

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.

JESSICA: 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. JESSICA: 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. 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

Facebook Twitter and Instagram
@CityStAug. Until next

time, thanks for tuning in. ANNOUNCER:
You've been listening to The

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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

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Augustine, Cindy Walker. See
you at this time next week for

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