

TOWN OF ST. JAMES WORK SESSION MINUTES
May 19, 2026

The St. James Town Council held a Work Session on May 19, 2026 in the Earl Dye Council Chamber. Mayor Toner opened the Work Session at 10:00 a.m.

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

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

Others Present: Jesse Thompson of 20-20, and 9 residents.

Administration Update

a. *Audio Visual Report and Presentation from 20-20*

Town Manager Jeff Repp introduced Jesse Thompson from 20-20, a Wilmington, NC based audiovisual integration firm, to present his findings and proposal for upgrading the town's audio-visual systems. Mr. Repp explained that the council had requested an opportunity to review the report and ask questions.

Mr. Thompson provided an overview of the existing problems and proposed solutions. He explained that during his assessment, he discovered the Town's facilities were operating in three different control platforms (Extron, Crestron, and a third system discovered during a secondary visit) which makes operations unnecessarily complex. He described Crestron as highly proprietary and noted there was no longer adequate local support for it. Mr. Thompson recommended replacing all existing platforms with Q-SYS, describing it as open, third-party friendly, and increasingly recognized as an industry leader.

Currently the Event Center and Council Chamber operate as two separate systems, but a proposal to connect both buildings with fiber optic cables and enterprise-grade switches, would unify them under one system while maintaining separate functionality for each room. Important pieces, such as network switches and main control devices, will be hard-wired. Mr. Thompson indicated that conduit exists between the two buildings, making connections easily feasible.

On the subject of display technology, Mr. Thompson advocated for LED wall panels over traditional projection, citing a significantly longer lifespan (100,000-hours vs. 20,000 for projectors) and a five-year warranty. He noted LED panels are modular, so a failed panel can be swapped out individually, minimizing downtime. Spare panels would be stocked either by the Town or held by 20-20 under a service agreement.

Mr. Thompson discussed the sound system improvements for the Event Center, focusing on speech intelligibility rather than concert-grade performance. He recommended JBL CBT series speakers specifically designed for spoken word and light music. The system would be divided into two separate systems to allow independent operation when the room is divided.

TOWN OF ST. JAMES WORK SESSION MINUTES May 19, 2026

Council discussed several topics in detail with Mr. Thompson:

- *Microphones:* The original proposal called for a quad-channel wireless system with four (4) handheld and four (4) lavalier microphones for the Event Center. The council determined they needed eight (8) channels to accommodate larger meetings and panels. Council requested the system be revised to provide eight (8) handheld microphones, four lavalier microphones, and four head-worn microphones.
- *Feedback Management:* Town Manager Jeff Repp asked about feedback preventions with multiple microphones in close proximity. Mr. Thompson explained that feedback is an understood phenomenon rooted in signal-to-noise ratios, and that proper room tuning, appropriate microphone selection, and staff training would significantly reduce the issue.
- *Cameras and Recording:* The system would include controllable pan-tilt-zoom cameras similar to the existing one in the council chamber, with preset scenes for different meeting configurations. For events like the Speaker Series where presenters pace, Mr. Thompson suggested programming wide “safety shots” to capture all movement, though he could also implement tracking systems that follow specific microphones or individuals (at additional cost). Discussion covered picture-in-picture capabilities for displaying both camera feeds and presentation content simultaneously. Mr. Thompson confirmed this was possible but would require manual operation unless someone was present to manage the switching.
- *Security and IT integration:* Mr. Thompson reported that the system would sit behind the Town’s existing firewall on an isolated network, keeping it segregated from staff networks. Guest access would be on a separate isolated guest network.
- *Power Conditioning:* Mr. Thompson assured Town Council and staff that all equipment would be downstream of Surgex surge protection, which he described as the best available, though he was careful not to promise complete lightening protection given the coastal environment.
- *Training:* Training would span approximately three (3) days total. Mr. Thompson emphasized their commitment to ongoing support and refresher training through service agreements. Mayor Toner emphasized the importance of also having a written user guide/instruction manual made available.

Regarding timeline, Mr. Thompson estimated 12-16 weeks for equipment delivery and 3 weeks total for installation, working one side at a time to maintain functionality. The installation would require closing the Event Center for approximately one week, with electrical work being the most disruptive aspect. Council and staff discussed the challenge of scheduling around the heavy fall event season and the need for firm installation dates well in advance. There was also discussion about coordinating installation during the low-activity period between Christmas and New Year when the Event Center traditionally has minimal bookings. Mr. Thompson agreed to tentatively hold that window.

Mr. Thompson noted that a service agreement would be included in a revised proposal. He also agreed to provide references. It would include same-day remote-response, 48-

TOWN OF ST. JAMES WORK SESSION MINUTES
May 19, 2026

hour onsite response for critical issues, remoted monitoring of Q-SYS and network infrastructure, two to three scheduled onsite visits per year, annual training, and stocking of mission critical parts.

Jesse Thompson and Lorna Brennan left the meeting at 11:07 a.m.

b. *Planning Board Candidate Statements of Interest*

Town Manager Jeff Repp explained that the town has a vacancy on the planning board for both a regular member and a second alternate member and has received letters of interest from several candidates. This was the second session for candidate presentations, as three others had presented at the previous public meeting. The following three candidates provided a brief statement at this meeting: Marc Fields, Barry Fulton, and Ed Kristensen. Heidi Heifetz withdrew her application.

Mr. Repp noted that one additional candidate was unable to attend either presentation opportunity and asked whether Council wished to invite her to the June meeting or to proceed. Council agreed they should proceed as to not delay the process further. Mr. Repp proposed having staff compile candidate information for council members to rank their preferences, which could then be consolidated for council consideration and decision-making.

c. *April 2026 Zoning Report*

Town Manager Jeff Repp reported that the town issued 13 zoning permits in April, including three (3) new construction permits. Over the last 12 months, the town has averaged 33 new residential permits and 105 other zoning permits.

d. *April Wright Event Center Report & Surveys*

Town Manager Jeff Repp presented the April 2026 Event Center report. The Event Center recorded 247 reservations in April, with 83% classified as no-cost Tier 1 resident activities. Year-to-date through April, the Center hosted 1,003 events and generated \$42,762 in billed revenue, tracking slightly behind the same period in 2025 but well above 2022-2024 levels. Survey responses for the period were consistently positive. Council noted that complaints, when they arise, are addressed immediately by staff and rarely escalate to written feedback. The quality of Event Center management was credited to current Event Center Manager Lorna Brennan and the foundation established by her predecessor, Steve Brennan.

Finance Update:

a. *April 2026 Finance Report*

Finance Director Pauline Haran presented the April 2026 finance report, noting the report was prepared through May 12 rather than the usual May 15 cutoff, meaning two notable items were not yet reflected: the monthly electric bill (estimated at \$36,000-\$38,000) and May sales tax. She confirmed that sales tax receipts collected by the state in March were received by the Town on May 15 in the amount of \$248,000. With 45 days remaining in the fiscal year, she reported the Town is under budget in all major departmental

TOWN OF ST. JAMES WORK SESSION MINUTES
May 19, 2026

categories, including governing and administration, town facilities, fire department, public safety, right-of-way and streets, environmental protection, and the Event Center.

Additional items reported:

- Scheduled replacement of carpeting in the mayor's office due to adhesive moisture issues
- Transfer of old Event Center televisions to the Emergency Management team in lieu of disposition via GovDeals
- Fire fee adjustment: The fire department revised its budget to reflect approximately \$28,200 in additional revenue from increased fire service fees, reducing the Town's direct contribution by the same amount. Mayor Toner explained the fire fee structure, noting that St. James charges the lowest fees among all 19 municipalities and volunteer fire departments in the county. The fee was raised, resulting in an increase of approximately \$50 per year for affected property owners in the unincorporated service area, primarily Arbor Creek.
- Staff confirmed payment of all outstanding BEMC streetlight invoices, with grant reimbursement to follow.

Councilor Barclay highlighted that July 1st marks three significant milestones: the start of fiscal year 2027, paying off the mortgage for the Town Hall and Event Center buildings, and implementing a tax rate reduction from 6 cents to 5 cents per hundred dollars of valuation. Ms. Haran noted that she would write the final mortgage payment around July 20th once the payoff figure is finalized.

Adjournment

Mayor Toner adjourned the Work Session at 11:40 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved,

Jamie Burns, Town Clerk

Jean R. Toner, Mayor