

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.

Thanks for tuning in. I'm

Melissa Wissel, Communications
Director for the City of St

Augustine.

When you think of grant funding,

what comes to mind? Applications,
documentation, lots of

paperwork and red tape. And
probably not a very quick

response to whether or not
you're getting that money

you've applied for, which
sometimes might even lead you

to give up on applying for
funding in the first place. But

not for the City of St
Augustine. We have a dedicated

staff member whose sole
responsibility is to apply for

grants and provide assistance
to others throughout the City

who apply for grants, making
sure that all that pesky

paperwork and red tape is in order.

Eric Walters is the City's

Grants Administration

Coordinator who makes all that

happen. He's here for the first

time in The Break Room to tell

us what grants and projects are
in the works and what is coming

ahead. Eric, welcome to The
Break Room. ERIC: Good morning,

Melissa. Thank you for having
me. I'm excited to be here and

give a little shout out to what
I do. MELISSA: Excellent. ERIC: How the City uses

grants. MELISSA: We, and we, there's
always something. Applying for grants.

So, let's start. I'm

going to throw some, were
letters, alphabet soup, as we

call it. The CDBG CV Grant for
St Francis House. What

is all that? ERIC: Yes. So CDBG, I
still have a hard time

pronouncing it sometimes. So
the CDBG is a Community

Development Block Grant.

Alright so I want to get that

clear to the public that this
is a CV grant, which is

specifically aimed for
coronavirus. MELISSA: Oh okay. ERIC: Yep the

St Francis House actually
applied for that back in 2021, I

believe. And we are just now in
the process of getting

construction. So, as you can see
how long the process is.

But, so I'll go back to CDBG's.

They are federally funded by

the Department of Economic

Opportunity. So there was

actually in 2020,

President Trump gave out five

billion dollars to State and

Local Government for the CV

grant. So the city jumped

on that and that's why I

want to talk about the St

Francis House, because we're all

excited about how this process

is where it's at now. MELISSA: And

to your point, it takes a long

time. ERIC: It does take a long time.

MELISSA: You, in 2020, the money

came out. 2021, we applied.

And now here we are. ERIC: A

lot of people think that hey,

you apply, you get the funds,

boom, the project's done. But

no, that's what my job is, is
to make sure everything's in

line. I mean, we have
floodplain notices, the public

notices, everything that has to
be administered in a certain

amount of time and approved
before you move on to the next

step. MELISSA: And that's that pesky red
tape. Probably referring

to. It's all those details
that. ERIC: It's very strict. Very

very strict. MELISSA: Cuz if you miss
one. ERIC: Yes. Anytime, that's why

it's very important that we
make sure that everything's in

line, because anytime that they
could take the funding away.

You could be in mid project and
they say hey, sorry, you don't

qualify anymore. MELISSA: So it's not
even the application, it's

literally beginning to end,
start to finish, till the last

door is hung, last nail is
screwed in. ERIC: Oh yeah. Even way after

finishing. You know, you
have to make sure that that

house or whatever project is
still following the lines of

what they proposed they were
going to do. You know, so if

sometimes you do a project, said
they're doing this, they come

back and look at it like, hey,
you guys aren't saying you're

doing the project you were
doing, so they could ask for

their money back. So, it's very

important. MELISSA: Or if you say you're

going to use it for a
particular purpose.

And then you're not. So, tell
us about St Francis House. ERIC: Okay,

yeah, the St Francis also.
We're excited to talk about

this. It's behind city
hall on Charlotte Street. I

don't know if you're familiar
with 64 Charlotte Street.

MELISSA: Charlotte? There's Washington. ERIC: Washington.
Washington Street. MELISSA: Okay.

Washington. Behind Dog Rose.
Yes. Yes. Okay. There you go. ERIC: I

always get those two mixed up.
MELISSA: That's okay. ERIC: So, on Washington

Street, there is a building.
It's just a slab with four

walls, no roof, nothing. And
it's the St Francis Crisis

Shelter. And what they do is
they help homeless around here

in St Augustine. It
obviously it's been down for a

few years since this project's
been going on. But it actually

has a, you know, helps with
people going to the hospital,

they have a contract. So if they
have homeless who are hurt

they're not just going to put
them back on the street when

they're better. So St Francis
Crisis Shelter will bring them

in, those individuals will bring
in homeless veterans, families.

They have numerous rooms on
board, they help with food, you

know, help them get back on
their feet. So it's a very

important project for the City. MELISSA:

So is it with that, it's not

necessarily permanent

transitional housing, but it's a

temporary place for them to be
sheltered. ERIC: It is a temporary

place. They hold

drives for donations, soup

kitchens, a lot of, lot of good
stuff. And I think this building,

once it's up, will really help
more people because, you know,

it's so limited. They actually
have three buildings now.

And that one is I think the
biggest one. So. MELISSA: So, if I drive

down Washington Street behind

Dog Rose, it's the big cinder

block thing that looks like

it's been blown out. ERIC: Yup. Yup.

Absolutely nothing inside, no

roof, it's just four walls. MELISSA: And

you mentioned that we're

starting construction, or

construction is coming or, where are we? ERIC:

Construction is coming. So,

just with the grant process,

there. We are finally getting in

the solicitation phase to find

a contractor. And just like

that, we have to follow the

guidelines of who can actually

work on this house. So, we're

in that process right now, but

once we find them, you know,

they can start work and make sure

that there my job is also to
make sure the construction is

following those guidelines.

Because if they propose they're

going to do this and they don't

do it, they can take.. MELISSA: Jeopardizes the funding. ERIC: Yeah, so

it's very important. MELISSA: And not
just any contractor either, or?

As long as the contractor
qualifies. ERIC: Well, it's

qualifications. And when we
send out a solicitation, there

is so much information that the
contractor will look at and see

if they can provide that.

And just like, we're going to

incorporate the grant policies
in that, so they have to follow

this. Follow these rules

so. MELISSA: But Saint Francis House

isn't the only project. ERIC: No it is not. Actually Washington

Street actually has, within stone's throwaway. There's two

more grant projects. It's actually being the project

manager as Jaime Perkins and she has doing a great job on that.

So, it's the St Mary's Baptist Church and there's also

the Elks Lodge. And those are also going to be renovated

fairly quickly too. So, Washington Street as a whole

will be revamped here in the near future. MELISSA: A whole new look

for Washington. ERIC: A new look.

It's going to be a great.

MELISSA: Let me do a quick, let me do a

quick identification. If you are

just tuning in. You're

listening to The Break Room.

I'm Melissa Wissel,

Communications Director for the

City of St Augustine and

today, we have Eric Walters. He

is the City's Grants

Administration Coordinator.

We're talking about grant

funding, specifically St

Francis House and a great

project that is just one of

several that City is involved

with. So, when you say not only

your projects, you work with

them, with Jamie. And she's

not, I mean, she's responsible

for those projects that she's

doing through the CRA, which
we've talked about. But you're

also integral to making sure
she's able to keep her

projects. ERIC: Yes. Well, not even
just Jamie. I'm also with

Jessica Beach. She does a lot
of great grant funding for..

MELISSA: She's got a lot of projects. ERIC: Oh
yeah, a lot of project, flood

mitigations. We're all, we all
work together to sure

everything's right. I mean, we
have quarterly status reports

that we have to send in it all
the time. We make sure we're

on the right track, because we
don't want any of this funding

to go away, you know? So. MELISSA: I'm
going to put you on the spot.

Can you, you may not know this.

Do you have a number of a

dollar amount of how much?

Lots. You can be vague

and say lots. ERIC: For the whole

City? MELISSA: I'm putting you on the

spot. ERIC: Is it for the whole city?

MELISSA: Grant funding. Roughly? ERIC: Millions.

There's millions. MELISSA: Yeah. And all

of them have be managed. To the penny. ERIC: Oh yeah,

definitely. Even down to FEMA

reimbursement. So, I'm dealing

with FEMA and Hurricane Ian and

Nicole took a, you know, damage

to the City. MELISSA: Right. And we are

just still getting projects

that, hey, we have electrical

issues from that storm. So it's

still ongoing, and there's a lot

of money from FEMA. They are a great organization, so that

right there is a big project, too. MELISSA: When I hear the words FEMA,

all I can think of, I can't help it. All I can think of is red

tape. ERIC: Yeah. Lot of red tape. MELISSA: And we still are working through

projects from Matthew? Yes. We still have funding or...? ERIC: It's

still it's still going.

So like I said with grants, FEMA

or any funder can request information. It's like an

audit. So there's times we're still getting information from

the COVID, COVID-19 grants that we're coming in. You know they

want explanation of how to use this money, or you know. And

that's where our job to really,
to make sure we have everything

in line. So if they ask for it,
we have it. You know, we give

them information and let them
know, oh okay. And they just keep

following up, keep following up.

MELISSA: So, you're always on your

toes. ERIC: Always on my toes. MELISSA: And you
have some regulations and rules

about notifications. You mention
that you have to go in front of

the City Commission sometimes,
there's public noticing, there's

timelines, very specific. ERIC: Yes, yes.

So just like this CDBG we're

talking about. In order to be
eligible, you have to hold two

public hearings to even be

eligible for that funding. So

you have to notify the public
and let them know that hey,

there is a source of money that
we can apply for. And if anybody

has any input like the public
or the Commission or anyone,

they can say hey yeah that's a
great idea. So you have to give,

I think, don't quote me on this,
but like 14 or 15 days to

let the public know. And then
you have to hold another second

public meeting, hearing to
notify the public of the

project. And you have to give
them time if someone says no

that's not a good project, we
don't want to go with that, we

can go with this one. And of
course the City's going to

reevaluate and see you know. MELISSA:
Listen, Yeah. But

there but there is something to
be said. Again that goes back

to the whole.. This doesn't
happen overnight. It's a matter

of, we do want our public to
know what we're doing. So

you, yeah. Public noticing. So
if you're listening just

consider this another public
notice for something. No. ERIC: Yeah.

To reach back to the St
Francis House. This was

started before my time here. So,
I'm just coming into the

construction phase. Our, my
Deputy Director Cory Sakryd.

He got the ball rolling on
this project. So, it's a really

good start. Denise Radovich
also kept, you know, in place

everything. And here I am, and
now we're in the construction

phase, and that's where I really
wanted you know the public to

know about the St Francis
House. And there's also a lot of

information on Washington
Street right, in the historical

aspect. I mean not many people
know that Dr Martin Luther

King actually used that as the
Southern Christian Leadership

Conference headquarters in
64 - 65. There's actually a

picture of him walking down

Washington Street during a

peaceful protest back then. And

there's the St Francis right

in the back. MELISSA: Right there. ERIC: It's

really cool. I mean, all the

way back to the 1800s, it

was a cigar shop, you know,

meat packing place, good store.

It, it's really cool. MELISSA: If those

walls could talk.

Although, I think technically

those walls are actually brand

new too. They've been, I think some of those buildings

have had to be rebuilt because

of Matthew. There's

been damage, but that's all what

this project is about though is

rebuilding. ERIC: Yes, but we also

want to keep the historical

aspect. Cuz it is

very important. And so,
Washington Street, like just

being the project manager, I've
learned more about that street

and it's great to be a part
of it. MELISSA: The history, I would

imagine the historic value
plays into the application, as

well, because it validates or
legitimizes why these projects

are so important. ERIC: Yeah that's
also another step of the

funding. So there's a time where
you had to deal with the

Florida Department Historical
Resources. You have to make sure

that everything that was in
that building, you know, whether

you're going to dig five inches

deep below or anything, and it's

all, it's all documented, because
they don't want to destroy

historical building, and just
put a new building up. So we're

dealing with that afterwards. There was a
time period where I had to keep

giving them, and that's where I
learned about the history of

the place, because the Florida
Department of Historical

Research wanted to know about
it, too. And then they had

to give us the good to go in
order to actually start this

project. So, we actually get the
good to go a couple months ago. So here we are.

MELISSA: So, so here we are. So, I know I told you

we would run out of time.

So, we're already out of time.

We didn't even get to talk
about all the other cool stuff

you do. Things that you
have your hand in. I'm going to

give a quick, I can't even
really ask you to tell me about

it, because we really are that
short on time. But I want you to

come back and talk to me about
derelict vessels. ERIC: Yes, we could

talk all day about derelict
vessels. MELISSA: And we, you know,

they're a bit of an eyesore.

It's not just. The fact

that something got abandoned.

It's, there's a lot of there's a

lot to be told about derelict

vessels. so. ERIC: They're multiplying every day it

seems like in the waterways, so.

Yeah. MELISSA: Well, we'll have to just

keep our listeners on the edge
of their seats for that one.

ERIC: Sounds good. MELISSA: Thank you for
coming. ERIC: Thank you for having me. Lots of

great information. If any of
our listeners, take a take a

drive down Washington Street.
Take a look at what's happening

there. History is being
restored. Those buildings are

going to come back and
Washington Street is going to

have a beautiful facelift. ERIC: Yes.
And thank you for everything.

And also I wanted to mention
that the StFrancisShelter.ORG is the website if you
want to learn anymore. History

or donations or about their

program. MELISSA: Excellent, tell me it one

more time. ERIC: StFrancisShelter.org. MELISSA: Excellent.

Thanks for coming by, Eric.

ERIC: Alright, thank you again. MELISSA: If

you missed part of this
broadcast and want to go back

and listen from the beginning,
you can now find us on your

favorite podcast app. Look for
us on Spotify, Apple Podcast,

and more. Check that out at
CityStAugRadio.com for a

complete listening. 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.

Find us on all of our social

media platforms. You'll see us
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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.