

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. It's been

about two months since the City
announced Ruben Franklin as

Assistant City Manager taking
the place of Mr David Burcham

who was selected to serve as
our new City Manager, following

the retirement of John Regan.
Reuben is joining us this week

to talk about what's happening
in his new role as Assistant

City Manager. Ruben, it's been
a while. Welcome back. REUBEN: Yeah, it

has. Thanks for having me back
and two months goes by in a

flash. MELISSA: In a flash and our 15
minutes today is going to go by

in a flash. So, if we can
squeeze it all in, we will. So,

you've been with us. You've
been an Engineer. You were

Mobility Manager when we
created that role. You're a

Public Works Director,

Assistant City Manager, you've

seen an awful lot. What's
new in your new role? REUBEN; Yeah,

it's going on 13 years. This
past July was 13 years with the

City of St Augustine, and
hopefully I have another 13

years in me. MELISSA: Excellent. REUBEN: Love
the City, love working for

the residents and businesses of
the City. We do have a lot

going on. A lot of important
issues that are important to

the community. So as
Assistant City Manager, I'm

taking over some of those
bigger project that David had

been working on. So
affordable housing,

homelessness, and then pushing
forward with, you know, our big

plans with mobility, as well, and
so.. MELISSA: Firehouse.

Spanish street's going on.

REUBEN: Spanish street. We're about to

start a couple things for you
to keep an eye on. MELISSA: Just a few things for you to keep an eye on. REUBEN: And you know,

a lot of that takes
coordination and time and

to make sure that our community
knows what's going on, and

that's what I love about this
show here. MELISSA: So let's start, let's

start with the one that's most
immediate and most pressing. And

it's a, it is somewhat of a
small niche issue, but we

want to make sure that we
address it. Won't take as

long, but Spanish Street. Tell
me about what's happening on

Spanish Street downtown. The historic core. REUBEN: Yes,
Spanish Street. We are

getting ready to start
construction on the next

section of the curbless
Streets. It's going to,

Spanish Street, between Cuna
and Orange Street. It's an

asphalted street. So, we're
about to convert this back to a

bricked, really
pedestrian-friendly street,

that's going to be a nice
addition to the downtown

Historic District. And so that
starts on Monday. Unfortunately

with all good things, you know,

there is going to be a bit of

pain with the construction
process. But we've been reaching

out to businesses and residents,
coordinating. We had an open

house. And so, when we do start
the construction, you know, it's

going to, it's going to take a
little while, we're

anticipating a six to eight
month process. So I tell

everybody, if you have an issue,
please reach out to the City. We

want to be nimble and agile and
and respond during this

construction process, so. MELISSA: And if
you're, so for, if folks aren't

familiar. Part of Spanish
Street already has this

redesign, correct? REUBEN: Yeah, if you want to know what it's going to

look like, it's the Hypolita Street and Spanish Street. It's

the curbless Street with the brick down the center, new

lighting, drainage so you're going to have your net drainage

inlets. And overall, it's just going to be another beautiful

addition to the downtown area. It's part of our mobility

plan, and part of some that started back in the 450th, when

we did the first section of streets, this plan to convert

all of our streets in that town plan to brick streets with a

nice streetscape. That contributes to the beautiful

architecture and historic
buildings that we have

downtown. MELISSA: Okay. So, bear with
us on Spanish Street. I

know it's going to be a little
painful. Not quite as painful.

Let's bring up another sort of
subject. Not quite as painful

as closing down West King. How
does that look like? Can we

talk about that real quick?
The West King little bridge

there, by the way. Let's Jump on that one while... REUBEN: Sure. With everything
with the City, we have state

roads that run through our
City. And so they have their

own plans, and part of their
plan is to rebuild the bridge

on King Street. So, when you

turn off of US one and you're

heading into town, that bridge
you cross right there. It's a

really old bridge, and it needs
to be rebuilt. And so they have

plans to start next summer to
rebuild that bridge and in order

to do that, we have to close
that bridge down because of the

tight confined spaces there. We
can't leave traffic on it while

they're working, so we're
going to have a detour in place,

or FDOT will have a detour in
place, that pushes people to a

new traffic signal at Malaga
and US-1. And so that will be

how you access downtown, you'll
bypass the US-1 King Street,

you'll go to Malaga Street, turn
right, and then come back to

King Street. And so that's
going to be another long

process, but that won't start
till next summer. MELISSA: And we'll have

meetings.. I know DOT.. REUBEN: We'll have meetings. MELISSA: We'll have some
meetings, and there's nothing we

can do about it again. You
know, it's the burden

that we bear of being a great,
historic, quaint little town,

that we need to upgrade. REUBEN: Yes
and the the good news is is

that's one of the last pieces
of old infrastructure, as far as

our bridges go. We're in
really good shape from an

infrastructure standpoint with
our bridges and roads. This

is kind of the last bridge, if
you look back over the last 15

years. We've replaced the
Bridge of Lions. We've replaced

State Road 16, we've
replaced... MELISSA: The old, or the box

culvert. REUBEN: And the box culvert.
So, that's the other flip side

to this coin, is it is good work
and that bridge does need to be

replaced. MELISSA: And it'll also
address some of that flooding

that happens on the ingress and
egress. REUBEN: Yeah, and we're looking

at the embankments that get
overtopped there as well. So, good

benefits, but another big
project coming our way. MELISSA: Okay.

Let's just let's just keep

on ticking down the list.

We're almost halfway through
our interview today, so we may not make it

all. We may have to have you
back. If you are just now

tuning in, you are listening to
The Break Room. I have Ruben

Franklin with us in studio this
week. He's the new Assistant

City Manager. He's been with us
for 13 years. He know it's, he

knows what's going on. We're
going to continue this. Let's

move on to, you take a pick.

Affordable housing or

homelessness. For 100. REUBEN: Well,
let's start with affordable

housing. Okay. And so,
recently the City Commission, we

we had a a public charrette
process on.. the City owns a

large piece of property off of, at
450 North Holmes

Boulevard, which is out in the
County. And so, we hired a

consultant, and they ran through
an affordable housing exercise.

We got public input and
stakeholder input and

professional input, and they
developed the final site plan

that, what it would look like to
develop this 80-acre site, off

of Holmes Boulevard into an
affordable housing development.

And it was a good process, and
the City Commission got

presented it and they asked us
to move forward with the

development review process,
because it's out in the County,

we have to go through their
process. So that's our next step,

is to sit down with the County
and go through what

requirements are needed in
order to develop this site, once

we acquire all that information,
we'll have a road map and cost

associated with it and we'll
bring that back to our City

commission and say, you know,
would you like us to move

forward with this? One of
the things we have to work out

is we currently use that site
as our storage and and lay down

area for utilities and

facilities. And so we would

have to figure out a new site

for that, as well. MELISSA: So, before we

move away from the development

idea, just to make sure folks

understand, the charrette was, like you

said, it was the on-site visit.

There was a public meeting.

They came back with a couple of

options, correct? And

and then the commission chose

one. Can you describe a little

bit of what those, kind of what

looked like, or what the one

looks like? Or how that? I think

people have a hard time of

imagining what does, what is

this really going to look like?

REUBEN: So the design was really

intent on making a livable
community there. And so we're

looking at 400 units, and it
would be a mixture of single

family houses to apartments to
duplexes and have a

variety of different housing
options on site. With like its

own little town center. MELISSA: So a
neighborhood. Yeah, it's a neighborhood. REUBEN: I mean

neighborhood. And and you
know, it's within a few miles of

of the downtown City really.
So we took all that into

consideration. The final
plan is just the concept, but it

was, it showed what we could,
what is possible. And so

now that we know what's
possible, now it's time.. MELISSA: The direction they

want to go. Okay. REUBEN: Now
it's time to get into the

permitting process, you know,
zoning requirements. We might

have to go for a zoning change,
or it might have to be a plan

unit development, and that's all
the things I'm about go find

out. MELISSA: Find out. And utilities?

We have to bring utilities. Which is a good thing. REUBEN: And

utilities, we actually had a
grant. Yeah. So utilities had

to be brought out to the site,
and we actually have a state

grant to fund the impact fees
in the utilities associated

with it. So, we we've got a lot
of good things in the hopper

here, and the intent was to try

to bring affordable housing

near the City and County. We
know it's a big issue, and this

could potentially add 400 units,
you know, to the market. MELISSA: When

we talk about affordable
housing too, I think, correct

me if I'm wrong, but it also
affordable housing, workforce

housing, the idea here is that
we have so much with industry.

You have not just teachers,
firefighters, police, service

providers, public safety
professionals, but we have

industry. We have hospitality,
bartenders, restaurant workers.

It's expensive to live here.
So, we're, this is us

trying to do what we can to
help make it easier for people

to live and work. REUBEN: Correct.

Yeah. So, affordable housing is

that, you know, you're the new
teacher that's a young

professional, or a new young
professional engineer that's

starting at the City. Where you
know, they need a place to live.

And that's at the heart of the
affordable housing is, you know,

how do we get folks coming out
of college, or going into

professions of places to live,
where they're actually living

in the County and City and not
having to go into a

neighboring. MELISSA: And living in the
community in which they work.

REUBEN: Exactly. Yeah. So. It's an important thing. MELISSA: Yeah and

there, it's a big, it's a big ask. You know, I think

there's been a little bit of why is that our problem? But

it's because we want to have a better community for our

workers. REUBEN: Yes and and the County's working on it, too.

They have an affordable housing committee. I was just at, to

discuss what the City's doing. We try to work even in our

utility service area with affordable housing to do cost

shares for utilities where we can. So it's an issue that's

just not the City's. It's issue

for the County, as well. And

I'm looking forward to moving
this particular project forward

to see if we can make something
of it. MELISSA: Is there, and I'm

going to put you on the spot a
little bit. There's also been

talks, I know I've had Greg
White in here. There's other

amenities and projects, that I'm
going to say folks in the

County, because it's in, it's
outside of the city limits, but

things like community centers,
medical development parks, to

really develop that area.

Not just this. REUBEN: Yes. So and in

that, that's what I alluded to,
that's in our utility

service area. So where we can
have an impact is how we can

help with the water and sewer
utilities. And before our

prior City Manager retired, he
had, the Commission did approve

us funding like the a medical
center to waive the impact fees

for flow-based fees, not waive
them, but the City would cover

the cost of those, so. Okay.

So doing what we can where we

can, and it's just, we're not in
it alone. It's a

County wide issue. MELISSA: Well, it's
nice to hear when you say

things like, there's a grant.

There's funding, helps, it helps

I think the taxpayers know that
you know, we're getting

support. It's not just those of
us who live here. But it, you

know, and it's going to benefit
everybody. REUBEN: Yes. MELISSA: Okay. So,

I'm going to move. I'm going to
switch gears, because I'm

going to have to have you come
back, so that we can talk about

the fire station out on the
island and homeless

initiatives. So, before we wrap
up real quick, we, you're in

charge of the CRA. We're
working on a new division,

department for neighborhood
services. Quick out, that'll be

an outreach with Jaime D
Perkins. Can you give me that

in a minute? REUBEN: Sure. Yeah. Very

excited. So, Jaime Perkins, who

is our CRA manager, has got a
promotion to expand her role

and do neighborhood
services. And one of the first

things out of the gate to
get the neighborhood grants

rolling. And I know that will take a
load off of communications

there. So, one of the first
things you'll see is the

neighborhood grants coming
back. So, if you're in a

neighborhood right now, be on
the lookout. We expect in the

next couple weeks to have some
messaging going out about

revitalizing and getting the
grant program back up and

running. And so, I'm excited
for Jaime and to help her

with that, as well. That's
great. MELISSA: I'm sure I'll be

working with her on
transitioning that over to her

plate. And off of my plate.
Wonderful. Well, I am going to

wrap us up here today, Ruben.
We're out of time, but like I

said, I do want to have you
come back. We're going to talk

a little bit about homelessness
support initiatives that we're

working on with Barry Fox, and
also the Fire house out on the

island, what we're doing with
that. So, thanks for coming.

REUBEN: Thank you. 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 podcasting
app. We have them all listed

along with our past episodes,
including this one on our

website. You can see that at
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want to keep you informed
what's happening in and around

the City, and most importantly
that you hear it here directly

from the people doing the work
and making it happen everyday.

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next time. 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.