

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. I'm
Melissa Wissel, Communications

Director for the City of St
Augustine. Thanks for tuning

in. We are in studio this week
with Jonathan Foster,

Development Supervisor for the
City of St Augustine.

Jonathan is in charge of
overseeing all things relevant

to development, such as subject
to sewer projects in West

Augustine, construction
developments like the Antigua

Subdivision, and the Gate Car
Wash over on 312. So

this week, I've invited
Jonathan back to The Break Room

to give us an update. Jonathan,
welcome back. JONATHAN: Thank you,

Melissa. Thank you for having
me again. MELISSA: It's always good to

talk about what we have going
on. In this particular episode,

I'd like us to start with West

Augustine, the septic to sewer

program, actually in its
entirety. It's been in the works

since 2019, so not terribly new.

Martha Graham, our former

Public Works Director kind of
got that started before she

left. Give us an update. Fill
us in. JONATHAN: Yes, so since 2019, the

City has been actively working
to convert the area residents

in West Augustine from septic
tanks to City sewer. And we

started a program, which was
probably conceptualized, you

know, beginning in 2017. And then in
2018 we laid the groundwork

with all the the contracts and
the financing and planning it

out. And then 2019, the work
ultimately started and that was

to pinpoint all the residents
in the Duval / St Johns

streets and in those areas of
West Augustine, who lived

adjacent to existing sewer, who
were not connected to it. And we

ultimately started a program to
do the work to get in and

abandon the septic tanks,
connect the residents to that

existing infrastructure. And so
we, you know, over the course of

from 2019 to today, we've
expanded the program from that

area up into the areas north of
King Street. And in total

between between that program
and some of the other sewer

projects we've done, we've
connected about 100 residences

over the sewer from
septic tanks and we're still

going. MELISSA: Still going. JONATHAN: Absolutely. MELISSA:
And the, why, and you're talking

about funding. We pay for that,
but we also get grants. This

isn't just City money, tax, tax,
taxpayer dollar money locally.

JONATHAN: Right. Yup. Right. We've been,
we've been getting state grants

for mainly for the new sewer
extensions that we've been

building. And so we had been
trying for many years, but

ultimately we started, getting
some some headway with our

state legislature. And so

some of the new sewer projects

we built from that time period
2019 and on have been West 2nd

Street and West 5th Street. And
both of those projects had

state grants that really really
helped us to, you know, combine

with our funds and get those
projects done. And then we have

more grants underway for some
projects that are, that are

coming very soon. So I mentioned
2nd street and 5th street.

Those are completed. We have
West 3rd Street, which the

design's been completed for and
we're about to put that out to

bid probably in the next couple
of weeks. But we have two state

grants, one of which is for
\$300, 000 that's allocated for

that project. And then we we
also received a subsequent

grant for \$2 million dollars, which a
portion of that will will go

towards finishing West 3rd
Street. And then the remainder of

that will go towards the next
project coming after that, which

would be Pearl Street. And
that's, that's going to be a

vast project that will that
will cover the better part of a

neighborhood near the Webster
School, and I can get into the

background of that a little
bit. But the Webster

School is located, you know, in
the area north of King Street

West of Volusia Street. And we
recognize that the school owned

a lift station with some
gravity sewer mains and

manholes that kind of stretched
around the perimeter of the

school. And those assets were at
a depth where there was a lot

of potential where we could
actually, we could potentially

run extensions off of that and
serve the residents that live

in the surrounding area of the
school. So the city engaged in

talks with the school board to
take over that infrastructure,

take over that lift station and
and those sewer mains. And so we

we've taken over those assets,

and now we're working on,

we're about 90% of the way
through the design at this

point. But we're going to build
out sewer in that whole

neighborhood, and that's
going to ultimately connect

about 44 houses to sewer.
Just existing houses. Of

course, there's a lot of
potential for infill

development, as well, that will
come, more affordable housing to

get built in that area.

MELISSA: So, when you're talking about

this concept of subject to
sewer, why is that important?

JONATHAN: Well, septic tanks are, that's
that's of course the private

homeowner, homeowner owned and
operated system for somebody

who doesn't have sewer and a
lot of us have these, but....

These systems can be very
maintenance intensive and prone

to failure. And in the West
Augustine area, like with a lot

of of our St Johns County
greater area, you have shallow

groundwater tables. And so
the way a septic tank works, is

to put it in a in a a simple
big picture or high-level talk,

your sewer goes out of the
house by gravity and it goes

into the tank, the septic tank,
which separates out your solids

and provides a low level of
treatment. And some residents

time and then the water, the
sewage, the effluent, will flow

out by gravity to a drain field,
where it enters the, where it

just kind of drains out into
the surrounding ground, and

ultimately could make its way
down to the groundwater.

Now, in when you have a shallow
groundwater table, you have to

have your drain field elevated
in a mound. And so people, a lot

of listeners would be familiar
with these mounds that they see

all over the place. To make
that. MELISSA: So, you basically are

your own, you you're basically
processing your own sewage.

JONATHAN: Right. MELISSA: In your yard,

essentially. JONATHAN: And these

systems with mounds, you know,
you have to have a pump

that would then, you know,
kind of move that affluent from

your septic tank to the mound.
And so that's another point of

failure that is common. There
are a lot of things that could

go wrong. When you're
dealing with old houses, maybe

elderly people, maybe people of
low income, you know, you get a

lot of these systems falling
into disrepair and not

functioning properly. And I
personally have walked around

and seen some systems that have
been neglected for a long time.

And there was one case where
actually a trench in a backyard

covered with plywood, and these
are the kinds of things that

unfortunately happen over time
if something's neglected and

and the resources aren't there,
too. MELISSA: Cuz it's expensive, if it's

your own problem to have to
solve. JONATHAN: Right. MELISSA: And it fails.

So this gets people onto
an actual City utility. JONATHAN: Right.

This is this is an effort to
get those septic tanks

abandoned and, you know,
allow the sewage from the house

to go by gravity to public
sewer system, to our sewer

treatment plant. Taking care
of. MELISSA: If you're just now tuning

in, you're listening to The
Break Room. I'm speaking with

Jonathan Foster. He is our
Development Supervisor for the

City. We're talking about the
septic to sewer program and

projects that are going on in
West Augustine. I do want to

talk briefly. We have a few
minutes left. We're talking

lift stations, gravity sewer.

You gave a really great

description of, I have a septic
tank in my backyard, those big

mounds. Once this happens and I
now, I no longer have this mound

in my backyard. Does the does
that equipment under the mound

get removed, as well? JONATHAN: Yes, it

typically would. If you. Now,

the state Health Department
requires that the septic tank

itself has to be abandoned.

Now there's there's

technically not a requirement
to get rid of the the mound or

the drain field, but with our
program, we've been removing

those because. MELISSA: Oh so nice. JONATHAN: It's,
they're not serving a purpose

anymore. It gives people
their yard back. And You

know, it it's it also serves as
an incentive to get people to,

you know, be on board with
wanting this done. MELISSA: Before we

go, I do want to talk about a
little bit of definitions of

what we were talking about
because we talk about the

septic and the sewer lines and
other conversations when we

talk about lift stations with
hurricanes and recovery and

FEMA Lift 13 projects and
things like that. Give us a

quick visual if you could. So,
I used to have a septic tank

and a drain field. I don't have
that anymore. Now, what does

my, what does that path look
like? And give me a little bit

of definition of that lift
station concept. JONATHAN: Right, right

and it's important to do that,
and sometimes we, sometimes us

engineers will will skim over
these things. Take for granted... MELISSA: You talk into, like we know what

that's supposed to mean. JONATHAN: But

ultimately the yeah, the sewage
will come out of the house by

via a service line, which we
call a lateral. And you know,

when it when it gets to the
property line close to the

street, it will enter what,
what's a six-inch pipe, it's a

lateral that flows by
gravity and it connects with a

larger sewer main that's under
the ground in the street. And

you know, you would see these
manholes usually at

intersections, so the manholes
are like junction points, where

between them you have sewer
mains that are eight inch pipe,

and they're installed at a
slope, so that when the sewage

gets to them it flows downhill
by gravity and it

just leads ultimately to a low
point, which is which would be

the pump station, or the lift
station. And so the lift station

is a, it's, if it's your low
point, you have a a cylindrical

tank that generally extends 20
feet under the ground and it

collects all that sewage. And
then when it stages up to a

certain point, the pump will
kick on and pump that into a

pressurized sewer line, known as
a force main. And so it sends it

further on down the system and
ends up at our Wastewater

Treatment Plant. MELISSA: And these lift stations, like we talked about

sometimes, the electrical fails during the hurricanes,

we're trying to mitigate that. That's a whole another

conversation. JONATHAN: Right, right. It's a maintenance burden, but

we've been, it's probably the number one thing we focus on in

the follow up from a hurricane, in the aftermath, getting the

lift stations back up and running. Now these last two

storms we've been, we've fared a lot better than the previous

ones. MELISSA: And and it's proving to be successful now that we've done

those repairs. JONATHAN: Right. We've

rehabbed a lot of our lift

stations in our low areas, that
combine with FPL doing some

hardening. It's made a
notable difference. We've seen

in these last two storms, it
was not nearly the level of

mobilization that was needed,
for say like Matthew or Irma.

MELISSA: Right. So, we're
getting better. JONATHAN: Absolutely.

MELISSA: That's wonderful. Real quick,
before we sign off, we were

talking about the West King
Street. In a minute or so.

Give me what's our quick recap
where are we now with, I guess,

we've got West 3rd and Pearl
Street. Right, we have West 3rd

Street and Pearl Street, which
we anticipate starting, you know,

both of those projects in
2023. We're

going to continue with the mini
grant program and continue to

to pinpoint residents who live
adjacent to sewer who aren't

yet connected. And so those are
efforts that continue and

ultimately the agencies have
recognized it and with

funding, so. MELISSA: We're getting
support. JONATHAN: Yeah, we are. MELISSA: That's

fantastic and that's great for
our residents in West

Augustine. Well, thank you for
the work that you do Jonathan.

I know you're very active in
the West Augustine, in the

programs that are happening
over there. You attend their

meetings for the CRA, so keep up
all the great work that you're

doing. JONATHAN: Thank you. Thanks for
thanks for having me on the

show. MELISSA: Well we're going to have
to have you come back, because

in my intro, I talked about
Antigua and the car wash, so

we're going to have to have you
come back to follow up on the

on what else you've got going
on. JONATHAN: I'll be back. MELISSA: Okay great.

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broadcast and want to go back

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happening in and around the
city and most importantly that

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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.