

TOWN OF ST. JAMES WORK SESSION MINUTES
July 16, 2026

The St. James Town Council held a Work Session on July 16, 2026, in the Earl Dye Council Chamber following a brief special meeting held at 10:00 a.m. A motion to open the Town Council Work Session of Thursday, July 16, 2026, was made by Mayor Pro Tem Jim Board at 10:04 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: State Port Pilot reporter Eliot Duke, Steve Stegman, President of the Brunswick County Beekeepers Association, David Vickers with St. James American Legion, and 7 residents

Administration Update

- a. *Honeybees & St. James – Councilman Board & Steve Stegman, President, Brunswick County Beekeepers Association*

Town Manager Jeff Repp introduced this item, explaining that approximately three weeks prior Councilman Board had forwarded an email from Steve Stegman—an independent general contractor and President of the Brunswick County Beekeepers Association—regarding a recurring honeybee problem within the St. James community. Mr. Repp noted that a preliminary review confirmed that North Carolina does consider public funds spent on bee management to be a legitimate public purpose, making the town eligible to participate financially if council chose to proceed. The item was placed on the work session agenda to gauge council interest before proceeding further.

Steve Stegman addressed the council, explaining that over the past two years he had performed 12 cutout operations in St. James—a process requiring significant structural work to remove established honeybee colonies from wall and roof cavities—at a cumulative cost of approximately \$32,000 to homeowners. Mr. Stegman stated that the root cause was the disappearance of natural "bee trees" as St. James has expanded, leaving swarms to seek alternative nesting sites such as homes and outbuildings.

Mr. Stegman's proposed solution was to place 12 deep brood boxes ("swarm traps") at strategically placed locations throughout St. James, preferably beneath American Holly trees, which attract foraging bees. Placing an attractively scented brood box nearby statistically increases the likelihood that a swarm selects the box rather than a structure. He noted that with 12 boxes spread across the community, the roughly half-mile radius coverage of each box would encompass most of the developed acreage.

Participating volunteer homeowners would monitor their box daily and notify Mr. Stegman upon detecting bee activity; he would then remove the colony at night and replace the box. The removal process is rapid, safe, and leaves behind only a small number of older forager bees. Once a colony is captured, Mr. Stegman would transfer it to beekeeping friends, cycling the town's boxes back into rotation. He stated the initial

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investment would be \$4,800 for materials, construction, and painting of the boxes, with no ongoing labor cost to the town. He confirmed that he makes no profit from the arrangement and that the primary motivation is reducing the number of costly and disruptive cutouts.

Councilor Bill Miller asked about recurring costs, and Mr. Stegman confirmed that beyond the initial capital investment, there were no costs for removal calls. He noted the boxes require repainting approximately every five to six years and that any future contracted replacement would likely involve a setup fee. Mr. Stegman acknowledged that bees cannot be completely controlled and that there was no guarantee of eliminating all cutouts, but that the program should significantly reduce their frequency.

Council discussion raised questions and concerns:

- Council members expressed significant concern about municipal liability, particularly given that boxes would be placed on private property rather than town-owned land. Mayor Toner questioned whether the town could legally fund a program sited on private property.
- Mayor Toner expressed a philosophical concern about the municipality entering the business of pest control on private property, drawing a parallel to mosquito or termite control programs.
- POA rules governing beekeeping would need to be addressed, as the POA—not the town—sets policy for activities within the plantation. Any program would require POA policy creation and potentially neighbor consent. Mr. Repp confirmed he had not yet contacted the POA, as he first wanted to gauge Council interest before deeper inquiry.

The Council agreed that no decision could be made at this time and that the following questions required resolution before proceeding: legal opinion from the town attorney on liability and the legality of funding activities on private property; clarification of applicable POA policies; and assessment of whether neighbor consent would be required.

Steve Stegman left the meeting at 10:32 a.m.

b. *Veterans Memorial Find a Brick Proposal – Mayor Toner & David Vickers, St. James American Legion Post 543*

David Vickers, representing American Legion Post 543, presented a proposal to install two granite "Find A Brick" locator stations at the Veterans Memorial adjacent to Town Hall. He explained that as the number of commemorative bricks in the memorial's sidewalks has grown, it has become increasingly difficult for visitors and family members to locate a specific brick. The solution is a QR-code-based digital locator system. Each granite stanchion (approximately 24" tall, 12" square) would display a QR code that visitors can scan to search for a brick by veteran name or sponsor, view the brick's engraved text, and identify its exact location within a labeled section of the sidewalk. The system requires no electrical infrastructure. The design height was chosen to accommodate both standing visitors and individuals in wheelchairs, providing ADA

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accessibility. Mr. Vickers noted the estimated cost of approximately \$4,600 for the two stanchions, fully funded by American Legion Post 543, with no cost to the town. Upkeep would consist of routine granite cleaning already performed for the memorial.

Mr. Vickers requested the Council approve the concept and installation locations and assist with publicizing the locator system. He confirmed that the Legion had not yet ordered the stanchions and wished to secure town approval before proceeding.

Council expressed unanimous support for the proposal and gave verbal consensus to approve the concept. Mr. Vickers was directed to coordinate the installation time frame with Town Manager Repp.

David Vickers left the meeting at 10:43 a.m.

c. *Rural Transportation Advisory Council Update – Councilman Miller*

Councilman Miller provided an update from his service on the Rural Transportation Advisory Council (RTAC), which operates under the Cape Fear Rural Planning Organization (CFRPO) and helps set transportation funding priorities across Brunswick, Columbus, and Pender Counties.

The most significant development from the prior week's meeting was that the CFRPO has proposed—though not yet finalized—that the third section of NC 211 (from Sunset Harbor Road back to NC 906) be designated a high priority in the next funding allocation cycle. Councilman Miller noted that the fourth and final section, connecting Sunset Harbor Road to US 17, remains unfunded. He provided context on the scale of the funding challenge: the three-county region receives a combined allocation of approximately \$130 million, while the third section of NC 211 alone is estimated at roughly \$95 million, leaving little room for additional projects. He emphasized that prioritization does not equal funding, and that the process repeats every two years as allocations are reassessed.

Councilman Miller noted that the primary criteria for transportation funding prioritization are congestion and documented safety hazards, with evacuation route considerations not formally weighted in the scoring model. Mayor Toner suggested this was a missed opportunity and proposed that residents could be encouraged to submit public comments in support of including evacuation route considerations in the prioritization criteria. Councilman Miller requested that the town send a communications blast to residents before the end of July—the public comment deadline—directing them to the relevant website to submit their transportation priorities and comments.

The Council also briefly discussed smaller-scale improvements already in progress along the regional highway network, such as the intersection improvement at NC 906 and Galloway Road in Bolivia, and a new traffic signal at NC 906 and Old Ocean Highway.

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Councilman Barclay raised a previously pending question about whether accident data from the NC 211 corridor—pre-construction—had been obtained to support a future request for a flashing light and reduced speed limit. Town Manager Repp indicated he was still awaiting data from the state police, noting that NCDOT had stated any incidents occurring during the current construction period would not count toward their review.

d. *June 2026 Zoning Report*

Town Manager Jeff Repp briefly presented the June 2026 Zoning Report. Eleven (11) total zoning permits were issued in June, including two (2) new residential constructions and nine (9) other zoning approvals. The 12-month rolling total stands at 32 residential new construction permits and 110 other permits. A question was raised about the status of the St. James North project. Mr. Repp indicated he anticipated a submittal for the CN1 parcel before the end of July, contingent on the lighting contractor completing their lighting plan submission, which had been targeted for July 8th. A separate question was raised regarding sewer calculations for the project. Mr. Repp indicated that he had not received any update on that matter.

e. *June 2026 Wright Event Center Report*

Town Manager Repp reported that between January and June 2026, the Wright Event Center hosted 1,467 events and generated \$54,159 in billed revenue, consistent with prior years and significantly higher than when records began in 2022.

Project Update

a. *Council Chamber & Event Center Technology Project*

Mr. Repp explained the delay in bringing a contract to the council. While the town had been working with firm "20/20" and had received a preliminary design proposal, consultation with the town's attorneys determined the project could not be awarded on a sole-source basis. The project falls into a category of information technology procurement, which requires public advertisement and an open solicitation process, though the town may specify equipment and is not obligated to accept multiple bids if only one is received. The RFP was advertised in the State Port Pilot on July 15. A site walkthrough is scheduled for July 29, sealed proposals are due August 17, and a contract award recommendation is targeted for the September 2 council meeting. Staff noted that the proposer would be required to submit a draft sample contract that can be modified after town legal review, as the town did not include a draft contract in the RFP.

b. *St. James Water Pressure Improvement Project August 2026 Update*

Mr. Repp reported the project remains largely on schedule, with a modest slip of approximately two weeks. The primary remaining item is the installation of a 16-inch check valve, whose delivery date has been confirmed as October 1, 2026, pushed back from the previously anticipated mid-September date. Most construction work inside the town—including valve connections and system looping at three locations—has been

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completed, and improvements at the water plant are finished. Once the check valve arrives and is installed, the contractor will conduct testing and start up the system.

Discussion touched on a note in the project documents that Brunswick County wants changes made to the 24-inch pressure sustaining valve, with design work pending. Mr. Repp clarified the distinction between the pressure reducing valve, pressure sustaining valve, and check valve within the system.

Council inquired about what residents should expect when the system goes live. Mr. Repp indicated the transition should be seamless—no boil-water advisory is expected—though residents in the more than 900 homes previously receiving below 40 PSI should notice a meaningful improvement in pressure. He noted that post-activation monitoring data would be available to verify actual versus theoretical pressure levels, which would enable the town to respond to any resident complaints with data. Council asked that residents receive advance notice of the go-live date. Mr. Repp estimated system commissioning in October, with full verification of pressures likely in November. He anticipated that those 900-plus homes that had been receiving below 40 PSI would see significant improvement.

c. Unique Places to Save NCLWF Grant Application & Schedule

Town Manager Repp reported that Unique Places to Save (UP2S) has submitted its resubmittal to the NC Land and Water Fund (NCLWF) for the St. James Boiling Spring Lakes Wetland Complex conservation project. Comments from the Land and Water Fund are expected by late August, with award announcements anticipated in October 2026. Council inquired whether the town had sent any supportive correspondence to state legislative contacts, such as Representative Miller or Senator Rabon. Mr. Repp noted that UP2S had not yet asked the town for additional solicitation letters. Mayor Toner and Mr. Repp agreed that a copy of the executive summary and a status update should be sent to Miller and Rabon's offices. Mr. Repp indicated he would follow up with UP2S to determine if formal solicitation letters were needed at this stage.

Finance Update:

a. June 2026 Finance Report

Town Manager Jeff Repp presented the June 2026 Finance Report on behalf of Finance Director Pauline Haran. Mr. Repp noted that while the numbers were not yet final, as bills from the prior fiscal year are still being processed, the report reflected the town's financial position as of July 15. Of particular note was the final payment of the Wright Event Center mortgage, meaning the town's buildings are now fully paid off with no current debt service obligations. The council noted this milestone with appreciation.

Additional items discussed included the following:

- After a brief discussion, the council reached consensus that January 21st was the preferred date to schedule the Volunteer Appreciation Lunch, as that date follows a scheduled work session, meaning all members would already be present.

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- Mr. Repp noted that he is working with McGill Associates to obtain a proposal for engineering and environmental permitting work to re-permit a new storm debris site, as the town anticipates transitioning to a new property in the coming year. He expected to have the proposal ready for the August council meeting.

Adjournment

Additional items raised before adjournment included a brief discussion initiated by Councilor Miller regarding concerns about a North Carolina House Bill related to the carriage of weapons in public buildings. Town Manager Repp indicated his understanding that the governor had vetoed the bill and that the legislature did not appear to have a supermajority to override the veto. Mayor Toner noted that the security camera system had been updated and expanded following a minor incident at the community center, which had revealed a gap in camera coverage. Mr. Repp confirmed the upgrade was complete.

Mayor Toner thanked members of the public for attending and adjourned the work session.

Mayor Toner adjourned the Work Session at 11:17 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved,

Jamie Burns, Town Clerk

Jean R. Toner, Mayor