TOWN OF ST. JAMES
PLANNING BOARD MEETING MINUTES
September 1, 2026

The St. James Planning Board held a Meeting on September 1, 2026, at 9:30 a.m. in the Earl Dye Council Chamber at Town Hall.

Board Members Present: Chairman Bill Kozub, Vice-Chairman Marc Fields, Regular Board Members Duane Stewart, Richard Ishler, Trent Pohlar, and 1st Alternate Barry Fulton and 2nd Alternate Robert Arthur.

Others Present: Town Manager Jeff Repp, Wes MacLeod with Anchorpoint Planning, Town Council Representative Jim Board, and Assistant Zoning Administrator Jamie Burns

CALL TO ORDER

Board Chairman Bill Kozub called the Planning Board meeting to order at 9:28 a.m. A quorum was confirmed present.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Chairman Kozub requested a motion to approve the agenda as distributed. A motion was made by Member Richard Ishler to approve the agenda as submitted. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

Chairman Kozub noted that the consent agenda primarily consisted of the minutes from the August 4, 2026 meeting and requested a motion to approve. Member Duane Stewart made a motion to approve the consent agenda. The motion passed unanimously, with Chairman Kozub abstaining as he was not present for the entire August 4 meeting.

2nd Alternate Robert Arthur arrived at 9:29 a.m.

STAFF REPORTS

Consultant Wes MacLeod led the Board through the continuing review of ongoing UDO audit findings and draft revisions. He advised the Board that a new tranche of homework documents covering Articles 7 and 8 would be distributed within the following one to two weeks. Chairman Kozub requested that all questions and comments be kept focused on the specific items under review, with a goal of completing the session within two hours.

Draft UDO Changes:
Mr. MacLeod continued leading the board through a section-by-section review of the audit report, picking up where the August 4 meeting had left off in Article 9.

Key discussions included the following:

Article 9 – Design and Performance Standards (Loading Areas, Screening, Planned Building Groups

Loading Areas: Mr. MacLeod noted that many jurisdictions have moved away from including specific loading area requirements, preferring to defer to building occupant's needs. The board discussed whether hours of operation for loading and unloading could be regulated, with Town Manager Jeff Repp clarifying that such restrictions typically belong in a noise ordinance rather than the UDO's performance and design standards. The board reached consensus that loading area requirements should be left to the discretion of the developer or applicant rather than prescribed by the town.

Driveway Spacing and Screening: Mr. MacLeod noted that driveway spacing is primarily governed by NCDOT, which holds ultimate permitting authority. He also identified an overlap between screening requirements in Section 9.9 and Article 10 and recommended consolidating all screening standards into Article 10 to eliminate conflicts. The board agreed.

References to the non-existent Community Appearance Manual were also flagged for removal, with lighting standards to be incorporated directly into the UDO. The "Planned Building Group" and "cluster development" provisions were identified as redundant and confusing given existing conditional zoning mechanisms and were agreed to be removed.

Article 10 – Tree Preservation and Landscaping

Mr. MacLeod acknowledged that the current tree preservation language in the code is "fairly unclear" and requires meaningful revision. He noted two significant legal constraints: (1) G.S. 160D contains down-zoning provisions that limit a local government's ability to make development more burdensome, and (2) the General Assembly has been actively proposing that local governments without express special legislation should not be regulating trees. Mr. MacLeod indicated that the Town of St. James does not appear to have such special legislation. The board discussed the distinction between mandatory tree preservation standards, and those voluntarily negotiated through conditional zoning, as had been done for the St. James North development agreement.

Town Manager Jeff Repp noted that, within the existing community, the Property Owners Association (POA) effectively governs tree matters for residential property but does not cover commercial uses. Mr. MacLeod noted that the POA's private authority is a significant practical advantage, as it is not subject to the same statutory limitations as the town. However, concern was raised about the fifth gate development area, which was approved under a 2017 development agreement that did not incorporate conditional zoning standards. Mr. MacLeod and Mr. Repp confirmed that whatever language is in the UDO will govern that area and that changes to the UDO enacted after 2017 do not apply there.

The board agreed that Mr. MacLeod would draft tree preservation and mitigation language applicable to larger residential and commercial projects, aligned with standards previously established through the St. James North conditional zoning process. The existing five-year building permit delay penalty was identified as impractical and the board agreed for it to be removed. The Town's tree species list is to be updated and aligned with the species list developed during recent conditional zoning proceedings.

Regarding landscaping, Mr. MacLeod described the three components of a comprehensive landscaping standard: street yard standards, parking lot interior landscaping, and buffering between incompatible uses. He noted that the current code does not adequately integrate these three elements and that standards should be made cohesive and non-overlapping, so that trees serving one function can count toward another where physically appropriate.

Article 11 – Signs

The board agreed that the UDO should be updated to steer commercial signage toward monument signs rather than freestanding pole signs. Mr. MacLeod noted the preference is consistent with both regional practice and prior discussions during conditional zoning. Given that commercial development in St. James is just beginning, it was noted that few or no existing pole signs would be rendered nonconforming.

Discussion followed regarding appropriate height limits. Mr. MacLeod suggested a maximum height of 16 feet for monument signs adjacent to NC-211, consistent with the existing town entry sign, with a lower limit (10-12 feet) for signs in interior commercial areas where speed limits are reduced. The board agreed.

Member Duane Stewart raised the question of restricting light intensity for illuminated signs. Mr. MacLeod confirmed that provisions could be included to require shielded, externally directed lighting rather than internally lit or flood-lit signs.

Electronic message centers (EMC) and video-board signage were discussed at length. The Board noted that Section 11.4.5 of the existing code already prohibits flashing, oscillating, and electronically scrolling signs, with an exemption for government and public education signs displaying time and temperature. Mr. MacLeod cautioned that an outright prohibition carries legal risk and offered to research the matter further. The board also discussed temporary and portable signs, feather flags, wall signs, and the existing standard of one wall sign per building capped at 10% of the wall area.

Article 12 – Subdivision Standards

Mr. MacLeod identified several administrative items requiring update, including ensuring correct references to improvement guarantee terms. He also noted that discretionary conditions previously embedded in the code, such as the ability of the planning board to require a crosswalk in an administrative decision, are no longer permissible and must be removed.

The board agreed to remove the provision requiring corner lots to be 1.5 times the minimum lot size. Mr. MacLeod noted this was an unusual standard not seen in other codes and could create layout irregularities. Setback considerations and design practice already accommodate corner lot constraints.

Member Duane Stewart raised a concern about the length of cul-de-sacs, noting that some streets in the existing St. James subdivision are excessively long without secondary access, creating potential emergency access issues. Mr. MacLeod confirmed the current code allows a maximum length of 1,000 feet and suggested that this limit may already be longer than what many jurisdictions permit. The Board agreed that 1,000 feet remains an appropriate standard.

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Article 13 – Stormwater
The town is subject to the county's stormwater ordinance. The board briefly discussed the county's recent adoption of a 100-year storm standard for stormwater management, including an update to the UDO to codify that standard. A question was raised as to whether the town must independently adopt a stormwater management ordinance and Mr. MacLeod indicated he would seek clarification on this point.

Article 14 – Temporary Uses
Minor clean-up only, including removal of appearance controls for single-family model homes.

Article 15 – Lighting
The board confirmed the importance of downward-shielded lighting standards and the absence of uplighting. Mr. MacLeod recommended relocating the streetlight authorization provision (currently in Article 15.3) to the subdivision standards article, so that streetlight installation is treated as a required infrastructure element prior to final plat approval, consistent with how other subdivision infrastructure is handled.

Article 16 – Electric
Mr. MacLeod noted that having an electric section in the UDO is somewhat unusual and may be redundant with building code provisions. He committed to reviewing whether the section is necessary.

Draft UDO New Definitions
Wes MacLeod reported that numerous uses listed in the UDO's table are either undefined or redundant and require consolidation. For example, distinct listings for accounting offices, law offices, and similar professional services should be consolidated under a general "office" category. Similarly, retail sub-categories such as shoe stores and sports stores should be merged. He emphasized that these changes represent cleanup rather than fundamental rezoning.

Draft Redline Review of Articles 1-6:
Mr. MacLeod walked the board through the redlined draft of Articles 1 through 6. Key items discussed included the following:

- *Article 1 (General Provisions):* Administrative cleanup; the permitted use table reference is being relocated to the appropriate article. There was no significant discussion.
- *Article 2 (General Standards):* Dimensional standards are being relocated to the appropriate dimensional standards tables to prevent them from being overlooked. The loudspeaker/noise provision is proposed for deletion as the town may be in the process of adopting the County noise ordinance. The impervious surface limit provision is proposed for removal as redundant with state stormwater permits. The board affirmed that Brunswick County's building inspection department, not the town, issues certificates of occupancy.
- *Article 3 (Decision-Making Bodies):* A question arose regarding the UDO language providing that the planning board shall appoint a chairman. Council liaison Jim Board noted the mayor had previously expressed a preference to retain appointment authority

over the chairmanship. Mr. Repp and Mr. Board recalled that the mayor had voiced a preference, particularly regarding the town council serving as the Board of Appeals. Mr. Repp agreed to confirm the mayor's position before finalizing the language. Mr. MacLeod noted this could be easily adjusted. The role of the Board of Adjustment was discussed at length. Mr. MacLeod noted that the Town Council currently serves by resolution as the Board of Adjustment and raised the potential conflict that arises if the town itself wishes to be a party in a variance or appeal proceeding. Mr. MacLeod explained that the Board of Adjustment is expected to function as a neutral, quasi-judicial body independent of the legislative body. Town Manager Repp described the procedural safeguard already in use, whereby the council formally adjourns from its public meeting and convenes as the Board of Adjustment for relevant hearings. Mr. MacLeod suggested that the council could instead appoint a separate Board of Adjustment composed of qualified laypeople, though he and Mr. Repp both acknowledged the practical difficulty of finding and retaining qualified members willing to serve in that capacity. No formal action was taken; the matter was noted for further consideration. Mr. Repp agreed to seek clarification from Town Attorney Grady Richardson as to whether to establish a separate Board of Adjustment.

- *Article 4 (Development Review Procedures):* Key changes include clarification that a pre-application conference is not explicitly required; removal of the planning board from the variance review process (which is properly a Board of Adjustment function); and removal of the 12-month resubmittal limitation (no longer permitted under state statute). The board noted a potential conflict in the downzoning consent provisions between the general requirement and Section 4.3(d), which Mr. MacLeod agreed to correct. The board also discussed the 10-business-day completeness review period, with concern raised that it may be insufficient given staff workload. Mr. Repp noted that the state has been trending toward deeming applications approved if not reviewed within statutory timeframes. The board affirmed that special use permits are heard by the town council. The requirement for eight hard copies of special use permit applications was identified as outdated and the Board agreed that one original and one electronic copy should suffice, with the UDO administrator authorized to request additional copies as needed. A question was raised regarding the "unnecessary hardship" standard for variances and four-part criteria under Section 4.5.9, with particular discussion about the vague statutory language requiring that "substantial justice is achieved." References to the transportation impact analysis (TIA) were removed in deference to NCDOT for such review. The improvement guarantee provisions were noted as largely governed by statute, with the town retaining authority to specify which items may be bonded.

Council liaison Jim Board was excused and left the meeting at 11:07a.m.

- *Article 5-6 (Nonconformities & Enforcement):* Nonconformities and enforcement were reviewed without substantive objection.

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A broader discussion arose near the close of the meeting regarding the value of a separate community engagement document or wish list, separate from the UDO, that could communicate the town's development preferences to prospective developers. Mr. MacLeod clarified that this function is properly served by a comprehensive land use plan with a survey instrument and citizen feedback component. Chairman Kozub noted that the town's comprehensive plan should address these matters, and that conditional zoning already provides a mechanism for negotiating specific development outcomes. Mr. MacLeod noted that a structured public engagement document could provide developers with a useful roadmap of community priorities.

OLD BUSINESS
None

NEW BUSINESS
None

PUBLIC COMMENT
There was no public comment.

ADJOURNMENT
A motion to adjourn was made by Member Trent Pohlar. All were in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:37 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie Burns
(Asst. Zoning Admin. / Clerk)

Approved,

William Kozub
(Chair)