

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. Former

Police Chief Barry Fox is with me in studio this week. Barry

retired from the St

Augustine Police Department in 2021

and now serves as the City's
Code Enforcement Manager. But in

addition to that, he has been
tasked with taking the lead on

the City's efforts to help the
unsheltered homeless, find

solutions for providing
services and support, getting

people back on their feet
reunited with their families,

all kinds of hard work. Barry
welcome back. BARRY: Thank you for

having me. MELISSA: You are a busy man. BARRY:
Little bit. MELISSA: Out of the out of

the frying pan into the fire,
maybe? Just keep, we're keeping

you on your toes. We couldn't
let you go. MELISSA: All things noone

else wants to do, I think. MELISSA: You're doing great work. Let's get

started. In all seriousness, you're taking on a really big

initiative, a lot of work there.

But it didn't start now, you

started it before you left the Police Department. And you

kind of brought it with you. BARRY: I did. So, I guess it's important

to kind of remember that, we didn't start the fight, we

joined. In 2017, you know, then City Manager John Regan asked

that I kind of come up with a way to address homelessness in the

downtown area to kind of support the service providers

and all that were already, you know, in the fight. MELISSA: When you were

Chief. BARRY: With the homeless and the unsheltered. And we

modeled it basically after a program out of the west, and

I think Sarasota we sent some officers down to Sarasota. And it

was basically an outreach team, and that team was consisted

of two of my officers. Because we already, we knew the

homeless. We knew where they were located at. And for the

most part, we knew the services. So we just needed someone

working with the homeless or the unsheltered and connecting

them with the services. And you know, just continuously staying on top

of them. And the city is, the

St Augustine Police

Department, way way back in the
90s, mid 90s, had actually

started a program called the
Family Reunification Program.

And the city had been funding
it 30 years now. And it's

basically a program where we
buy individuals that may be

unsheltered or homeless, we buy
them tickets, as long as they

could give us a family member,
and they we, and they going home

to a family member, and that
family member, if we contacted

them, would assure us that if we
got their loved one home, they

would take them off the street.

MELISSA: And a ticket, you mean a bus

ticket. BARRY: A bus ticket.

Yes. So you know, the City of

St Augustine has sponsored
that program, and the City of

St Augustine Police
Department has utilized it in

conjunction with Catholic
Charities who managed the money

for it. So that there was no, you
know, for almost 30 years. So

we've been utilizing that
program for 30 years and

the City of St Augustine's
been funding it. So that was

one thing that was already
occurring. So, we started this

outreach team and it consisted
of Caroline Drouin and Officer

Steve Fischer and they really
hit the hit the road running,

you know. And they
changed a lot of lives and had

huge impacts and things
like that. And then so I retired

in 2021, and you know, there's
only so much with working with

the homeless that you can do
from behind a gun and a badge.

Because a lot of the issues associated

with getting them assistance
depends upon trust. And not

that people don't trust law
enforcement. It's just, it's

hard for those.... MELISSA: Intimidating. BARRY: To
yeah, to build those

relationships of trust. So,
recently before Mr. Regan

retired, he approached me
with, you know, reimagining the

outreach and reimagining our

efforts for outreach in the

City. And you know,

one of the suggestions that

come out of that conversation

was, we moved the outreach from

the Police Department over to a

civilian job and continue those

efforts in that manner, and then,

you know, identify, you know, what

the next steps are for the

City. MELISSA: Take it away from that

badge and gun, as you you said

that to me that, we were talking,

and it made, it made a visual

impression on me of the

difference of an, of someone

with a badge and a gun.

Walking up to someone who's

unsheltered. Homeless.

Versus someone in street

clothes. BARRY: With you, know an

assistance community service or... MELISSA:

City logo or something that,

that has a been, friendly feel.

BARRY: Right. You know, and it then,

it gave the St Augustine

Police Department to

concentrate their efforts on

enforcement and those quality

of life issues that needed to

be enforced, and... MELISSA: They got their

hands full with that, too. BARRY: Yeah.

They do. Yeah yeah. You know, 28

years plus, I know what

they deal with. Yeah. So, yeah,

it gives them the ability to

just kind of concentrate on

those efforts, and stay inside
that law enforcement, you know,

arena and do what they needed
to do there. MELISSA: Which I want to

point out to folks. I know one

of the things, while we're

talking about law enforcement.

is if there are concerns, folks

do need to call law enforcement

to. I mean it's a fine line.

Yeah so. It's hard. BARRY: Yeah so you
got a lot of

business owners or residents
that will see issues, but you

know, they don't want to be
involved. They don't want to

get involved, because they're
they're concerned about

retaliation, especially our
business owners for a great

part. So they won't call, but
they will voice their opinions

in certain, you know, platforms.

But listen, you know. And I'm

sure Chief Michaux and
Assistant Chief Cuthbert will

assure you that the officers
are out there and ready to

respond. And we'll
take care, they'll take care of

the things appropriately. And we, they just have to know

that, you know, those things are
going on right then. I think

they have, they have an
individual that walks St

George Street now. I think
they've got five bikes assigned

downtown. MELISSA: So, their hands are tied.

I guess my point though is

their hands are tied. If folks
don't call. To report.

They can't do anything. BARRY: They
can't be everywhere at once.

MELISSA: You can't you can't be. So if
they're responding to a call.

You know. There has to be. BARRY: They'll
address it.

But in the absence of
a of a call for service.

They're they're kind of trying
to be seen everywhere. So

they're walking. MELISSA: They're there.
BARRY: And they're there somewhere.

But if you need them, you gotta
call, and they'll come. I'm sure

of it, so. MELISSA: If you are just now
tuning in, you are listening to

The Break Room. I have Barry Fox with

me in The Break Room. He is our

former Police Chief. He is now
the head of our homeless

initiatives, we are working on some of
these solutions. You've been

witnessing it, you brought it
with you. We were talking

just a minute ago, about you
were tasked by former City

Manager John Regan. Mr
Birchim, of course, has asked you

to please carry on. Yes, how is
that going? BARRY: So absolutely. So, you know, when the transition,
when Mr Birchim became the

City Manager, he passed on
the strategic plan, because

we're currently involved with
the Florida Housing Coalition

on a developing a strategic
plan for St Augustine, which

has been something that's been
missing for years. MELISSA: So, that

means we're doing. We're not
just talking. BARRY: No, no, no. We

are doing. MELISSA: Yeah. Strategic
plan. Yes. Right. In writing.

BARRY: Absolutely. I can, I can attest
to that, because I've, we've

solicited over 900 responses to
our survey. MELISSA: That yeah, and I'm

going to tell you, the the next
largest response from a survey

I think was 600 and something,
and that was about parking.

So, you're winning. BARRY: Right. So we've got, we have
a lot of information to to mine

through. Luckily
enough, you and and Cindy set me

up on a Survey Monkey that does

a lot of the analysis for me,

because the first time I rolled
out results, it was all hand

tabulated. MELISSA: Good luck with that.

BARRY: Yeah, thank you for doing

that for me. But it had a much
deeper impact, too. So, in

the development of Strategic Plan,
we issued these surveys, and

we did cut them off, because we
do have to, you know, cut it off,

so we can formalize some
reports. But 932 responses I

think is the actual number, I
believe. And that's impressive

responses, and there's good
information from that, and we're

going to vet that out. MELISSA: And
anything stand out on your

first glance through it? I'm
putting you on the spot a

little bit... BARRY: You know, I gotta
tell you, there's some, there's

some service providers that are
are not well known within our

community. There's
some misconceptions in

reference to our service
providers. Our Umbrella

organization seems to be not as
widely recognized as I thought

it would be. So, we
you know, we need to make sure

that people understand that.
There's educational

opportunities that we
identified in reference to

educating and informing the
community on just how many

organizations and how many
people are actually involved,

and have been involved for
years. MELISSA: So maybe the good news is

if I could applaud you guys on
the work, and the, and what's

been going on is that, maybe
folks just don't realize what's

out there. And
how much is being done and

who's doing the work. BARRY: Yeah
there's definitely a lack of

knowledge, in reference to the
number of service providers

and the number of individuals
involved. And that's

alright. MELISSA: Because there's room
there's room to educate and

improve. BARRY: Yeah absolutely and

education yeah. MELISSA: The, you had

some recent outreach

meetings, as part of

defining that strategic plan. I

do sit on that committee with

you. That's a lot of work. And tell me about that.

BARRY: So, we had five town hall meetings,

for lack of a better term, but

strategic plan planning

meetings with the community. And

our service providers, you

know, joined us in that, so

that, you know, some myths. MELISSA:

Visibility, yeah. BARRY: Yeah,

visibility and some myths could

be put to rest right then. And

we developed a lot of good

information from those, and it

was just kind of a piggy back

onto the survey, get, glean some

information from them in

person, give them the ability

to express themselves, meet me

again. Know who I was

and where I came from, in

reference to how I want to, what

my vision is and how I, and

who I am as a person. Talk

about the efforts that are

being made, you know, county wide

to include the continuum of

care, the 30 plus organizations

up underneath the umbrella of

the continuum of care, you know.

The St Johns County outreach

program, you know, the family

unification program that's been

run by the St Augustine

Police Department and the
City of St Augustine for

that 30 plus years. And our
outreach efforts and the change

that the evolution that
we're going, you know. The

the more you know that... MELISSA: We're
shifting. We're shifting the

paradigm. BARRY: No we're shifting.
Yep. And we're shifting

to the positive, in reference to...
We're not shifting just the

appearance. We're shifting our
efforts. We're shifting our

commitment. You know, Mr.
Birchim is committed to this.

So, we're we're shifting that
commitment. We're shifting

those efforts, and we're
going to, what we're

concentrating on not
duplicating. That's right. You

know, one of the things we
want to concentrate on. And but

enhancing the ease of access to
service providers. And maybe

accomplish some other things
that we've seen in other Cities

that have helped individuals
build up the self-esteem to be

able to reach down and. MELISSA:
Dignity, Dignity. Yeah. That's your....
BARRY: Little dignity. A little bit,

little some of the smaller
things that are needed to help

pull, your pull your boots on
and kind of help yourself up

while, you know, while you got a
helping hand, so yeah. MELISSA: So, I

told you we're going to run out
of time. So, we've got about 2

minutes. BARRY: 2 minutes. So. MELISSA: Give me
your quick, you were talking

about re-visioning.

Give me, give us a sneak peek so

that people will just stay
tuned on the edge of their

seats for when you come back
and talk to us. What was the

latest big development? BARRY: Well,
people, if individuals

were paying, you know, paying
attention to the City

Commission meeting, they would
have seen a land swap that

occurred and was approved. And that land swap was for between

two pieces of property where
the City and and I've been

tasked, and Mr. Birchim has
asked me to kind of put

this together and work with
the different service providers,

to kind of put the service
model together. We're

looking at building a daytime
drop-in center. It's not a, not

a shelter. MELISSA: Not a shelter. Not
overnight. BARRY: Not overnight.

Daytime drop-in shelter, where
the different service providers

can come. Dining with
dignity can go where there's

better, where there's better
facilities, supply showers and

restrooms, laundry, you know,
maybe a medical from the

Wildflower Clinic, the ability
to get their IDs, enter them

into HMIS, mental health

counseling is a key through

Lutheran Services. And then any

other service provider that

wants to come and spend some

time there during the week.

They can schedule one, two,

three days, or be there all

week. We don't We don't care.

We want you to be there and

provide a safe place for the

unsheltered to go during the

day. And hopefully, if we can

get them there to take

advantage of those services,

then we can get them to step

inside to the service center,

and start wrapping, we can start

wrapping services around them.

Connect them with services. And

it's a place to go when someone
finds themselves on... I got

evicted this morning. They can
come and we can immediately

hook them up with Salvation
Army. Debbie over housing,

you know, or work with Bill
Lazar in in reference to what,

you know. the projects he's got
going on. Or, all of our other

service providers that can help that individual who's ready for

help. Because he, just you know,
he's just gotta, yeah, just hit

the street, him and his family.
Or the or the single

mother and the two daughters,
you know, we can get, we

can scoop them right up, wrap

services around them, and

and keep them off the street,

and that'll that'll be our

first step, our most, you

know. I think is the most

important part is don't

leave the ones that are just

entering out there too long.

Because the longer

in the unsheltered,

the harder to to bring them

back. Yeah. So. MELISSA: And with that,

we didn't even. So we didn't

even... BARRY: Tease what we wanted to

tease those. MELISSA: You did. You said

we got a place. BARRY: Yeah we got a

place. And so you know where

there's going to be some

developments coming soon on

that particular issue. And so,
and we're going to be trying to

do some education and outreach
and information services to the

individuals that came to our
meeting. And hopefully that

process will grow, so that we're
constantly updating people on

the development of our our
center. So yeah. MELISSA: Okay. I'm

going to cut you off now.

Alright, we're done. Alright.

You're going to come back and
we're going to finish this

conversation. BARRY: Well, we will
try. 15 minutes. MELISSA: Keep up the good work.

Thanks so much, Barry. I
appreciate it and I'm just
going to cut off and end with
that and say thank you for

tuning in to The Break Room
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
another edition of The
Break Room.