

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 again for

tuning in. With Hurricane Season  
at a close, but resilience

always on our minds. I have  
invited Jessica Beach back to

The Break Room for an update on  
resilience projects around the

City. We have a Sea Level Rise  
study about to start with the

Army Corps of Engineers. Lots  
going on, Jessica. I'm going to

let you tell us all about it.

Welcome back. JESSICA: Thank you,

Melissa. It's never a dull  
moment. No. In this realm. I

think we're relieved that we  
finally made it through

hurricane season. I think what  
we were not expecting was two

hurricanes back to back  
essentially, six weeks apart.

We've actually been doing a lot

of site visits with property

owners and fielding phone calls  
and emails and things like that

because a lot of people are  
recovering. And I think the

good news from it is I think  
our businesses are getting more

efficient and quicker to  
recover. I noticed in Hurricane

Nicole, literally the next day.  
You would really not have

noticed that the downtown had  
been impacted, other than debris

and cleanup and things like  
that. Like the businesses are

doing a really good job. And  
even our residents, we just met

with several residents earlier  
today for site visits, and they

were showing us things and  
measures that they had taken to

flood proof their homes. And so,  
they're progressing and

I think we're all getting  
smarter and better with each

storm. We would love to not have  
to do that but we are adapting

to what we're dealing with. MELISSA: And  
we don't want to have to leave

our homes. JESSICA: Exactly, like... MELISSA: I  
want to be in my house, that's

why I bought here. JESSICA: Right. This  
community, it's a beautiful

community, so we want to do our  
best to preserve it. And so I

think in the middle of those  
hurricanes I know a lot of

people were interested in the  
Flood Mitigation Assistance

Program that Fema offers. And we were in the middle of accepting

our applications and getting those wrapped up. We did end up

turning in 61 applications into FEMA. So it's at the State

right now. It has to go through state review, pretty extensive.

And then when the state, if it clears through the state hurdle

it will then get turned into FEMA, and then FEMA will start

their review process. But I think that interest in the

program has been unprecedented.

I think the hurricanes are

really the tipping point for a lot of homeowners, where if they

haven't thought about elevating,

they are now. And there's at

least something in place that  
they could tap into to cost

share because it's not cheap to  
do. MELISSA: And we have new residents.

New homeowners, I should  
say. JESSICA: Yeah. A lot of new

homeowners that have maybe  
never gone through hurricane

and so it was somewhat  
traumatic and eye opening I

think dealing with that  
repercussions of this. So I

think there's a lot of interest  
and hope for the program. And

we'll have to wait and see.  
It's competitive, but I think

we've been talking to our our  
State and Federal representatives because it is

a federal program. We did get  
letters of support from

our Congressional  
Representatives on that. And so

we turned all that in with the  
application and we're kind of

going through that process. So,  
we hope to hear back maybe in

August, like late summer what, if  
we might get a hint, if it's

going to happen or not. MELISSA: Not a  
quick program. JESSICA: Not a quick

program at all and... MELISSA: By the time  
we hear about that, we'll be

starting the next cycle.

JESSICCA: That's right. MELISSA: So, stay tuned.

JESSICA: Stay tuned. More to come. More  
workshops. That's definitely in

the not-so-distant future. But  
kind of pivoting from the FMA

program. Since then, we've been  
looking at, well actually we've

been doing a lot of tours.

People are interested in seeing

how is the City been impacted  
with these hurricanes, which

brings a lot of State and  
Federal attention, which we're

hopeful that that may turn into  
funding or support for

different programs. And so  
that's been something positive

that's come out of that. And I  
think kind of where we're

at now, as we're wrapping up the  
end of the year, doing almost

like a year in review, some  
things that are on the

immediate horizon that we're gonna be



starting is two major studies.

And so the studies are  
important because they

identify the needs and then  
that allows us to tap into the

funding to be able to address  
those needs.

Ultimately what. MELISSA: Let it prove if,  
prove why you should be, why you

should qualify to get the  
money. JESSICA: Exactly. MELISSA: And there's

money to be had. JESSICA: And there is a  
lot of money that's coming

through the Federal Government.

And so we want to position

ourselves to take advantage of  
that. So the first study that's

going to be launching is a  
vulnerability assessment. And so

it's going to be update from  
the one we had done in 2016.

This is now meeting state  
statute requirements, and you

have to do this in order to be  
eligible for future state

funding through the Resilient  
Florida Program. So, we're

going to be following  
their protocol and meeting

their requirements with that.  
And we got \$500,000 to do the

vulnerability assessment, as did  
St Johns County. And

actually there's a number of  
other counties in our Northeast

Florida region that are  
going to be doing that, too. So

that's exciting. We're going to,  
we've already started

conversations with the county,  
and we're using the same team

to do the vulnerability  
assessment, so we're about to

kick that off. And then that's  
going to be very specific to

critical infrastructure and  
meeting state requirements. But

then what's also going to  
coordinate with that is our

Army Corps of Engineers  
back-bay study. And that's a,

really, it's really hard to get  
these studies. It takes

congressional authorization.

MELISSA: Literally an act of congress.

JESSICA: Literally. MELISSA: Just about. Yeah.

JESSICA: And we've been asking, it

actually started with Mayor

Shaver, back in, I think it was

2018. MELISSA: Wow. Okay. JESSICA: She started the conversations in

the official request, and each year we've been putting in a formal

request saying yes we would like to do this study if it

works out. And low and behold we have there was federal

funding that was allocated to start it. It's like seed money.

There's still more funding that's going to be needed on

the federal side. But the City has opted to take ARPA funding

and use that as our cost share.

So now we have a, on our part, a

fully funded three year three million dollar study. It is

split 50/ 50 with the Army  
Corps. So we pay half of that

and they will pay the other  
half. But that money will then,

we can actually start the study  
now, and then be able to

complete it later on. But that's,  
that's actually a huge step.

MELISSA: And you're talking, you were  
mentioning before about people

coming to visit. We had this,  
didn't again, this didn't happen

overnight. Like you said,  
it started way back when with

our former Mayor Shaver and  
it's been taking the time. We

had to kind of sell it a little  
bit. Didn't we? JESSICA: Yes. It's it

takes. MELISSA: Tell me, tell our  
listeners about that visit. JESSICA: It

is. It's very, it's it takes a  
lot of work. You have to really

talk to your federal your  
congressional representatives

on it. So, Congressman  
Rutherford's office has been

supportive of it, they've  
actually been the ones to get

us the funding to start the  
seed. And once you get your foot

in the door, it'll come, with the  
rest of the funding. MELISSA: We had people come to Saint

Augustine right after. JESSICA: We did. So  
that study got on the radar, and

then we were moving forward  
with kind of figuring out our

financing, and then here comes  
Hurricane Ian, and it, you know,

it ravaged most most of the

state and the Army Corps was

actually sending some pretty high-level  
generals to take a look at the

impacts to the State, and we  
were one of the stops. And so we

got to tour various parts of  
the City showing the impacts

and why we need this Coastal  
Storm Risk Management Study and

partnering with them, because  
it's going to identify very

complex, high-level solutions  
on long-term strategies... like

this is like the long-range  
plan. These projects will be

large, capital projects, and  
identify strategies to help us

with resilience in the long run.

But, it taps into the federal

funding. And we can then again,  
it's not easy, but you can still,

you at least have a path to be  
able to access that. MELISSA: Study that

says yes St Augustine should  
get money. JESSICA: Yes, and this is that. MELISSA:

We should get money. JESSICA: Yes  
essentially. If you boil it

really basic down. Yes. MELISSA: Okay.  
If you're just now tuning in,

you're listening to The Break  
Room. I have Jessica Beach with

me this week. She is our chief  
Resilience Officer, and we are

talking about the importance of  
the back bay study, why we need to

have studies done to see what  
we are going to see in the

future for sea level rise. What  
comes out of these studies? So,



let's say they come back and  
they say yes, you need money.

What do we do with it? And if  
you can, what's the area? JESSICA: That's

a good question. MELISSA: Where's the footprint of where this  
study happens? Because I think

people get studied out.

And I'm sure some

listeners are saying another  
study, oh another study. But you

have to have a study. JESSUCA: You do, you  
really have to. MELISSA: Because you have

to also identify where you're  
going to put the money and

where those needs need to be  
met. JESSICA: Right, and that's

essentially what the project  
does. And so the project in

itself it's a coastal storm

risk management study, and it

investigates coastal storm  
impacts on the City. So we

partner with the Army Corps,  
they're going to do the heavy

lift of the technical analysis,  
they're equipped to do that

kind of high level, very  
detailed, very involved type of

a study. But ultimately between  
us, our stakeholders, and the

Army Corps, the study will  
explore economically viable and

environmentally sound solutions  
to mitigate coastal storm risks.

And that could be a variety of  
things. They came to the

Commission back in March when  
we were looking.. that would be

basically got notice of the

study being approved, and

funding being allocated for it.

You know, there could be a

combination of, there could be

flood walls, there could be

pump stations, there could be

home elevations, there could be

buyouts, there could be a

nature-based solutions that can

be integrated in. So, there's a,

it's pretty much putting

everything on the table.

Everything will get looked at,

like literally any idea will

get vetted. And we can kind of

go through that process and

weed out what's going to be

meet, what's cost effective,

what's technically, and

environmentally feasible.

That's ultimately what will

come out of that. MELISSA: So, let me  
throw out an idea that

everybody says, just build a  
wall around Davis Shores. JESSICA: We

will look at that, and that will  
tell us if they can do it.

MELISSA: All kidding aside. JESSICA: Yes. MELISSA: They could  
come in and say, you know what?

If you did this and this, you  
could build a wall around.

JESSICA: Right and a big piece of that  
is cost benefit. And so you have

to look at the cost of  
constructing the infrastructure

and what you're protecting. And  
there, it's pretty involved. But

they basically determine is  
that solution cost effective

because it ultimately has to be  
cost effective. So it'll be

interesting to go through.

They're going to ask about,

where we want to ask the big  
questions and you ask about the

project area. Right now I've  
told them let's look at

everything within City limits.

Which is pretty broad. Okay.

And I know when you're looking  
at modeling it'll get

complicated and that might get  
refined. But we really need to

look at everything within City  
limits first, first to start

there. MELISSA: I mean because you could  
say, let's look at our utilities.

JESSICA: That's that kind of gets into a

weird. It's a bigger area. MELISSA: And

it's a strange cookie cutter

and right. In the middle of

programs and projects and so,

and all of a sudden, you go well,

I got my utilities this month.

But this project started two

weeks ago, or two years ago, and

you can't qualify yeah. JESSICA: So

we're going to start with City

limits. And that'll it'll

evolve. We're we still have to

have meetings and there'll be a

lot of technical discussion

about it. But we're going to

start with the City limits

first and go from there. MELISSA: And to

talk about why this is so

important in anything ceremonial.

We're going to have a signing.

JESSICA: Yes, we are. MELISSA: It's not quite the

declaration of independence, but

it's.. JESSICA: It's formal and it's a big

deal. So, we are going to be

having our representatives from

the Army Corps. The Colonel

James Booth who represents the

Jacksonville District. He leads

that district headquarters, will

be coming down to sign. And then

we'll have our City staff, our

City Attorney has to be there

and our Mayor. So, they will do

a formal signing ceremony and

we will be extending the

invitation to all the different

rep, people that are interested

in the project, helping us with

the project, and getting that

out very soon. And so we're  
looking at that January 9th

date, which is just around the  
corner. MELISSA: Right okay. So January

9th, it's going to be official.  
The ink will be drying on the

page. How excited are you about  
this? JESSICA: It's a, it's going to be a

big study. I think a lot of  
public engagement. And I guess

this is a plug for our  
community, we need the community

to get involved because if they  
don't speak up now on what they

like and what they don't like,  
forever hold your peace. Because

it's a it's a it's an involved  
process and they really want

public comment and that can



help shape the solutions on

that, too. But we also don't  
want to get at the end of the

study and people be unaware of  
it, not following it, and they

were like, oh but wait, about  
what about this idea? Well we

really need input on the early  
ends. And there'll be

opportunity throughout the  
process. But as we're getting

started, we really need that  
public input. Any idea could go

and any idea could be taken  
into consideration. JESSICA: Yes. MELISSA: And

and be a solution. JESSICA: Yes. It'll  
get vetted, but yes. We need

all, any and all ideas. MELISSA: Any and  
all ideas. Before we sign

off, real quick. We've got  
about a minute left. Can you

give us a quick update? Are  
we moving forward with Lake

Mary Sanchez? JESSICA: Yes, we are.

We've overcome hurdles with

funding. But I think we  
have a clear path forward.

But we are working out  
some alternatives and I think

we're closer more than ever.

With the project and so

our hope is that we can get  
that design wrapped up and

actually move into construction  
and get it built, so. MELISSA: You mean a

shovel in the ground? JEISSICA: Yes. It's  
coming. MELISSA: We kind of talk about

this every time and I keep... one  
of these days we're going to

get a picture of somebody  
putting a shovel in the ground.

JESSICA: Before I retire. MELISSA: 2023 is  
going to be a big year. JESSICA: Yes, it

is. MELISSA: Well as always, it's a  
pleasure to have you. You've

always got so much going on.  
You've you're a wealth of

information and you're doing  
great things to help our City.

JESSICA: Thank you Melissa. We'll keep  
on. MELISSA: We'll have you back. JESSICA: That

sounds good. MELISSA: If you missed part  
of this broadcast and want to go

back and listen from the  
beginning. You can find us on

your favorite podcasting app.

All of those are listed at [CityStAugRadio.com](http://CityStAugRadio.com). We  
want to keep you informed

about what's happening in and  
around the City, and most

importantly that you hear it  
here from the people doing the

work and making it happen every  
day. Remember to stay connected

with the city on social media.

You want to be sure to follow

us on our social media

platforms. You'll find us on

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time, thanks for tuning in. ANNOUNCER:

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