

ANNOUNCER: You've tuned into 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: Hello and thanks for tuning in. You're listening to The

Break Room. I'm Melissa Wissel, Communications Director for the

City of St Augustine. Today, I'm happy to welcome to The

Break Room for the first time,

Firefighter Dustin Hamilton. He

is the City's Fire Safety

Inspector for the St

Augustine Fire Department. Which

means he's in charge of

inspecting everything from old

buildings, new buildings,

construction projects, schools,

events at Francis Field, and

all those short-term rentals.

Among other things. Dustin,

welcome to The Break Room. DUSTIN: Oh,

thanks for having me. MELISSA: You're a

very busy man. You're, you've

started out in our department

as a Firefighter. Give us, give

us a little backstory. This is

your first time with us, we're

happy to have you. DUSTIN: Yeah, so

I've worked in local government  
basically since I was 18 years

old. Started out, I used to  
live in Gainesville, but I

worked for Bradford County,  
Florida, rural county, small

town. I've started out there  
right out of high school,

working at the Property  
Appraiser's Office and I did a

little bit of drafting, data  
collecting, appraisal stuff. And

then I was, I knew I Wanted to  
transition into public safety.

And I got an opportunity to  
move over to take on emergency

management planning. I did that  
for about two, two and a half

years. That was that was

really good and I got to the

point though where I I wanted

to go to the fire service. I

was I felt like I was too young

to sit in an office and had too

much energy to set in an

office. So I was kind of

going stir crazy. That was a

big job for me though at

emergency management. When I

took that position at the time.

I was, I was told, the youngest

planner in the State of Florida. I

was I think 20, 20 years old.

MELISSA: Wow. DUSTIN: I took that. So that that

was a big. MELISSA: And emergency

management is a big, it's big.

If you don't, if you don't know

a lot about it. I didn't

know a lot about it until I came. DUSTIN: Yeah  
you're it's a lot of, a lot of

planning and obtaining  
resources during major

emergencies, for people that  
aren't really aware. You're not

running calls, 911 calls  
or anything. But if there's big

hurricane or wildfire, you  
know, they're they're the folks

that are able to organize the  
chaos of all those resources,

other departments and entities  
that are going to be coming in

to help. So, that was a big one  
for me. And then after that, I

ended up going to fire school  
and worked for my first job at

the time when I got out of

school. It was super hard to

get a job. We were in a recession, not many people

were hiring. More of them were laying off than anything. So,

went to work for City of Ocala Fire Department. Great place to

work. And stayed there for maybe a year. My my intentions

were never to stay there just because I was fixed to get

married. We knew we weren't going to stay in the

Gainesville area or Ocala. So we ended up moving up here and

I've worked for City of St Augustine now for almost 12

years. Yeah so. MELISSA: Wow. And now you're a Fire Safety Inspector.

DUSTIN: And now I'm a Fire Safety Inspector. You know, one of the

things going into it is I knew that I would transition back

into a administrative role, that was goal from from day one. And

I planned on doing it later in my career than I currently

have, but because you know, the City Fire Department's a

smaller department. Those opportunities don't come up

very often. Like, if you worked at a larger department like

Jacksonville or whatever, that they're more ready, readily

available to you. So, the opportunity came up when

Abby got promoted to Fire Marshall, that was one of the

other things too. Me and Abby's  
always work well together. And I

knew it would be a pretty easy  
transition. It's a great fit.

Yeah, it was a great fit for  
me. We get along great. Both of

us are, you know, learning new  
things every day. So, it's and

part of that learning is been  
with the short-term rental

program. That's a pretty young  
program. It's about I think two

years old now. MELISSA: I think she  
kind of started that up with

Chief Growick. DUSTIN: She did. MELISSA: She was here and  
so tell us about that. DUSTIN: Yeah so

part of the process when you  
register to say, you have a

property that you want to turn

into an Air BnB per se is

basically what a short-term  
rental is. You have to

register through the City. Part  
of that registration process is

to get a life safety inspection  
done from the Fire Department.

You'll fill out your  
inspection request form during

that process and it comes to me  
and then I'll call you up and

we'll go through and try  
to figure everything out for

you. MELISSA: It's a checklist? DUSTIN: It's  
it's it's a checklist for the

most part. It's, you know,  
it's make sure you've got a

fire extinguisher on every  
floor. The fire extinguisher

needs to be at least a 2 A  
10 BC rated fire extinguisher.

And these are things, too, if  
anybody's listening and they're

wanting, thinking about you know  
starting their own short term

rental. You know, give me a  
call. You know, you can look on

our website. My number's on  
there, that's should be my work

cellphone number. But give me a  
call. You know, and I'll go

through that process with you.  
For the most part, vast

majority of the inspections  
that I do, they're, they pass. or

there it's easy for them to  
pass. MELISSA: Okay. DUSTIN: But there is

some cases and also when I'm  
saying that is give me a call

if you're planning on buying  
that piece of property before

you pull the trigger on it.

Because we have had

several cases of, you know, the  
real estate agent tells them,

yes, this can be a short-term  
rental. Which is technically not

a lie, but you haven't passed  
your inspection yet. And so,

we've ran into cases, where so  
every bedroom has to have two

means of escape. One  
of those could be, you know,

the normal way you would get  
out your your stairs. The other

way would be like an emergency  
of means of escape. So, you

need to have a window. And we've

ran into multiple cases where

people don't have windows. So. MELISSA: Okay. This room that I

thought was going to be a  
bedroom or. Right. I can't or.

DUSTIN: Yeah or it's a small townhouse,  
and then here lies the problem

of alright, now you're not  
allowed to cut a hole into that

wall to put a window in. So now  
this person's just spent you

know, several hundred thousand  
dollars on a piece of property

thinking, hey I'm going to be up  
and running in a couple weeks.

And that's not the case. Now  
you're kind of stuck. MELISSA: Yeah. If

you're just now tuning in  
you're listening to The Break

Room. I have Dustin Hamilton

with me in studio this week. He

is our City's Fire Safety  
Inspector. We're talking about

short-term rental inspections.

Things that you need to be

aware of, and maybe things that  
you're not thinking of, or you

haven't been made aware of.

Let's keep the conversation

going. You're talking about  
call before you buy even. DUSTIN: Yeah.

MELISSA: Cuz you're we are seeing a lot  
of folks, even if they're

locally residing locally, they're  
trying to buy an investment and

turn it into that. So I  
wouldn't, I guess I wouldn't

have thought of call you first. DUSTIN:  
And I'm going to do whatever I

can to get out there to try to  
help you out before, you know,

before you pull the trigger on  
it. You know, it it, is it in my

job title that I'm supposed to  
do that? No, not technically. But

I also get it, if you're fixing  
to drop several hundred thousand dollars on an

investment property, it would  
be nice to know. The thing is,

is, is every city, county, and  
municipality, they all handle

this a little differently.

You know, the way we

kind of look at it here, this  
is a historic city, we look at

the short-term rentals is  
basically you're a, you're a

mini hotel. You know,  
and when some people get

aggravated, it's a little  
harder to get approved to be a

short-term rental here. But it's  
only because the area that

you're in. We look at it as like  
a a hotel... With being a hotel

though, they have stringent  
inspections that are not done

by just us, it's the state,  
whatever that corporation is. A

a lot, laundry list of things  
that it takes for them to do.

And we have, just you know, a  
short checklist of things. If

you do everything on that list,  
it's for the most part,

it's pretty inexpensive. MELISSA: And it  
doesn't take a long time? DUSTIN: It

doesn't take a long time, you

know. And I'll help you out is

is the best I can, you know, as far as  
getting you approved. With

saying that. I also, it does not  
mean that I will come to your

house and put up everything. MELISSA:  
Just green light

everything right? Yeah. DUSTIN: I mean, I  
have had that a couple times

where of tell of like, yeah I'll  
I'll help you with this and

I'll show up and they got a box  
full of emergency exit lights,

exit signs, and they're like,  
alright you, I was like I was

like, MELISSA: Are you ready? DUSTIN: I've, these are supposed to  
be like 15 - 30 minute long

visits and and I'm on to the  
next one. so but I mean if

there's a hiccup or whatever in  
there. I'm going to work with

them to to try to get through  
it. MELISSA: And people are pretty

agreeable. They do what they  
need to do. Neighbors, we've,

I've had we've had folks on  
recently talking about

short-term rentals, and I know  
sometimes they upset the

neighbors. But for the most part  
by and large, are seeing that

people are getting along.  
They're doing what their due  
diligence doing what they need  
to do. DUSTIN: It's mixed. It depends

on the street. It depends on  
you know, it depends on who

they've had in that rental, you  
know, as to how well they are. I

mean I, I've heard both sides of it and I completely get both

sides of it. There is, because we do, we are getting a quite a

few large number of of short term rentals. I think there's

around 620 currently and I mean there's more coming in every

week. MELISSA: Real quick before we move on, or we're going to run

out of time, because it's a good topic of conversation. Tell me,

our listeners, give me the timeline in terms of registering,

renewing, there's a season and there's a cycle. You have to

renew in October again. DUSTIN: Yeah, October 1, whenever you go to

register, that's not a

pro-rated thing. So, if you

register today, you're going to  
have to pay that fee again come

October 1. But yeah, when you  
register, as soon as you

register, it takes, I don't  
know, 30 minutes, 45 minutes

for most people to shoot  
through it on the internet.

You send me that form,

I'm going to call you within a

day probably and schedule that  
with you, and I'll come out.

Morganne from Code Enforcement's  
going to come out to approve

your parking. And if you have  
everything ready to go and you

pass. I mean, it's, you know,  
couple days, you can be up and

going. MELISSA: And the, if I submit my registration in the beginning

of October, or I submit it

whenever I submit it. If I

don't have my inspection

approved, I can't operate.

DUSTIN: You're not supposed to.

MELISSA: Supposed to. Yeah and then, I will come back out. I, typically, you

have to have the done once a

year. So I'll, you'll see me

once a year. I typically email

everybody and kind of let them

know, hey it's coming up due, so

shoot me a date as to what's

good for you. And and we work

from there. MELISSA: It's a lot of

rentals to inspect. DUSTIN: It is.

Yeah. I don't, getting into this

job. I wasn't, I did not think

it would take up as much of my

time as it does, but that's yeah.

That's probably majority of my

time as dealing with, because

it's just me. MELISSA: Right. DUSTIN: You know

that handles. Abby can do 'em, but

Abby's got, you know, a laundry

list of things. You know, so I

mean, we both got our own lanes

that we're we're trying to

navigate through and keep on

top of. but yeah, no, it's

it's a lot. You know, and

when I'm not doing that, I'm

trying to do, you know, other

other inspections. MELISSA: Other

duties. Yeah. Other duties as assigned. DUSTIN: Yeah. Yeah. It's just,

yeah, it's just a never ending

thing. But no, it's great.

I mean, I think with the

short-term rental phenomenon  
that's happened is, you know, one

of the big pros is that it's  
rejuvenated a lot of the

communities in the City. I mean  
these are people that have came

in, that have enough money to  
fix up what were pretty rough

looking houses. And they've made  
a you know.. MELISSA: Very

beautiful. It's added added  
value. DUSTIN: Yeah so it's really

spruced up and and increase the  
property value in a lot of

areas in the City, too, yeah. MELISSA:  
Well I hate to say it, but we ran

out of time to talk about  
anything else in your other

duties as I said. DUSTIN: Yeah, I can

keep going, if... MELISSA: So, we'll have you

back. We'll have you back  
because I know you keep busy

doing other things. We've, we  
didn't get a chance to talk

about some of the community  
outreach, the school programs,

you get to do investigations,  
general inspections with

businesses, and other entities  
around the city. Fire

extinguisher training,  
all kinds of things. So, we'll

have to have you come back and  
visit. DUSTIN: Oh, yeah. Anytime.

MELISSA: Thanks so much, Dustin. It's  
great having you. If you've

missed part of this broadcast  
and want to go back and listen

from the beginning, you can now  
find us on your favorite

podcasting app. Look for that  
list on CityStAugRadio.com. You'll find a complete  
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platforms where you can find  
us. We want to keep you

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

want to be sure to follow the  
Fire Department on Facebook and

Instagram. You'll find the Fire  
Department @CityStAugFire and you'll find the City  
@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.