

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. Last
time we spoke to Eric Walters,

the City's Grants Administration
Coordinator. We learned about

CDBG grants, other grant
funding opportunities, and the

whole grants application
process. And we didn't even get

a chance to start talking about
how the City deals with

derelict vessels. So, we're
going to follow up on derelict

vessels and to do that today.

Of course, Eric Walters is back

in The Break Room. ERIC: I am. Good
morning, Melissa. Thank you for

having me again. MELISSA: Thanks for
coming back. You do a lot of

things. Derelict vessels is
something that's probably a

good thing to talk about as we
get into the warmer weather,

more people out on the water,
more people witnessing.

Such said items as delict
vessels. Take it away. ERIC: Yes. I'm

always on the waterway also.
So, I see a lot of these

derelict vessels. They can
come in different shapes or

forms, you know. You might not
even know you pass a delicate

vessel. It might be anchored
somewhere. A lot of people know

that there's some in the
mangroves or sunk. Those are

obvious ones. But I'll start
with the beginning of what a

delicate vessel is. So, by
definition, it's a wrecked,

junked, or substantially

dismantled vessel, you know,

and more importantly, it's
causing harm to the environment

and the waterway is of safety.

So, you know, a lot of people

go fishing or boating at night.

They could hit a vessel

that's in the middle of the
water. MELISSA: So, also what you're

saying though, too, is it doesn't
have to be looking like.

A junk boat. ERIC: A lot of times
there's vessels that they're

not paying their mooring fees,
they they're just abandoned.

I mean, there's different
situations, but before they

become derelict, they need to
become at-risk vessels. So,

there's a process before that.

So, it means just like that,

at risk. So, it's at risk of

becoming derelict. So, the FWC,

SJSO, or the St Augustine

Marine Unit will try to find

the owner. Let them know, hey,

I believe your vessels have

become at risk of becoming

derelict. Will you please do

something about this? And

then after that process, they will

send an official letter to the

owner. They have five days to

respond by the letter, you know,

just to make plans, they're

going to work with you, because

obviously they're not going to

try to take it away, that costs

money. Sometimes it cost more

than the vessels actually worth
to remove it. MELISSA: Which is why

people leave them behind. ERIC: So a
lot of times, you know, the owner

will be like, okay, sorry about
that. I'll go fix the motor or

I'll bring it in because it's
leaking or, you know, whatever

the police agency says that's
going on. So but yeah, lot of the vessels here in the
St Augustine Waterway, they

will be removed by the owners.
But you know, sometimes it gets

to that point where the City
has to remove them. So there's a

whole.. MELISSA: They can't just go in and
do that? Can you tell us about that? ERIC: After the time

period of, after the delict
process, I'll get notified like,

hey you can remove this vessel.

So, since I worked in

procurement, the City, we also
have to have these strict rules

of who, not anyone can just go
in there and tow the boat, you

know. We have to get quotes and do
all this stuff. So, once we

get, you know, a good
contractor, reliable

contractor, we will tow these
vessels. And then there's

another waiting area of time of
when we can destroy them.

Because then the owner can
still come back and claim their

vessel because sometimes, you
know, some people are on

vacation or they live up north
and they left their vessels.

They're not going to come down
the next day to come pick up

their vessels. But we're
we're always trying to work

with the owners to make sure.

MELISSA: So, it's a time, it's time

consuming, from what you're
saying, I mean it. ERIC: Yes. MELISSA: And I

can't just go because I've seen
a boat that hasn't been, if I

go out on the boat, if I go out
on the water every day, and I

see a boat that's never been
touched, let's just say I could

prove it's never been touched
for a certain period of time, I

can't just go and say, I
want to take that boat. ERIC: Nope,

you can't. MELISSA: Even if it looks

good. ERIC: Yeah. Actually, my good

buddy, he was born and raised
here. And when I moved down here

before I started this position,
he told me that hey, we you can

just hop on the vessel if it's
derelict, and then you can claim

that's yours. I was, I was like
hey yeah that's a free boat, you

know. What's going on? But no
That's not that's not the process. MELISSA: That's not the case.

ERIC: That's that's theft because.

MELISSA: And you've educated your

friend. ERIC: I've educated my
friend. So either the police

owns it or the City owns it. I
guess we're the same

organization, or the owner owns
it. So that is theft. But there

is a process with the FWC to
where you can claim it. But you

have to pay a fee. You know, you
have to go through all these

steps to try to get that title
into your name. And then once

it's in name, after you pay the
fees and all these waiting

times, you have now permission
to take it, and you have to get

this boat off the water. So
now it's derelict, but it's in

your name. MELISSA: Now it's your derelict vessel. ERIC: So,
if you claim a boat, and you pay

all the fees, but you don't get
it out in time, we're going to

remove it, and then you get the
bill, you know, that's how that

works. MELISSA: And so how do I report, I
mean is it legit, if I say that

I think this boat is abandoned,
or I think it's a? How do I,

as a boater report. ERIC: Well,
Derelict vessels have a

derelict sticker on them.

Visible. So, the police

agencies, when they troll
around, they can see what boat

is derelict. And it will say
the date of when it was posted.

It's just a warning, and it also
says you can't climb. You

cannot climb on a derelict
vessel. You can't take anything

from it because it's not your
property. but so you'll

see these boats out there.

MELISSA: You'll know. It's

usually the ones that have a

lot of bird poop on em. ERIC: Yes.

Yeah. Bird poop or half sunken.

And that that's another

thing. So, if your vessel is

posing a risk to the

environment, you know, if it's

not just floating, it's derelict,

like if it's sunk or it's

posing hazardous waterway, like

someone could get injured.

MELISSA: Like your mast is sticking up

out of the water. Cuz it's

underground in the mast is sticking up. ERIC: And

it's obvious that the owner

can't, you know, he's not

going to go out there swim

underneath the water and try to

float it. So he

can get some help. The

police will help you but we
will remove that vessel. Okay.

Some, a lot of times, they
have insurance, you know, getting

reimbursed for that. MELISSA: So, we work
with you. ERIC: Yeah we definitely

work with you. But we are, we
are trying to get all these

derelict vessels. But it is a
big, it's a process,

and it is grant funded.

And as we spoke earlier, you

know how long grants happen. But
these are not necessary as long

as that. Not at all

because you know, it's kind

of important to get these out
of there and not wait. MELISSA: And

we're trying to clean up the
waterways. So, be on the

lookout. If you see the big
sticker, we're on it. If

you're concerned, call hail the,
hail on the radio, call the

Police Department, report it.

Yup. Alright. ERIC: And

also there's a. So the cost of
moving it can vary greatly.

That's the biggest thing
working here. A lot of the

times, the bill is way more
expensive than the actual cost

of a vessel. So, there's
times where people think they

can just abandon their vessel.

You know, they don't know what

to do with it. They'll
scratch off the vin number.

Everything and not track
it to em. But the police is very

investigative. They will find
you. MELISSA: They will find you. ERIC: And

yeah, even if it's a \$50 boat,
it could turn to a couple

hundred or thousands of dollars
to get it removed. MELISSA: Okay. So,

take care of your boat. ERIC: Yeah,
take care of your boats and

don't just leave em in the
boat. MELISSA: And if they come knocking,

answer the door. If you're
just tuning in, you're

listening to The Break Room.
I'm Melissa Wissel,

Communications Director in the
studio with me this week. I

have Eric Walters, the City's
Grants Administration

Coordinator talking about

derelict vessels. We've got a

few minutes left. Let's talk
a little bit about the dredging

that's happening. That's getting started this month,

since we're talking about the
water. ERIC: Yes, in May in Salt Run,

there will, there is a dredging
project. So, a lot of locals

here know that when you get out
of the Lighthouse Boat Ramp,

it's pretty shallow at low
tide. So you know

how every year there is more
sediment and everything builds

up. So, we have to remove that
every year to make sure it's

safe passage. So that's
going to be happening here in

the next month. So there's

going to be a lot of action on

the water here in Salt Run.

Especially with the derelict

vessels around, too. So we're

trying to get rid of those.

We're trying to make it sure

that's safe. And we also

have the Marina Breakwaters

here at our Marina that's

going to be working on that.

Those were damaged from

Hurricane Ian and Nicole.

They took those out. So a lot

of people probably seen all the

engineers out there and and the

huge barges working on that.

But we're in the project,

or right now trying to get that

fixed. So we can get back

to running capacity. MELISSA: And we're
glad that it's broken in the

sense that it did its job. ERIC: Yeah
did its job. It's remarkable,

if you see pictures of the
storm, how crazy that water

looked before the breakwater,
and then after it's just calm.

It's pretty cool. I
didn't even know it works.

MELISSA: Yeah how that works. Yeah. So.
And particularly when you when

the tide comes in so high that
that dock is almost at the cap

of the pilings. And it's
up and down and it's roly poly,

stormy on the one side closest
to the bridge, and then you're

right on the inside. It's like
there's not even wind. ERIC: Yep. So

all those boats are protected
by that breakwater. All their

valuables and stuff. But so,
we're really going to try to

get this one going and get it
fixed so we can keep the public,

and have more boats coming in.
Because you know it's so

limited right now with
all the construction going on.

MELISSA: Before we sign off, you were
talking about the dredging

project, where is, where does
the dredging take place? They

don't come all the way into
the, the boat ramp, do they?

ERIC: They are going to be, we have
maps, I can't say exactly where

it's going to be, but it is

going to be here on the

lighthouse boat ramp.

It's going to be starting in

Salt Run, all the way to the

Conch House Marina. So,

there is a channel there where

boats are supposed to be going.

So, they will be touching those

areas, because that's where the

right away for vessels are

supposed to be. MELISSA: Okay, so it

is in the, it's from the ramp

to Conch House... Somehow in my head, I

was thinking Conch House out to

the inlet. But no, it's not. In,

it's down in the. In Salt

Run. And they've gotta

watch out for all those other

boats. So, if you see that big

barge down there. ERIC: Yes, and the
funding from that is, thank

goodness, from the FIND and Port
Waterway District. So,

the Florida Inland Navigation
District has helped out the

City so much. Same with the
St Augustine Port and

Waterway District. So, they are
helping us every year get these

projects and and help you
navigate the waterways in a

safe time. MELISSA: They're another
funding source for grants. ERIC: Yes.

MELISSA: And we apply for that money?

ERIC: Yes. Okay. Yep. We do the same

thing, we go to meetings, propose,
and it's all data. It's not

like, hey we think this is
happening. It's happening. MELISSA: It's

actually. Yeah. ERIC: Yeah. So we
have to remove that water. I

mean, not the water, the sediment
and all that stuff. MELISSA: And the

Marina overall, doing really
well. You were mentioning we're

going to get that breakwater
fixed. ERIC: Yes Yup. We're going to

get that fixed. I don't, I'm not
sure the timeline of that, but

it should be sometime in the
summer when they're working on

it, hopefully by the end of the summer, it
will be completed. But

then again, you know, anything
could happen. Another storm,

because we're coming into
hurricane season. MELISSA: Right. We're coming

into hurricane season. ERIC: So,

we're we're preparing for that,

too. So. MELISSA: And boats that are on
our moorings, we always put out

information about being, safety
on those on those mooring

balls, anchoring. You want to
make sure you're on a mooring

ball or dock during hurricane
season. But Eric, it's good to

from you, derelict Vessels,
Dredging, Marina Repairs.

All of its grant money. You get
to check all the boxes. Make sure
everything's going smoothly.

ERIC: Yup. Lot of cool things
happening. MELISSA: Alright. Well,

thanks for coming and checking
in with us. It's always good to

have you and keep all that
money coming in. ERIC: Alright. Thank

you. MELSSA: If you missed part of this
broadcast and want to go back

and listen from the beginning,
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what's happening in and around

the City. Most importantly that
you hear from the people

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Until next time, thanks for
tuning in. ANNOUNCER: You've been
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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.