under which the installation of light shields on streetlights will now carry an approximate cost of \$180, billed to the Town. Previously, BEMC had performed this service at no charge. He proposed that going forward, the Town would pass this cost on to the requesting resident, collecting payment before formally submitting the installation request to BEMC. Mr. Repp noted that the Town typically only receives a half-dozen such requests per year and that not all requests are technically feasible depending on the fixture type. Council reached consensus that cost would be passed on to residents. Council discussion acknowledged that while streetlights are a public resource, it is a convenience for the property owner rather than a town benefit. Council directed staff to communicate the new policy to residents via the Town website and standard correspondence, and to collect payment from requesting residents before authorizing the installation with BEMC, as the Town is BEMC's billing contact.

Mr. Repp noted that the most recent Shredding Event of the year was held the prior weekend under difficult heat conditions. He acknowledged the town representative and volunteers. Planning for next year's schedule will need to account for the potential loss of the rear parking lot due to St. James North construction.

Additional items discussed included the following:

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- A.B. Denning will be replacing the carpet in the mayor's office on July 23rd.
- Summer Winds Patriotic Concert will be held on July 2nd at the Wright Event Center.
- Mayor Pro Tem Board raised a concern regarding inconsistency in street light fixtures on St. James Drive, specifically that an LED style light was recently installed to replace the light near the wooden bridge. This fixture does not have the required glass panel which is necessary to achieve adequate light dispersal on the road. Staff was directed to follow up with the BEMC contractor to ensure consistency with the glass-panel colonial fixture specification on St. James Drive. The six remaining lights in the Reserve neighborhood were also noted as pending completion. Town Manager Repp agreed to follow-up.
- Mayor Pro Tem Board announced that the Planning Board will begin meeting monthly starting August 4, 2026, with a primary focus on a comprehensive rewrite of the Town's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to modernize it and expand its commercial property provisions. Council members were encouraged to review the UDO and submit any notes on provisions that need to be updated. Town Manager Jeff Repp suggested that rather than council members reviewing the entire document now, the town's planning consultant, Wes MacLeod would produce work product section by section for the planning board to review monthly, and that those incremental updates could be shared with council for comment as they progress, building toward a final version that would go to public hearing. Engagement with Wes is on an hourly rate based on his contract, with the anticipated hours budgeted. Council requested hard copies of the UDO be made available as the document is difficult to review on the Town website.
- Town Manager Jeff Repp advised that the July 1st regular meeting agenda currently contains only two sets of minutes for the consent agenda and planning board appointments. Council discussed canceling the meeting for lack of agenda items.
- Councilor Barclay noted that the Town's Comprehensive Plan is nearing completion and offered to present an informational summary to the council when it is finalized, focusing on the three or four most significant areas of the plan.

Adjournment

Mayor Toner adjourned the Work Session at 11:22 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved,

Jamie Burns, Town Clerk

Jean R. Toner, Mayor