

ANNOUNCER: You've tuned in to another edition of The Break Room. A

weekly conversation about how the City of St Augustine

works from those who do the work everyday. Hosted by the

City of St Augustine's Communications Director Melissa

Wissel. The Break Room offers a closer look at the different

city departments and provides updates on current and upcoming

projects and events. And now your host, Melissa Wissel.

MELISSA: Welcome to The Breakroom. Thanks for tuning in. I'm

Melissa Wissel, Communications Director for the City of St

Augustine. This week, we're going to have a conversation

with one of the City of St
Augustine's Code Enforcement

Officers, Morganne Pratten. In
addition to her

responsibilities in the
downtown HP District responding

to general code enforcement
complaints, Morganne is also in

charge of short-term rentals.

So whether you like them or

not, they are probably here to
stay, so I've asked Morganne to

stop by and give us the 411. Morganne, welcome to

your first visit to the break
room. MORGANNE: Thanks. I'm happy to be

here. MELISSA: So, let's start. I always
like to start when we have a

new guest on The Break Room and
give us a background. Let's

start with the basics of Code

Enforcement. Your job,

the job of the department.

MORGANNE: Right. So, I'm one of three

Code Enforcement Officers and
basically, our job is to

enforce, it's pretty self
explanatory. Enforce the city's

codes, right? So, everything
from weeds and grass to

building without a permit and
everything in between. Trash

cans, anything that has a code.

We we it's our job to enforce

it. MELISSA: Do you get, it's more, I'm
going to say reactionary? MORGANNE: Yes. MELISSA: I

mean, you're not out.

You're not cruising the streets

looking for violations because

there's plenty to follow up on.

MORGANNE; No, there is plenty to follow up on. Unless it's something

that is a life safety concern, then obviously we will seek

those things out. But but no, we're not we're not like

strolling through your neighborhood measuring your

grass. You know, in our spare time. MELISSA: Looking for trash

cans that got left out after seven o'clock the next that

night after the trash collection. MORGANNE: 7:03. We're

knocking at your door.

No, we're not we're not doing

that so. MELISSA: And you have a supervisor, former Police

Chief Barry Fox is our
Enforcement Manager. MORGANNE: Right.

Barry Fox. He's a good guy.
He's really funny. He's fun to
work with. MELISSA: You guys stay busy
all the time. MORGANNE: We really do. We
do. I stay busy all the time. MELISSA: I
know Code Enforcement, when

Chief Fox retired. It was sort
of a really good fit because I
know when he was Chief.

They worked hard really hard
down at PD and they still do,
but really turning this into
not a law enforcement
arm. But truly like You just
said, enforcing the municipal
code. MORGANNE: Right. Absolutely. Yeah.

He, it it was such an easy
transition for him I think. And

he's someone that I've I've
really tried to mimic almost,

you know, in in the terms of
enforcement because he's just

after 30 years in law
enforcement, enforcement is so

ingrained in him, it just comes
naturally to him now.

So there's a lot of little
things that he you know does

that without knowing that I
tried to mimic. MELISSA: Right. And you

started out as Admin
Coordinator for Code

Enforcement and you transitioned over to an Officer.

MORGANNE: I did. Yeah. We had an opening

and I'd only been there for two
or three months and we had an

opening and I was like, well,

worst they can say is no.

Might as well try. MELISSA: So,
congratulations on

transitioning to that. But I'm
going to just get right into

this, I'm going to joke with you
and say you had to have drawn

the short straw. MORGANNE: The short-term rental straw. MELISSA: The newest
Code Enforcement Officer.

You're going to have the HP
District and then oh, by the

way, why don't we just let you
take over short-term rental?

MORGANNE: Yeah. It ought to has not been
as bad as it seems. It

really has not been, I mean it
it's been a challenge I will

say but it, you know, it's
nothing I don't think I can

handle. And it's been, I like a challenge. It it, you know,

exercises my brain muscles.

MELISSA: Well and so, short term rentals

tends to be a little bit of a hot topic or a hot button for

people. I think when short term rentals first came on, online if

you will, people started considering doing it. It was

like hey, I think I'll buy an investment property, rent it

out for a couple years, get some extra income. I

think people were also buying them with the intent that, oh

maybe I could downsize into this so, when I'm ready to

retire. But it's really taken on a whole different meaning. We

have this preemption
that that comes up a lot about

the state has rules that we
can't do certain things. Our

hands are tied. But give
us the the low down on like,

what are the bare bones of the
short-term rentals. What's, give give

give us the the 411. MORGANNE:

There you go. Jinx you owe me a coke. So yeah, so

honestly it's, you know, it's not
as bad as people think to seem

that it is. And there's two
things actually that I want to

say about what you just said.

The first thing was, I was

talking with Dustin this
morning about it and told him

that I was coming on the show,

and said if there's anything

that you want me to put out
there, and he made a very good

point. A lot of times people do
buy these properties for

investment purposes, or it's
their retirement or things like

that. And they just kind of go
on whatever the realtor tells

them, and I'm not saying that
realtors don't know a lot of

the time. But sometimes there's
factors that they don't know

that that inhibit you from
making that property a

short-term rental. And it's
nothing to do with zoning.

Usually, I mean, there's no
zones that do not allow

short-term rentals. But it's
it's more so with with life

safety inspections. For
example, in order to have a

bedroom, the technical code,
the building code is 70 square

feet with an egress, and it needs
to go to the outside. So,

there's gotta be a window that,
you know, goes to the outside

that's open, so that there's an
emergency people can get out. A

lot of times with short-term
rentals, there will be like a

bedroom in a loft or something,
and you can't make that a

bedroom according to our code,
because there's no egress to

the outside. So, things like
that that realtors sometimes

aren't so familiar with. That's

like the deep depths of the

codes, you know. So, I mean,

it's not their job to know that

really, but we always encourage

everyone to reach out to me or

Dustin or someone in Code

Enforcement and they'll get

you'll get a touch in touch

with me and I would love to

walk through it with you, for

sure. MELISSA: And Dustin, just to

clarify, Dustin is actually at

the Fire Department. MORGANNE: Yes,

Dustin Hamilton, he's the guy

that does the Fire Prevention

inspections. Okay. So, all of

the life safety inspections. MELISSA:

So, let's start with that. You

just said I just bought a

house. I want to make it a
short-term rental. I contact

you. I register. Tell me
the story. MORGANNE: Yes, so, there's a

process. So, you register on
the city's website and it's

actually very user friendly if
you go on to CityStAug.com, right? The very home page.
There's a big button right in

the middle that says short-term
rentals. So, you click on that.

It'll tell you everything that
you would like to know. You

have to have two inspections
done. You have to have an

inspection with me and also
Dustin. I do parking and

zoning inspections and then he
does the life safety

inspections. As soon as you

register, there's a a tiered

fee rate schedule that you pay

and it goes on, it's a flat fee,

plus a number of however many

number of bedrooms you have, it

goes off of that. So, but

that's all on there as well.

So, you pay that fee and

usually within a day or two,

Dustin will reach out to you

and schedule your life safety

inspection and your parking and

zoning. We come together. It

takes, if you have everything

ready, it it literally will

take you three minutes to do

and that's it. I mean and and

then when we go back, we sign

off on it and say, yes,

everything's good and then
you're active and approved and

you're good to go. MELISSA: And the
inspection checklist. Yes. Is

someone saying, well, what does
that mean? You come and

inspect. There's a checklist.

MORGANNE: Right. So, what I am looking

for with parking and zoning
inspections is really just

number one, I want to make sure
that you understand your zoning

and what that means with your
intensity of use, how many

times you can rent it out.

There's, I mean, in the HP

districts, you can only rent
out once a month. One

tenant, one transaction per month is what we say. RS 1

and RS 2 seems to be very very common of course because

it's the right areas that people want to stay in.

Those are generally one week or greater. So, that doesn't mean

like they have to rent for seven days. It just means one

transaction per seven day period. And then of

course I'm looking for parking. And we go by what's the compact

car size which is eight by eighteen. So we're looking for

one parking spot per bedroom. So if you have two bedrooms

you need two parking spots on site. And then Dustin with

the life safety inspection.

He has a whole list, actually

brought a list of stuff just to

kind of go over it. He's

looking for things like the

address that's plainly visible

on the outside, smoke alarms, carbon

monoxide detectors, fire

extinguishers, exit signs,

emergency lighting, egress

windows, which we talked about,

and emergency evacuation plan.

Things to just make sure

that the property is safe in

the event of an emergency

because these people aren't

familiar with your property and

sometimes in these old houses,

they have lots of, you know,

caddy cornered bedrooms and

long hallways and it can be
confusing. MELISSA: Excellent. If you're

just now tuning in, you're
listening to The Break Room. We

have Morganne Pratten with us
this week in studio. She is one

of three Code Enforcement
Officers and we're talking

short-term rentals, vacation
rentals, call it what you will.

You were just mentioning the
safety inspection and I want to

go back to you were talking
about street address. But

let's talk about that for a
second because. A

couple years ago, it was kind
of a thing. Making sure

that your house is clearly
labeled with the address, but

you're also not even just
talking about it being clearly

labeled which is. A part
of the rules. But is you

can't just flat label your
address.... MORGANNE: Slap a number. MELISSA: and call it A, B, half.

MORGANNE: Right. That is
something that we're running

into a lot. A lot of people
have like a mother-in-law suite

in the back of their property
that they want to make a

short-term rental and they'll,
let's say their address is, I

don't know, 15 and that
mother-in-law suite, they'll

just put an A on it. So, it'll
be 15 A and then they'll

register it as 15 A. There's
actually a whole process that

you have to get your address
validated, and it's actually

through 911 mapping, it's it all
comes back to safety. If

there's an emergency in your
mother-in-law suite, you know,

we don't want to be searching
for 15 A when there really

is no 15 A, you just made
it up. Now, I mean, our

firefighters smart enough to
find it, probably but you know.

MELISSA: Probably that thing in the
backyard. Yeah, with flames coming out of it. MORGANNE: I'm sure they
could literally find the fire.

But you know, just better safe
than sorry really. So, we know

for sure that they can get to
you. So, it's actually through

911 mapping. You call, I have
the number actually. The

non-emergency number is 904 - 825 - 1098 if you want to
get that as a valid address for

your short-term rental. And
that's the phone number to the

Fire Department 805 - 1098. Again,

this is just to make sure, if
you're putting together an

outbuilding or a a part
something on your property that

is actually a separate building
that you're wanting to number.

It's not like they're going to
say no. It's just a formality

of making sure that it's
labeled. MORGANNE: Right. Exactly. Yup

and that goes for your regular
house too. There there should

be four technically it, the code
says four-inch numbers in a

contrasting color, so that if
there is an emergency, you

know, they can find you. MELISSA: Easily
find your house. MORGANNE: Easily find

your house. MELISSA: Yeah. I don't want
them driving by if they've

got an emergency. MORGANNE: Right. And
it's not always a fire. MELISSA: It

could be a health emergency.
Somebody falls down so.

Let me go back a second. We
were talking about the

registration process. Do I
register any time of the year?

Do I renew? How does that work?

MORGANNE: Yes. So, you can register

anytime of the year. If, you
know, you really look into it.

Honestly, it would behoove you
to try to get as close to

October as you can. That's
not to say you can rent it out

anytime and then just register
it in October. Try to get it

towards October because every
October 1st, your

registration is going to it's
going to expire and then you

have until the 31st to renew
it. So, every October 1st,

you're going to have to renew
it. If you pay in August,

you're going to have to pay
again in October. So, if you

want to avoid that, it's not

prorated unfortunately. We try

to make sure everybody gets
registered in October and so

that, you know, that way it's
just, you get a whole year out

of it, so to speak. MELISSA: When I renew
is it really just a renewal? Do I

have to do the reinspection? MORGANNE:
You're going to have to have

another life safety inspection.
Dustin will come out just to

make sure that everything is
the way that it was a year ago.

But as far as parking and
zoning, no we don't come back

out for that, unless there's
some kind of issue that we've

heard of. MELISSA: If I register, does
that mean I have to have that

inspection within October

31st? MORGANNE: No. No. MELISSA: Okay. Cuz

that's the other thing I think

people freak out about. MORGANNE: Yes.

There's too many of them.

Honestly, right now, I just

looked this morning. We have

623 registered short-term

rentals. Within the city.

So, that's too many, obviously,

for 1 month. So, Dustin

spreads them out throughout the

year. So, you can schedule

it for any time. He'll,

he's very good about working

with you. Usually it's

within that day or so. And

this was the other thing I

wanted to say. I said I had two

things. The good news about

having a short-term rental next
to your house. I think everyone

hears horror stories but those
are kind of few and far

between. The good news is
you do have to have those life

safety inspections. So, if there
was an emergency with someone

in a short-term rental next to
your house, at least you know

that they have the proper, you
know, avenues in place to have

everybody the safest as
possible. You know, if

somebody just moves in next to
you and they throw parties all

the time, you know, we don't
know that they've had a life safety

inspection. So at least

you can say that that you know

it's safe and you know that

that we've been in and we've

seen it and it's, you know,

deemed a safe place. MELISSA: A safe place. Right. And

you also mentioned, and I

want to just make a reminder,

depending on where the property

is. If you've got a

seven-day rental period, which

is your residential. MORGANNE: Right. RS1

and RS 2. If you've got

somebody in there only for

three or four days, they can't

rent to another party, and it

could be an extension of that

same transaction. You mentioned

transaction. So, I could go for

three days, you're my

sister-in-law, I'm going to
leave, you could come pick that

up for the next four days of
that seven day. But if I'm done,

I'm done. MORGANNE: Right, it's vacant. And
it's vacant yeah and like let's

say we're talking about
specifically RS1 which was,

which is seven days or greater.
So if you come in and and your

sister-in-law comes in and
she's here for two days, right.

You don't charge her to stay,
there she just stays there

because you know her, that
doesn't count as a

transaction. We're we're
looking for an actual

transaction where you've
advertised, they've paid you

money, and that counts as a transaction. So, I would say you know, one tenant per week is what I usually tell people.

And if they stay for 2 days, that's okay. You just can't

rent out for another five, you know? And that falls

also to the owners. It's kind of governed accordingly. They

set their own seven days. We don't have a specific Sunday to

Monday that they have to choose. It really goes

off of schedule. So, which is good. It's flexible for people

that stay. MELISSA: And for the most part, it's a positive thing.

People are doing right. There's a few out there that cause a

little bit of problems, but
you're having a good time with

it and. MORGANNE: I am surprisingly. It's
I'm enjoying it. Yeah. So, it

keeps me busy. MELISSA: Well, we are out
of time. Great having

you and I think you've brought
up a good point. We'll get

Dustin in here to talk a little
bit more about those life

safety. MORGANNE: For sure, thank you so much.
MELISSA: Well, we want to keep you

informed about what's happening
in and around the City. You can

catch us now on your favorite
podcast app. Look for us at

CityStAugRadio. com.
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addressing projects and

programs offered by the City of

St Augustine. Join us each

week as the City's

Communications Director, Melissa

Wissel, has in-depth

conversations with the people

who make our town work to meet

the needs of our community. The

Break Room is produced by

Communications Specialist for

the City of St Augustine,

Cindy Walker. See you at this

time next week for another

edition of The Break Room.