

[Narrator] You've tuned in to another edition of The Breakroom, a

weekly conversation about how the City of Saint Augustine

works from those who do the work every day. Hosted by the

City of Saint Augustine's communications director,

Melissa Wissel. The Breakroom 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 Breakroom. Thanks for tuning

in. In studio this week, we have Mayor Nancy Sikes-Kline. I

don't know where the year went. She was in studio with us at

the beginning of the year to
talk about the year ahead and

now we are here to recap mayor.

Thank you for coming back to

talk about our year. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Well thank
you. It's been quite a year.

We've gotten a lot accomplished
and we have had some great

things happen. [Melissa] We have we've
had I will you know we I will

admit and you and I both know
this. We've had some setbacks

but we're going to talk about
the good stuff because we

want to end on a positive. We
want to look forward to

2024. I think we
actually have a lot of exciting

things to look forward to but

let's start off with one of our

biggest changes all started if

you don't mind is our new city

manager. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Yup we have a old city

manager John Regan retired and

we brought David Birchim as our

new city manager and I think

about a little over six months

ago. [Melissa] Yeah. June. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Um he took the helm

and he's doing a fantastic job.

[Melissa] Yeah. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] We're really happy and

pleased with what he's he took

us through the budget process

and which is always you know so

important because the how you

spend your money is how you

express your values. [Melissa] Right. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Um

so and so we did that and I'll

talk a little bit about the

budget if you like. We do have
a balanced budgets about a

eighty-four million dollar
budget. Um we were able to do

some new things this year. We
added positions. We we spent a

lot adding staff because that's
what the community wanted. They

wanted more code enforcement.
Um they wanted us to address a

out home homelessness issues.
So we have a a new position for

continue on the outreach
officer effort to work with the

homeless that are living on the
streets. Um we added a

sustainability position for the
environment that was a very

high priority for our citizens
as well as communications.

[Melissa] Yeah. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Position. So which is in
your department Melissa. [Melissa] That really scratches the surface. So

there's so many. Yeah. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] There
are other ones too and but yeah

we thought that those are kind
of the highlights of the

budget. We we also set up a
fund for land acquisition and

we are still working on exactly
how that's going to look but we

have already in the budget set
aside a million dollars. [Melissa] Right.

[Mayor Sikes-Kline] And in the first year. [Melissa] And that
can we expand on that a little

bit? People. I don't know if
people understand why. I know

that the environment is you
know if you were to look at our

at our sitting commission

Commissioner Blonder is very
passionate about the
environment. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Yes. [Melissa] And and
always brings us back to native
plants and and and conservation
[Mayor Sikes-Kline] Mm-hmm. [Melissa] And this grew out of
that. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Yes. [Melissa] And and the Florida
Avenue Project and Fish Island
and there have been a lot of
things. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Yes, there's been some
over the years, over the last
years, you know, we really
have, we, we, we looked back
and we recognized with the help
of Commissioner Blonder that
and reminded by Commissioner
Blonder that, you know, we have
kind of been on this track.
We've been buying property and

it's very important to our
citizens that we preserve what

land is left but also we
preserve archaeological sites

and cultural our cultural
resources so which sometimes

are all on the same parcel. [Melissa] Mm
hmm. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Um but we've kind of been

doing that and so we just it's
important that we formalize it.

So we feel like it's a big step
in the preparing us for the

future. [Melissa] Even sitting here as
we're we're talking I I want to

also say Coquina Park was one.
Coquina Park looking back there

was and Seminole was Seminole?
[Mayor Sikes-Kline] Uh there was one up in North

City as well and you know,
these are really primarily to

address our flooding issues.

[Melissa] Right. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] And but we we wanted,

like I said, we want to develop

this fund and make sure that

it's funded every year, find a

way to fund it [Melissa] So, you're not

so basically that's so that

we're not sitting there in the

middle of the year going, gee,

I wish we had some money set

aside [Mayor Sikes-Kline] we have some money set

aside right so so it's really a

good way to prepare us for a

future and I have a little

story about that I really

support this because I I had a

chance last year to go through

my hometown area of Central

Florida you know I did not grow

up here my family's from here

but I did grow up in Central

Florida which is a beautiful

beautiful part of the state and

I had returned with my husband

and I couldn't find my places

when I returned. They were all

developed. They were all all

the pasture lands that we rode

horses and the places that we

hunted as kids with our family,

all those outdoor places,

they're all gone and developed

except where the state or

individuals have come along

like us. [Melissa] Right. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] And set them

aside forever and that just

really hit home for me. So, and

I think we all feel a little

bit about that. Maybe everybody
didn't get lucky enough to grow

up in Florida like I did.

[Melissa] Right. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Um as a child but I

think we all can see what's and
that it's so important. Um I

would say that's probably the
one great thing that I think

that I'm really looking forward
to see what the city does with

that. [Melissa] It's a big you're you're
right. You drive through and

you go boy that oh my gosh they
developed and that's a big

that's a big problem word in
the county is over development,

overdevelopment. So we have
such a small footprint down

here. We have to save what we
can. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] That's right. I mean we're

only 15000 people but we have a
really good budget. We have a

nice size budget and we and you
know how let's use this money

wisely for our future as well.

Um so yeah. [Melissa] If you are just

tuning in, you're listening to
the break room. I'm Melissa

Whistle, communications
director for the city. I have

the pleasure of speaking with
Mayor Nancy Sykes Klein in

studio this week doing a bit of
a recap just talking about our

budget, land acquisition, the
fund for the land acquisition.

Um what else are you are you
proud of and pleased that we

were able to do this year? [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Um

well, we were, you know, we

hear about homelessness is
another issue. We hear about

traffic and parking and so as
far as homelessness we were

able to do a land swap swap on
a parcel that the city owned

for a parcel over on 207. 207 and
Old Moultrie and it's a

triangular piece. It's a nice
large piece and so we acquired

that property in order to
create a ultimately a drop-in

day center that would be sort
of a service center as well for

homeless for some some place
for them to go besides you know

downtown and you know a place
where they could have lockers

and a mailbox and they could
like I said access services as

well as moving dining with
dignity. Um so they will have a

you know a meal provided to
them like they are downtown now

but except on this this piece
of property. So we we've got a

lot to look forward to there.

Um as well as on the

sustainability and parking. I
could list that. Uh I'm really

excited about the Lake Maria
Sanchez project is coming to

fruition to State came through
with 10 million dollars

recently to thank you Florida
Legislature and Paul Speaker

Paul Renner and Cindy Stevenson
and I'm not I you know I'm

going to forget somebody. Sure.

Start listening names. But we

had a lot of help on that. Um

that's a drainage project that

will help us. We hope

potentially drain help help

with flooding in the downtown

200 acres. Acres of downtown. [Melissa] I

have to tell you. I will I

can't wait to to the ribbon

cutting or the groundbreaking

with the gold shovel because

I've been with the city now

going on eight years and we

have been talking about Lake

Maria Sanchez and every time we

bring up resiliency flooding

that project, I'm sure if you

go back and listen to these

radio interviews with people. I

was like, yeah, we've been
talking about Lake Maria Sanchez

since I started. So, we're
getting there. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Yes. [Melissa] That much

closer. That was that was a big
win too. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] It's a big one and

it's a it's a massive project
and it's an extremely expensive

project. So, and it's taken a
long time to put the pieces

together and I hope that it you
know, we we really have hopes

that it will help with the
flooding down. [Melissa] we stay the course. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] It's very

difficult. It's very difficult
because we are coastal city and

we're surrounded by water. So,
the other thing I wanted to

talk about, I think was a big
win was we we did get into a

contract with a private public
partnership for a parking

garage. [Melissa] Yes. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] One of the things
that we hear most from people

and we do hear them is about
traffic and parking and so we

do have we have a garage I
think Santa's going to [Melissa] yes [Mayor Sikes-Kline] load

his sleigh and maybe in the
next year or two we'll have a

garage but it's it's well on
the way it's going to take time

to build right but it'll be
larger than the one we have and

it's a great opportunity for us
to kind of get people keep the

cars out of downtown because I
think that's one of the

problems is we just get so
congested downtown [Melissa] well this

this garage too to remind
Folks, it's more than just the
parking garage. It's more than
the parking. There's going to

be commerce, right? There's
retail, perhaps? [Mayor Sikes-Kline] There'll

be. There'll be there's that's
up to the private developer but

there will be apartments and I
understand retail there. I

don't know exactly what that's
going to look like.

[Melissa] Transportation. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] But we're
hoping that it's going to be a

good boost for that business
community over there and that

whole West Augustine area. We

we really look forward to and

we got some ideas about what we
can do moving forward as far as

creating a CRA there. [Melissa] Right. That's another one, right?

[Mayor Sikes-Kline] Yeah. So, that's that's kind of
in the on the on the front

burner now. [Melissa] Right. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] So, but
yeah. Yeah. We've had quite a

bit and we've been busy. [Melissa] Lots
going on. I'm excited too. I

think I know as with anything,
I think you and I have had

these conversations. You know,
you can't please everyone. It's

it's so hard. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] No you can't. But but we do
your best. [Melissa] You do your best. I

think we've also witnessed the
process this year of you know

things being brought forward

and they not everything wins

but you we learn from those
things and we come out of it

with new direction of ways that
we can still improve on things

to make life better. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Right and
I think you know that's kind of

a good part part of place to
talk about the nightlife

ordinance. Um it did not pass.
Um but I do feel like there's

some really good things that
came out of it and it it like

you said it paves the way for
addressing important some of

the important issues that we've
been hearing and maybe maybe

even more of a laser approach
to solving those issues about

noise for example so we have as
a result coming out of that and

I want to look at the bright
side of it. [Melissa] Right. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Um what we

can do not what we can't do.

[Melissa] Right. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] But we we have a working

we're dedicated to working on a
sound ordinance and just trying

to get things quieter so that
we can be more of a livable

city. You know, We want to
balance. Um so working on

downtown lighting. Um working
on more bathrooms and better

bathrooms downtown. [Melissa] Right. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Um
these are things that have been

shared with us by the business
community that they want to see

and I think these are really
good points for us to work on.

Um and a rideshare. Provisions

for rideshare. Um what's going

on with the vehicles for hire.

There's just a lot of vehicles

for hire and how do we organize

those? [Melissa] Safety. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Safety. How do

we make our streets safer and

less congested and how do we yes

safety is the key. So we've got

some good some good projects

and good ideas I would say

about how we can organize

rideshare because we you know

we've taxi cabs have kind of

fallen by the wayside. [Melissa] Taxi cab

what's the taxi cab right? [Mayor Sikes-Kline] But

Rich Rideshare is an important

part of the of the night life

and safety. It is. It is

getting people out of downtown

when they need to go out and

not you know if [Melissa] they've had a few drinks. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] you

know have too much fun and they

have a good way to get out. A

good safe way to get access

their rideshare. [Melissa] Absolutely. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Um

server and then home to where you

know [Melissa] I think everybody's on

board but that the the

restaurants downtown the

businesses everybody's aware of

of the of the safety for

everyone. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] Well I think the

residents too but you know it

always comes down to balance

you know between the visitors,

the businesses and the

residents and it's and it's a

tough thing and the pendulum
swings. [Melissa] Right. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] And so I think

that that's this always
going to be a challenge. It's

always going to be the
challenge. So. [Melissa] And now we have

a new year. Start over. [Mayor Sikes-Kline] We have
a new year starting and oh my

gosh. Yeah. Well. That's right.
[Melissa] I'm very excited that you were

able to stop in. It's a busy
time of year. Thank you so much

for coming by. Lots of great
things happened. Lots of great

things to look forward to and
we'll have you back again.

[Mayor Sikes-Kline] Okay. Thank you, Melissa.
Appreciate it. [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.

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Thanks for tuning in until next

time. [Narrator] You've been listening to
The Break Room, a weekly

program addressing projects and
program 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 Breakroom.