

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 every day. 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. If there's one thing residents

have an opinion about in St Augustine, it's parking. We've

got street parking spaces, parking lots, and the parking

garage. When you want to open a business, there are parking

requirements that go along with that. Neighborhoods are

inundated with people trying to avoid paying to park downtown.

There's so much more to the parking conversation than just

adding another parking garage, and the City is looking for

your input. So, here in studio this week to talk about all

things parking and explain some of those more complex issues.

I've invited Planning and

Building Director Amy Skinner

to join me. Amy, this is not
your first rodeo. Welcome back

to The Break Room. AMY: Thank you.

Thanks for having me. MELISSA: You

have been very busy since
becoming the Planning and

Building Director. AMY: Yes, one
thing after another. MELISSA: And we've

got lots of friends in the
media. Interviewing you,

getting the word out, and I
think we love having you come

here on The Break Room because
the stuff that you're working

on is so important and this
latest one is about parking.

AMY: Yes, we're looking to update
the parking code in a, in very

simple terms. I want to stress

though that this is the

beginning of the process, that

we are trying to garner as much

input as possible. So, I want

people to have faith that we're

listening and that we want to

hear from them. We are, you

know, the issue about parking is

kind of complex. And

it's, it is going to be a

balance of dynamics and it's

going to be kind of a leap of

faith about how we want to

approach it going into the

future. The City has worked

really hard in trying to set up

a mobility plan. And it, and we

can only control certain things

on our right away, in our

parking garage, the parking

meters, the pay-to-park

program, any yellow curbing,

anything like that. And there is

a relationship between parking

requirements and the City

Mobility Plan. So, what we're

trying to do is actually update

the code. And that is kind of a

separate thing because it has

to do with actually private

property, and what people have

to do in order to open up

businesses, you know, build

multifamily, or anything like

that, any types of uses, except

in the actual core historic

districts, have are supposed to

and have to provide parking.

So, it has not, the code has

not been updated in a long time.

And it's implemented on a daily

basis. So, it does impact kind

of the whole parking program,

and the whole, kind of, mobility

direction. So that we're

heading in. MELISSA: Right. And so, for

parking, I think too, just to

put it plainly. It's not just

about where you can park. It's

about why those rules apply

and. Yes. Why we have

certain rules. So for me, for an

example, when you and I have

been talking about this. One of

the things is, for example, if I

want to open a business, if it's

a restaurant or a doctor's

office, there's different requirements. And

basically should we keep those requirements. AMY: Yes. So. MELISSA: Cuz

parking isn't all, and it, and it isn't also just about, let's

just put more. To make it better. That's the

also a misconception. AMY: Right. That's not always the answer.

Because now we're realizing there's environmental concerns

and do we really want everything paved over with

parking lots, because we have flooding and other issues that

we're also trying to balance.

And over the years,

actually in the engineering manuals, have reduced parking

requirements for certain uses,
because it, we've come to know,
that you don't have to design a
parking lot like for Christmas

shopping, you know. For the
rest of the year, that parking

is basically half empty right.

And so there's other things

that we can do to accommodate
the the rushes. But do we really

have to design part a parking
lot for Black Friday for

everyday use of the year? MELISSA: and
have something right adjacent

to my business. AMY: Right, plus
business models have changed. We

look at, we can, for example
through this COVID, look at what

happened on US-1 in the Chic
Fil A. They closed their dining

room, and but they added

drive-thru lanes. And a

lot of fast food, shall we say

restaurants and stuff, are going

to more drive-thru lanes. So,

people aren't even parking and

going into the restaurant

anymore. So, we we need to look

at our parking requirements and

maybe only require enough

parking for the employees.

And then accommodate the

driving aisles, so that they're

not stacking out on the US one,

which I I saw on it, and

that's incredibly dangerous.

So there's safety

considerations. There's a coffee

shop that I understand, you know

doesn't have, you can't actually

go into it. You

have to go through the

drive-thru. So

there's standards like that

that impact the design of the

parking lot, that impact the

maneuverability on the parking

lot. I, the size of our

parking spaces. We need to look

at that. You know, it's a

balance. We know that some

people drive big vehicles, some

people don't. But a lot of areas

are reducing the size of the

parking spaces. So, in a

smaller area, you can fit maybe

more parking. MELISSA: Right. And

then the, in the when you're

talking parking, you know, if

I've got a big truck..Is my big

truck, you ain't going to make

it down some of those narrow

streets downtown. To get

into the parking spaces, I'm

not going to fit. And

when you're talking parking and

that you were mentioning the

Mobility Plan. The idea

also is do I have to be able to

drive right next door and park

in the parking lot directly

next to where I'm going? Can I

park a little bit further away

and walk or take a shuttle? AMY: And

that's part of what we're

considering. We've realized

that, you know, we have to kind

of address different users. We

have our residents that we're
trying to maintain livability

and a balance of quality of
life. We have employees that

work downtown. We have
businesses that obviously need

customers. And then we have
tourists and we have, kind of,

long distance tourists, and we
have day trippers. Where you

know, I've said in different, at
different occasions. In 1970 at

14, 000 people. We were 40% of
the St Johns County

population.. Now we have
about 14, 15, 14,000 people

and we're only 5% of the St
Johns County population. So

St Johns County has boomed

around us. There's a lot of
people that just like to come
downtown for the day. And so we
have alternatives, like the
peripheral parking garages,
where if people are on vacation,
or if they're just coming for
the day, they can park, like you
said, more easily. They can
not be stressed, get on a
shuttle, come into town, relax,
enjoy the City. And in the
meantime, because they're not on
the roads, they reduce traffic
coming into town so that
hopefully the parking is freed
up for people that need it, and
the, and the traffic is reduced
for those that here, so that

they can actually get in and
out and participate in their

life without, you know, without
the extreme stress of a log

jam. MELISSA: Well, if you are just now
tuning in, you're listening to

The Break Room. I'm Melissa
Wissel, Communications

Director for the City of St.
Augustine and I have Amy

Skinner with me. She is the
Planning and Building Director.

We're talking about parking
We've kind of covered the whole

ideas of parking to get people
thinking about what are the

needs of parking, mobility,
traffic. Before we sign off,

let's talk about, you, we
mentioned getting people's

input about this change in code. We've got a survey.

Tell me a little bit about that survey. So folks know to go and

take the survey. There is a link. The link is on the homepage story on our website CityStAug. com. The

stories there on the homepage.

You can probably put a

button on there to make it really easy for folks. AMY: That

would be great. This again, as I as I emphasize, it's kind of the

beginning of the process. So it's a real simple survey. I

think it's, you know, a short survey, to get kind of an

people's initial feedback of

how, what they think about the

parking situation. What perspective are they coming

from? How, what alternatives to parking would they be willing

to use? Like the shuttle service, or you know other forms of

transportation, pedestrian, bicycle. Another aspect to

this is calming traffic down, so that we can, you know, have safer

situations for pedestrians and other forms of transport. So

we want to get people's feedback on what they're

willing, what they think is a priority, what they're willing

to use. Sometimes that's different. You know, we might

think. Oh well, this is a
good idea, but we're, not really.

MELISSA: But not for me. AMY: Are we really
going to use it? So, we want to

hear what people would really
use. You know and I'd like

to say too, that we. And talking
to the City Commission. The

Mayor and the City Commission
kind of offered that we should

sort of break it down in maybe
smaller bites. And I understand

that. And because it is kind of
a complex issue, we have issues

for the downtown. We have
issues kind of in our entry

corridors, San Marco, King
Street, Anastasia Boulevard.

One thing the Planning and
Zoning board also recognizes,

maybe we need different,

different solutions for the

different areas of the City.

And so that's something

that we're going to be

considering in in things that

we might be automatically

thinking about for downtown

might not really work as well

on Anastasia Boulevard, or might

you know, we need to consider

other options to encourage

people to park on Anastasia

Boulevard, and maybe take or

Ubers downtown, so we're talking

about doing mobility hubs where

you can get dropped off and

picked up. MELISSA: Yeah there's a lot.

You just mentioned a really one

that we've been talking about, I

guess you could say a little
bit behind the scenes. But in

that downtown traffic in the
rideshares, I think it was

Orlando, I believe, that did the,
you know, there's only certain

areas where you're allowed to
be dropped off and picked up on

a rideshare like an Uber and a
Lyft. And I think we're looking

at that, we don't have anything
to report or to

implement yet. But, you know,
think about that. If you're

driving along Avenida Menendez
and you get stuck behind one of

those Uber lifts that's
stopping to pick up or drop off

that causes traffic. AMY: Right,
exactly that. So we're open to

ideas where, if you have certain
areas that where it's safe to

be picked up and dropped off,
and you're not clogging up

traffic while you're, the
vehicle has to stop.

You're not just going to keep
rolling while you you know tuck

and roll. Right about the
vehicle. So you know, other

examples are shared parking
facilities. We do allow shared

parking for mixed use projects
and things. But we require the

full amount of parking for all
the uses, so it's not really

shared. But where there's some
examples where maybe there's

commercial and residential, or
different types of commercials,

so that certain commercial uses
use the parking during the day.

But then if you have a
restaurant, like you mentioned,

or residential uses that
would mainly be there at night,

maybe overlap just a little
while. And you know, we can

actually accommodate things
with smaller parking

requirements. And with, it's an
environmental issue.

Where if we discourage you
know, you know, vehicular traffic

circling around, circling
around, looking. We're not

producing greenhouse gases.

We're having less pavement to

accommodate our storm
issues, and our stormwater, you

know, balance. MELISSA: It's
literally endless. And I hate to

say it, but we're almost out of
time. I do want to ask you one

quick question, if you can.

Answer for me. Explain the idea

of blight and why a parking lot
is blight. Because I think that

is on the survey and again,
that's the survey. The link is

on our homepage story on the
website CityStAug.com,

put a button out there for you.

Explain blight to me, to our

listeners, why parking is
considered blight. AMY: Well, you

know, what's it really

contributing? What's it

really contributing to? We're,

have a lot of discussion about

our character, our, the value of

our historic preservation

assets, you know. Do they look

just look? How do they look? Do

they just look dirty and junky

and whatever? And so any

kind of aspect where it's, we're

talking about economic

development, you know, in the

short term, they might be making

a lot of cash for people.

But in the long term,

you know, health of the City

would be like economic

development to have businesses

that contribute to the economy,

employ people, and just look

better, contribute to the

overall character of the City

and. MELISSA: Maybe a green space. Maybe

a, maybe a building but. AMY: Maybe a

building. Like you said, green

space. You know, there's

other uses that that might just

work better. MELISSA: Work better. Yeah.

Yeah. Well I hate to say it, but

we have about run out of time.

AMY: Alright well thank you. MELISSA: We, I

hope everybody got a lot out of

that. There's a lot going on

with this parking initiative.

Please go out and take the

survey if you haven't already.

At the at the time of our

recording, we have over 500

responses already. The survey

closes on.. AMY: April 16th. So, it
closes on April 16th, and the

Planning and Zoning Board has
already had one workshop.

We're having second special
meeting scheduled for April

25th at one o'clock. And we
really do want to hear your

hear your feedback. And we'll
fine tune information as we

kind of fine tune, you know,
what directions we think, you

know, people seem to want to
go. So. MELISSA: Excellent. Thanks for

stopping by. AMY: Thank you. MELISSA: If you
missed part of this broadcast and

want to go back and listen from
the beginning, check it out at

CityStAugRadio. com. You
can also find us on all of the

podcasting platforms, and a list
of that is also available at

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Until next time. Thanks for

tuning in. 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.