

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 Break Room.
Thanks for tuning in. I'm

Melissa Wissel, Communications
Director for the City of St

Augustine. Recently, the City
of St Augustine has proposed

an amendment to the
comprehensive plan to create a

new land used category relating
to a concept called mobility

oriented development or MOD.
Along with this new land use

category, a compatible zoning
district would be created and

inserted into the city's zoning
code that would outline how

this new land use category can
be used. And if that sound a

little confusing to you, don't
worry, keep listening because I

have Amy Skinner in studio with
me this week. Amy is the City's

Planning and builder, Planning
and Building Director and she's

here to tell us what all of

that really means. Amy, welcome

back. AMY: Thank you. Thank you for
having me. MELISSA: We've got a lot to

talk about. It's a little bit
complicated. So, we're going to

take it slow and if we need to,
we're going to have you come

back and finish the
conversation. AMY: Sounds great. MELISSA: So,

how my first question, how did
we get here? With Mobility

Oriented Development. AMY: Well,
it's pretty interesting.

This JTA and other agencies,
state and regional agencies, are

really talking about putting a
rail station in St

Augustine. Originally there
were two locations that they

were looking at. One at the
near the intersection of King

Street and US-1 and 1 a
little bit north where the FEC

Railroad kind of.. MELISSA: Up there by
Winn Dixie? AMY: Up there by Winn

Dixie. Yeah. Just just south of
Winn Dixie. Over time,

they've narrowed it down to
looking specifically at the

King Street and US-1
intersection mainly because you,

they need a certain amount of
density, certain amount of

walkability within the transit
state, nearest transit station.

So, they've look, they also
looked at sixteen potential

locations all the way up to
Jacksonville and for this

initial study, they have a
one-million-dollar grant where

they're kind of doing an
initial outreach and discussion

talking to people and
looking at actually four

locations. The kind of anchor
location at King Street and US-1

in St Augustine,
Racetrack Road area, the

Avenues area, and then downtown
Jacksonville. So, we will, it's

a commuter rail to connect us
to Jacksonville. MELISSA: And all four

of those could be or would be
stations. AMY: Yes. MELISSA: Not one or the

other. AMY: No, I think those are
the first four. Part of

the first phase of what they're

thinking seriously for this

commuter rail. MELISSA: And this isn't
really a new conversation. No, I

mean to us it may sound new, but
this is kind of been something

going on for a while. AMY: To be
honest the, our region is being

forced to look at mobility
options, because I95

the Federal Government is
saying I95 is at

maximum capacity. There's only
a certain amount of right away

that can be widened. The last
section, as I understand, it is

basically from St Johns
County through downtown

Jacksonville that can be
widened. Once that's widened,

that's it. 95 will be. MELISSA: No more lanes. AMY: No more lanes. So, we

are being forced to a certain extent to look at mobility

options and the next best option right now is looking

like transit and commuter rail because there's existing right

of way along the railroad tracks that can be used. It's

wide enough. They can do it. South and Central Florida are

already looking at different commuter rails and rail options

for transit. And so ultimately, we would be connected, who

knows? All the way to South Florida. All the way to

Jacksonville. Maybe even to Tampa the way things are going

eventually. MELISSA: So this transit

idea, too, in terms of like you

just said, it's already there.

The rail is already there.

So it's just a matter of

modifying or using it for this transportation

option. AMY: And they look for, I

guess, really, in the future,

to the future, traveling by

independent vehicles, cars is

not sustainable. MELISSA: You, I mean,

you look at big cities,

Atlanta, New York. Chicago, LA, all the, all those

places have these transit

systems. We're just, we need to

get up with how modern

transportation options work.

We're not this little

small town anymore, as we all

know. AMY: And Florida needs to adapt. I mean, the reality is

Florida's boom in the 50s, 60s was when the when vehicles

were. Kind of a the first priority, the first

option for transportation and that's what people like to use.

So we're basically retrofitting Florida. To fit into the

future. MELISSA: Well and so. And and so so like you say, retrofitting. We

have, talking about, before we get on to what the MOD is.. We

already face these transportation challenges. We

have concerns in the city, so this almost seems like we're doing ourselves a favor to kind of get

with the program? AMY: Yes, you

know, throughout the update to
the Comprehensive Plan which

really was a two-year process
between 2018 and 2020. You

know, the reality is we talked
about trying to control our own

destiny, trying to, you know,
recognize that we're being

impacted by the county, as well.
That you know, usually urban

boundaries are intended to
protect rural areas from cities

expanding out. But in fact, is
we have the county growing

around us and we are kind of a
little urban.. MELISSA: They're coming in. AMY:

Coming in. And at the time, I
imagine it's gotten higher. But

18% of the traffic that
was driving across the Bridge

of Lions in 2018
were just passed through cars.

County people basically driving
through the city, not stopping,

not whatever. But log, you know,
creating a log jam in the City,

as as well as tourists and and
locals. MELISSA: Which makes you think

about, you and I might not drive
around 312 to get to the bridge,

or excuse me 312 to get to the
beach, but people come in

through the city almost as like,
oh let's just drive through.

Like you're going to
drive through downtown wherever,

and it's just a little pass
through, so that's that's one of

our problems, too. If you are
now just tuning in you are

listening to The Break room.

I'm Melissa Wissel,

Communications Director for the
City and I have Amy Skinner

with me today. She's the
Planning and Building Director

and we're talking about a
mobility orient - Mobility

Oriented Development. It's
something that the City is

considering putting into the
Comprehensive Plan. It's a land

use category and the reason why
that's important is we don't

have that. Category. I
think maybe people don't

realize if you want to build

something, what you want to

build has to match what's
intended in that space. AMY: Right

and the Comprehensive Plan is a
document that is supposed to

plan out to 2040. So as
we look forward to 2040 and

we're you know trying to
promote alternative forms of

transportation and we have the
fact that that we're going,

there's going to be a transit
station or a rail station in,

you know, at that location, you
know, as much as we can tell

probably. Then we have
to have sort of options that

deal with the land use issues
and deal with the zoning issues

to create an environment where
that can be successful. And you

were talking about density and
mixed-use projects and you

know, the Kings, West King
Street corridor. Most, the

City's really foundation and is
kind of mixed use. We, most of

our categories are mixed use.
So, we're trying to promote a

mix of residential, types of
residential uses and mix of

commercial uses. We have an
affordable housing problem. One

of the issues that factors into
affordability is the cost of

commuting. So, if we don't have
multiple you know, levels of.

Housing options that
maybe you, someone can live in

close enough proximity where
they can walk downtown to their

job or they can ride a bike to
their job or they can catch a

circulator to their job. You
really are reducing their

housing cost because you're
taking the cost of

transportation out, which
reflected with gas prices and

things like that. If you're
driving in from Palatka, if

you're driving in from Flagler
County, you know, that is...

MELISSA A lot. Because it adds up right? AMY: It
adds up. MELISSA: And this, so for us, for

the purposes of our
conversation here, this Mobility

Oriented Development, if it were

to be implemented as a

category. We'll call it this
land use category and then the

zoning.. what are, just give us a
little bit, as I, because we're,

we don't have a whole lot of
time left, because you're

going to come back, but why is a
Mobility Oriented Development a

good thing on that corner or
anywhere else? Because this

doesn't just apply to just
this. AMY: Right, it could be

applied in other areas. First,
you know, one of the main crux

of the Mobility Plan is to
encourage peripheral parking

garages. So, we want people
that can park outside of the

City and use another form of
transportation to get into the

downtown to use the peripheral
parking garage. We are trying

to promote alternative forms of
transportation. So, you you

can, if you live there, then,
you can feasibly walk downtown,

you can or you can ride a bike
downtown, or as I already said

catch, you know, the circulator
that's coming is coming. And

there's going to be different
you know, routes, different

routes... It's... we're trying to
promote economic development in

areas of the city that need it
and that, you know, keep a

diverse economy. So we know that
tourism is a big part of our

economy, but another thing we
talked about in the updating

the comp plan, was trying to
figure out how we can control

our own destiny and keep a
diverse economy, other types of

job workers. You have the solar
stick place. You have the, you

know, chocolate factory. You
have, you know, different ways

where restaurants... MELISSA: Breweries.
AMY: Breweries. MELISSA: Yeah. Delis. Yeah.

AMY: Right. Spreading out you, know
keeping, our economy and keeping

a diverse, attracting a work or
workforce. That can live

here and work as well. So it
needs to be walkable. It needs

to be mixed use. It needs to

be a mix of residential and

commercial and preferably
within, kind of, you're looking

at a walking distance within
the transit facility, like a

quarter, eighth, quarter mile, one
third of a mile. Basically a

10-minute walk is where we
would be looking to concentrate.

MELISSA: So that if I lived if I lived
nearby I could walk, I could I

could really live nearby walk
to the transit station, and work

downtown Jacksonville.

Or work at the Avenues Mall or.

Work up near racetrack.

AMY: The opportunity as a planner,

the opportunity is really
exciting. You know, it's it's

you know, again, we've been
considered kind of the urban

area of of St Johns County.

We're feeling a little

overwhelmed right now because
St Johns County has grown so

much. But if we can take an
opportunity to kind of set our

own standards and, you know,
help ourselves, help the

people that live here.

Ultimately, if we can make the

road safer by getting some of
the vehicles off the road and

that they're safer for
pedestrian traffic, you know,

bicycle traffic, and local
traffic, then that helps balance

our quality of life, our
livability, and that, and those

other issues. MELISSA: And that would be
my next question about

livability, quality of life,
but we're going to have to

pause here. So the MOD, I
really appreciate you coming in

to talk about this. I'm
going to I'm going to make this

pronouncement now that this is
going to be part one of a part

two, and I'm going to have you
come back. Because we are

talking about this Mobility
Oriented Development. Why it

benefits us from a
transportation aspect, but then

also as you just started to
talk about economic development

and managing our quality of

life, you know, we have a vision

plan that the city sort of
tries to keep in line with, and

one of those is is livability.

So when you come back, we'll

talk about livability. And thank
you for all the work that

you've done on this. You spent
two long years on that Comp

Plan. AMY: Thank you. I appreciate
that. It was really kind of a

labor of love. MELISSA: Well and I'm
glad that we're able to to

continue to follow up with that
and incorporate this MOD somehow

into our Comp Plan and and
adapt and adjust to what what's

coming in the future. AMY: Thank
you. MELISSA: If you missed part of this

broadcast and want to go back
and listen from the beginning,

you can now find us on your
favorite podcast app. Look for

us on Spotify, Apple Podcast
Spreaker, and more. You can

find a complete listing at CityStAugRadio.com. Remember,

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Twitter, and Instagram @CityStAug. Thanks for tuning in,

until next time. ANNOUNCER: You've been
listening to The Break Room, a

weekly program 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

Communication Specialist for
the City of St. Augustine, Cindy

Walker. See you at this time
next week for another edition
of The Break Room.