

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 [CityStAugRadio.com](http://CityStAugRadio.com). We

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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Thanks for tuning in. Until  
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  
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