

[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 every day. 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. St. Augustine City Commission recently held a

public workshop to get public
input about proposed changes to

a city ordinance which we have
been referring to as the Nightlife

Ordinance. This ordinance has
been on the books for quite a

while trying to get it through
and the commission is still

looking for some great
language. I have Planning and

Building Director Amy Skinner
here with me in studio this

week. We are going to talk
about the proposed changes,

proposed recommendations, lot
of conversation. Amy, welcome

back. [AMY] Thank you. Thanks for
having me. [MELISSA] This is a really

important topic. Um as I

mentioned just now, we've been

talking about it for a long

time. Of course, night life,

safety, and a positive healthy

night life for the downtown has

always been a concern. Of course

as we see more and more

nightlife. Um let's just get

started. Give us a little bit

of a history, just for those

listeners that aren't entirely

aware. Give us give us some of

that backstory. [AMY] So you're

right. We've been talking about

this since probably 2019.

It was definitely

before COVID. Um the concerns

were how to balance resident,

residents that live downtown,

interested in safety concerns
about worker safety as well as

as people who patronize the
downtown, safety issues and and
restaurants and night life.

We're realizing as the county

has grown and we are kind of on
the more of a tourism on the

map on the map as far as
tourism is considered you know.

We're not just for the beach
anymore, we have an a really

neat downtown that people like
to check out, that we you know

are trying to figure out how to
balance the issues and maybe

anticipate growth. And not only
the tourism but also realize

that you know our residents pay
taxes the other businesses that

are here in town. We want to
keep our economy as diverse as

possible, they pay taxes and
there you know everybody has to

work together to make a good,
right, a good city. [MELISSA] Well and and

when you talk about you know
you're talking about as a

destination. Some of the
conversation also has been

recognizing the industry is
shifting. We're having a lot

more weddings. Uh you see a lot
more bachelorette parties and

group parties and groups coming
in. And everybody wants to come

to St. Augustine and have fun
but we need to be able to...

[AMY] Right, people really actually

do live here. That's always

been the neat part about St.
Augustine, is we are kind of a

little urban environment and
people really live here and

we're a real city. And so you
know, this whole destination

thing as you said, you know,
like these weddings. Right. And

these issues and even for
people who live in St. Johns

County that just want to come
and have dinner. Um like we've

said many times if most places
if you're if you have 14, 000

people, you'd be lucky to have
a Dairy Queen and Arby's and

whatever. And we are, it's
amazing that we have as many

you know good restaurants.

Right. Amazing food. Different

you know all kinds of things

that music entertainment. Um

but we're realizing especially

I guess coming out of COVID and

we first introduced this in 2021. Okay. Then we

also had a consultant come in

Responsible

Hospitality Institute, right,

RHI. They came in and they

looked at these issues and they

issued their report in June of 2022.

So [MELISSA] it's moving right along.

[AMY] It's moving along and so that's why we're

kind of bringing it back to

sort of reconsider. We're

realizing you know we still

have issues even though we

slowed down during COVID.

You know we're we're figuring out
how to balance things and the

point of regulation is kind of
how to make things fair sort of

across the board for all the
people that kind of use the

city. And that's those, that's
the residents again the the

workers, the other businesses,
you know the community that we

are trying to maintain. We are a
historic town so [MELISSA] well and you

make a good point - equity and
and by something that you can

regulate gives you a
foundation by which to go and

tell someone, you're not in
compliance. That here's

the rule and we don't there are
some things where, let me give

you an example. Uh people think
that we have a last call.

[AMY] Right. [MELISSA] We don't. Correct?

[AMY] Correct. [MELISSA] There's no rule that

says you must have last call at
a certain time. [AMY] Right and you

know the the state stops
regulating sort of this service

of alcohol serving of alcohol
at midnight. So it's really a

privilege to serve alcohol
after midnight. The city had

had a 1AM kind of alcohol
regulation before the Super

Bowl was in Jacksonville. And so
generally in 2005, this the city

moved it to 2 AM at for the big
event. Having the Super Bowl in

Jacksonville and we never rolled
it back. And we're finding that,

you know, between midnight and 2
AM, is kind of where we have

the the concerns and you know
it's, we're looking at our

services kind of across the
board. You know people have to

realize that the taxpayers of
the city, pay for the police

department, pay for our solid
waste, code enforcement. Code

enforcement, the people that
maintain our infrastructure.

You know, the wear and tear on
our infrastructure, the

pressure washing on St.
George Street to keep things

clean and sanitary, the the

restrooms, the trash. Yeah. You

know, it all it all is impacted
by all the users. And when you

have places that are serving
alcohol until 2 AM, and like you

said, they they don't have last
call procedures that maybe

would help sort of with with
people leaving and and not when you

[MELISSA] when you stop serving
and everybody would have the

same rules to follow. [AMY] Right.
Right. Right and it's basically,

we're going to clarify to
make sure it's clear and we're

not saying you have to close.

[MELISSA] Correct. [AMY] But that is just the

serving the privilege of
serving the alcohol between

twelve and two. [MELISSA] And I think too,
people need to realize and I'll

just say it, somebody could say,
we're not serving alcohol after

midnight, at all. Right and, I
mean which we're not. We're not

but but like you said it's a
privilege so the fact that

we're coming to the table the
commission is coming to the

table and saying we still
want to allow you to do that if

you are so inclined but in
doing so you're going to have

to abide by [AMY] and what we're
asking the people that choose

to serve alcohol after midnight
to do is come in and it would

just be kind of a for a nominal
fee or for some you know some

fee where we you have to cover

what it's regulating. Or what,

you know how much it cost to

regulate but you need to meet

certain things like the last

call procedure, training for in

standard kind of industry

standards [MELISSA] it should be doing

anyway but [AMY] you're how to

recognize when someone's been

over served, how to you know

kind of handle things, situation

that escalate, if someone's had

too much to drink. You know,

making sure that your servers

and bartenders can stay safe.

and. Security was wide. Where

you have, you can have

in-person security or you can

have cameras. Yup. Yup. As far

as lighting, beverage training,
things like that. So, there are

kind of four issues. The noise.

Mm-hmm. The, we're finding

that, you know, the noise,
especially outdoor music, is uh

hard so we were going to set
hours for noise, set our set

kind of stipulations about what
the noise levels can be. If

you're in, if you're in a
contained building and the

windows are closed and things,
that would be a different

standard than if you were in a
courtyard. Right. Um but

basically, I guess common
sense, I would say common

sense. Yeah. Things related to
these issues. [MELISSA] If you're just

now tuning in, you are
listening to The Break Room.

I'm Melissa Wissel,
Communications Director for the

City and I have Amy Skinner
with me today. She's the

Director of Planning and
Building. She's been leading

our public discussions with the
commission on this proposed

ordinance, nightlife ordinance.
We're talking about safety for

the community, safety for our
residents as well as our

business owners. It's a big
topic. When will this come back

to the commission? [AMY] So, we
recently, we did bring it to

the City Commission in July and

the City Commission probably

rightly so said, we need to

have a workshop. And we probably

should look at this ordinance

and see, you know, make sure we

understand what it really says.

Because there were some

concerns about whether it went

too far to make businesses

responsible for things that

they can't control. Like things

that happen outside of their

business. And so we did relook

at it. We had it the workshop

on Monday as you said and we

have kind of recommendations to

follow up and we've listened to

every everyone and so we

definitely took notes. We're

going to kind of rework it,
relook at it, and we'll bring

it, right now, the plan is to
bring it back to the City

Commission on September 11th.

Um there is some time sensitive

sensitivity to this. Because the
state of Florida has passed

some regulations that take
effect October 1st, and so we if

the city commission's going to
move forward with this, we want

it to be adopted before October
1st. Okay. [MELISSA] And when you bring

it back on the 11th, the
the hope is that it's kind of

covered all the basis of what
came out of that workshop. Uh

it was a great workshop, did not
get too animated, folks were very

respectful, lot of good
feedback. So you'll come back

and present the rework. [AMY] Yes.

[MELISSA] And then there may be a few

other minor tweaks and then
hopefully then it would come

back for second reading to
pass. [AMY] Yes. [MELISSA] At the end of

September. [AMY] Yes. [MELISSA] Okay. Um with
regards to, if I'm wanting to

read all of this, we post this
on the website, should be on the

website, that they can go in and
just click on the meeting

agenda. [AMY] Yes correct. All the
background information should

be on the website, the meeting
was the August 21st, so

look under the August
21st meeting date for
special meeting for the City
Commission. [MELISSA] But just so folks

understand, we're not the only
community dealing with or
facing this issue in terms of
nightlife ordinances or safety,

those types of concerns. [AMY] Yeah
that's right. I mean the whole

state of Florida's impacted by
tourism obviously. We're, there's

16 other jurisdictions around
the state that we know of that

have either already adopted
these types of regulations or
permitting process, or are
looking at adopting things just

like we are. And you know again,

the the impact of tourism and

local tourism, you know is
something that all the

taxpayers, all the city
residents has to have, has to

experience, and impacts everyone.

And just the role of regulation

is to balance these needs and
impacts and and as you know the

mayor has said, we're finding
out that there's three

different economies. Kind of a
daytime economy, the evening

economy for dinner or things
like that, and then a nightlife

economy. Which is all kind
exciting is it makes the town

fun and and and things like
that. But it it also means that

we probably need to anticipate
what the impacts are going to

be and and make sure that we
have an idea of what what's

happening and. What we can do
to keep it safe yeah. Keep it

safe. [MELISSA] I've heard the ones,
there's some I've heard, some of

the cities like they actually
have like a nighttime mayor.

Like they have a night or
nighttime mare and they it's

almost like they have this
complete shift and it's almost

like a shift change of the
daytime enforcement and now

it's night time and there you
know I don't know that we're

going that far but. Right. But
it but it is out there so.

Right. We'll see what happens.

[AMY] And we definitely want you know

your best marketing is our

repeat customers. Right. We

want people to have a good

experience. Right. When they

come to St. Augustine, we've

always, I feel like we've been

family oriented. Right. And so

we we definitely want people to

have a good, safe experience.

Word of mouth is your best.

Absolutely. Your best. [MELISSA] I don't

like getting those Facebook

private messages of people

telling me they came to town

over the weekend and they had

this horrible experience.

Right. They're going down and

we don't see them often but

what it it it hurts my heart as

I'm sure it does you because

we'll share those with you when

it's something that we need to

share with you so that you can

pass it on and there's really

nothing I think that hurts all

of our hearts more is is people

who come and have a negative

experience and we want to make

we want to make it right. [AMY] And

we work so hard. We work really

hard to make the city what it

is and keep it clean and keep

it safe and and so we take a

lot of pride in that. And this

is just one more aspect of of

how we can just kind of keep a

thumb on what's our finger or

thumb or what's going on the

pulse of what's happening in

this in the town so. [MELISSA] And that's

a wrap. Thanks for coming.

Always good information. We'll

look forward to seeing the new

the new proposed ordinance.

Hope it goes through and we can

all get on with with making

having a a great nightlife experience

in St. Augustine.

[AMY] Thank you. [MELISSA] If you missed part

of this broadcast and want to

go back and listen from the

beginning, you can find us on

your favorite podcasting app.

Look for us on Spotify, Apple

Podcast, and more. You can find

the listing of the podcasting

platforms, in addition to links
to our past episodes at CityStAugRadio.com

We want to keep you informed about

what's happening in and around
the city, most importantly, you

hear it from the people who do
the work and make it happen

every day. Be sure to follow
us. We're on Facebook, Twitter and

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Until 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.