

Transcript

00:00:00 Narrator

You've tuned into another edition of the break room, 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 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.

00:00:21 Melissa Wissel

Thanks for tuning into the break room. I'm Melissa Wissel, communications director for the City of Saint.

00:00:25 Melissa Wissel

15 It's almost that time of year as we get ready for hurricane season, we keep a closer eye on the weather that's developing in the tropics. We pay more attention to those stormy days and sunny day flooding. Of course, there's always that threat of a hurricane, but in studio this week, I've got Jessica Beach joining me. She is our Chief Resilience Officer, and she thinks about this stuff.

00:00:45 Melissa Wissel

All the time. Welcome back.

00:00:47 Jessica Beach

Jessica, thanks, Melissa. How?

00:00:49 Melissa Wissel

Are you? I'm doing well. But you know, it's like we start to think about it and you're over there going, I think about everyday wake up every day. It's a lot to manage. Yes, it's always been here.

00:00:53 Jessica Beach

This is a day-to-day thing, yes.

00:01:00 Melissa Wissel

Yes, but we've had storms.

00:01:04 Jessica Beach

In the past, we got away with it. Last year we didn't really have. We did not have official hurricanes like we did in 2022, but that does not mean that we should not slack off on anything because it's always a potential well. And as you know, in your job, it's not just the Hurricanes. It's not just the storms, it's the everyday.

00:01:23 Melissa Wissel

And most of our residents know who they are that live there. We also have a lot of.

00:01:27 Jessica Beach

Yes.

00:01:28 Jessica Beach

New residents? Yes, that's probably the biggest learning curve is for residents that are not familiar with the city and are surprised when they buy a new home when they move to the neighborhood and all of a sudden they have, well, it's a rainfall event and there's flooding in the streets. Or if it's during the King Tide season in the fall.

00:01:44 Jessica Beach

Add a little more Easter to.

00:01:45 Jessica Beach

That and we've got a lot of citywide flooding, so.

00:01:48 Melissa Wissel

It's definitely and like you said, it's not only the rainfall that's coming down, it's the stuff that comes up.

00:01:54 Melissa Wissel

You're working on.

00:01:54 Jessica Beach

Yes, yes, we've got lots of projects in the works. We've got lots of grant funding that's helping us do drainage improvements for neighborhood projects. We've got tons of things on our web.

00:02:03 Jessica Beach

Right. And that's a whole nother.

00:02:05 Jessica Beach

He said for another day that that we can certainly do, but all those projects are are underway. So that's let our community know that those things are.

00:02:11 Melissa Wissel

Moving so one of the things I wanted to talk about now.

00:02:15 Melissa Wissel

As we have you.

00:02:16 Melissa Wissel

This this time of year we just finished Earth week and and an awareness month campaign and you did resilience walks.

00:02:18 Narrator

Mm-hmm.

00:02:23 Jessica Beach

Yes, that was.

00:02:23 Melissa Wissel

Tell us about those. How were they successful?

00:02:25 Jessica Beach

Yes.

00:02:26 Melissa Wissel

Are you going to do them again so.

00:02:28 Jessica Beach

That was a new thing that we decided to pilot. We've actually been doing these resiliency walking tours, kind of unofficially. I would get requests from universities or just interested parties, groups we would take sometimes engineering students.

00:02:40 Jessica Beach

Or the high school. And so we've been kind of doing it informally over time. And this was something that they going to pilot for Earth week. And there's just a lot of interest in the topic. So I think that was kind of exciting. We kept it small, so we capped it at 10 people. That way, people can really engage and ask questions. And so I we had it fill up, which is great.

00:03:00 Jessica Beach

And we met and we started the walk here at the Lightner Museum, and then we have, like, a route that we do. And we look at specific projects. And I have photos that show before and after things that the city has done or is in the work.

00:03:10 Jessica Beach

And it really just gives that one-on-one conversation with our our community. And surprisingly, we had a couple of residents that were local that attended, but we actually had a lot of outsiders, they might have been in the county or at the beach, but not necessarily in the city of Saint Augustine. So some of this was really new for them. And some people here from outside the area moved to Saint Augustine.

00:03:20 Melissa Wissel

Really.

00:03:31 Jessica Beach

They're not familiar with a lot of the flooding anyways, too.

00:03:33 Melissa Wissel

Can you give us a little bit of a highlight of?

00:03:35 Jessica Beach

What those stops were I'm sure. So we usually start at City Hall and then I try to highlight efforts that the community is making. So Flagler College does a lot of flood proofing during hurricane season.

00:03:46 Jessica Beach

And so we show some examples of just basic things that can be done for buildings. How do you flood proof? And also there's a whole section about what our homeowners are doing. And so I probably learn more from our homeowners than they learn from me when we do these flood site visits one-on-one, but they show us things that have worked. And so I've been collecting kind of just best practices with permission of the property owners.

00:04:06 Jessica Beach

Share because we get lots of questions about that. And that was part of the tour is when we're looking.

00:04:12 Jessica Beach

Essentially, it is like a big leap where we start at City Hall and we work our way down King Street. We look at the FEMA lift stations that we flood proofed right and hardened and that type of thing and then we.

00:04:22 Melissa Wissel

Alright, yes, it caused a lot of traffic problems.

00:04:23 Jessica Beach

Make.

00:04:25 Jessica Beach

Yes. And people will remember that. And then on our way up to the Fort. And so we talk about what the National Park Service is doing.

00:04:28 Melissa Wissel

OK.

00:04:32 Jessica Beach

The seawall on the Bayfront. The dot has a project in the works. We just finished up the King St. drainage outfall improvements. There's the Bayfront park.

00:04:40 Jessica Beach

They were actually doing the dedication ceremony when we were kind of sneaking by on that too. There's just a lot of projects in kind of the Bayfront area that we can show before and after. This is what the city has in the works and just different examples to get people thinking about that.

00:04:55 Melissa Wissel

When you talk about the Bayfront and the Ford, and you said, oh, yeah, and dot has that little seawall.

00:05:00 Melissa Wissel

Project. Let's talk about that little seawall project. We started out again by saying the dot, the Florida Department of Transportation.

00:05:10 Melissa Wissel

Is it is it's going to happen?

00:05:12 Jessica Beach

It's going to happen. They have funding for design and construction, which?

00:05:15 Melissa Wissel

Is and what is that going to look like? How are we going to be impacted by that and what does it do?

00:05:15 Jessica Beach

Huge.

00:05:21 Jessica Beach

So there right now the existing sea wall is relatively low and as it's been in the media now, we're painfully aware of that. Overtopping, there's the corner.

00:05:29 Jessica Beach

Segment where the Castillo joins with the FOTC wall that gets breached very.

00:05:35 Jessica Beach

Usually. So there's joint efforts and keep in mind it's local, state and federal and we're trying to coordinate amongst ourselves on the design because we want it to be a unified project. Even a you've got three separate entities, yes. So we've had lots of coordination meetings and they're really in the early stages. They've asked feedback of what the city would.

00:05:47 Melissa Wissel

Agencies.

00:05:48 Melissa Wissel

Yeah.

00:05:55 Jessica Beach

You like to see that we point to our sea wall that's been completed on the southern part of Anada Menendez. And that's a good template model to follow that the communities likes and has accepted. So they're going to be kind of modeling that. I know they had a public meeting with the earlier this year. They have some renderings.

00:06:14 Jessica Beach

I don't know if the if it's been finalized yet, but they've got that community input and so they'll be kind of flushing that design out further. So we'll have probably have something soon to.

00:06:22 Jessica Beach

Kind of know more.

00:06:23 Melissa Wissel

So they've already, let's be clear, they've already gotten input, yes. So if you missed the input, you missed the input, but so they will come back and be ready to go. Is that in a year?

00:06:34 Jessica Beach

Oh, that's a good.

00:06:34 Melissa Wissel

Yeah, I mean, I.

00:06:35 Jessica Beach

Question. The schedule usually design and permitting and these are complex projects. It's probably at least a year for design and permitting on that too.

00:06:43 Jessica Beach

That they've started, they're very intentional with the project and they want to accelerate to the best of their ability.

00:06:49 Melissa Wissel

It.

00:06:49 Melissa Wissel

Done well and I think that's that's one of the things you and I often talk about generally is these projects take forever. They do in the eyes of the public. I always say, when are you going to shove when are?

00:06:50 Jessica Beach

Yeah.

00:07:00 Melissa Wissel

You going to put the shovel?

00:07:01 Melissa Wissel

In the graph, that's what I want to know as a resident, and that project will impact the seawall. And then for us, and we won't get too much into it, but that ripple effect of the downtown traffic circle that we're talking about at the base of King Street, so totally separate projects. So there's a.

00:07:14 Jessica Beach

Yes, that's a separate projects, right?

00:07:18 Melissa Wissel

Lot going on.

00:07:19 Jessica Beach

With the King Street, it's streetscape that's.

00:07:20 Melissa Wissel

Right.

00:07:21 Jessica Beach

Please.

00:07:21 Jessica Beach

Going again, a lot of things happening, so there's a lot of coordination between the different groups as well, but we are making the effort. I think that's the drive home message that I was trying to make, particularly in our Back Bay, meaning that we had just recently we're trying to coordinate amongst multiple entities and these are key pieces and we recognize that. And so they've initiated talking to the city, talking to the National Park Service so we can be as coordinated as best as we can.

00:07:45 Melissa Wissel

So if you're just now tuning in, I've got Jessica Beach in studio with us. She is our Chief Resilience officer. She's the deputy director of the public works and Utilities Department. And you just mentioned the Back Bay meeting also recently. So let's circle on that.

00:08:01 Melissa Wissel

A lot of this comes back to public input and their long term projects tell us about the Back Bay study because again, we've been talking about it and why do I want to come to those meetings when we show those invitations to come to public meetings? And how did that back?

00:08:06 Jessica Beach

Yes.

00:08:16 Jessica Beach

The meeting go. Yes. So it is definitely public input has been very important.

00:08:21 Jessica Beach

When we started that really from the get go with this study and it's important because this is our community and this is the Army Corps is coming in to forecast over the next 50 years, what is the city going to be facing in terms of flooding and that's comprehensive, it's looking at all types of flooding.

00:08:38 Jessica Beach

And the effects of those combined, which we're already experiencing, but over the next 50 years, what are we looking at? So the public input is important. So the first public meeting that we had back in October was really a listening session. We talked obviously about the study and it is long term, it's going to take us about it's \$7,000,000 cost shared with Army Corps and about six years to complete.

00:08:58 Jessica Beach

It's pretty comprehensive and it's very.

00:09:00 Jessica Beach

You know, as far as looking at all of the options for our our, our city.

00:09:04 Melissa Wissel

And the six year project is a study.

00:09:07 Jessica Beach

Yes.

00:09:08 Jessica Beach

It's it's a study that identifies the strategies that would turn into projects that we would then move into construction at some point. And so it is very long term and that's why I was emphasizing the, it's a 50 year planning horizon. But these projects come out of the study and then we're eligible for cost share to do the actual projects with the federal government. But public inputs been very important.

00:09:28 Jessica Beach

I think it was really helpful for our Army Corps team there. We have a great team that's been assembled, but for them to hear from our residents, we broke them up into groups of where they live based on land mass, if you will.

00:09:39 Jessica Beach

And just listened about where they're hearing flooding and experiencing it and collecting that data, which then gets go, that gets put into the modeling. And then the last meeting that we had just

recently is the result of this is the future of the city without us doing any type of big type of projects. If we do nothing, yes. So with our baseline.

00:09:54 Melissa Wissel

If they if they do nothing, this is what will happen and.

00:09:57 Melissa Wissel

What does that look like?

00:10:00 Jessica Beach

It's important to establish a baseline we have over 8000 structures that are within the city that are at risk for flooding.

00:10:07 Jessica Beach

And if you put economics to it, it's worth \$5.4 billion. So that's our infrastructure that's at risk.

00:10:15 Melissa Wissel

At risk.

00:10:16 Jessica Beach

And so if you they did a whole scenario of all these modeling exercises and different scenarios and there's a range because again we're trying to predict a lot of the uncertainty. So there's a range.

00:10:27 Jessica Beach

If we do nothing, our damages are going to be anywhere from 3.3 to 8 point.

00:10:31 Jessica Beach

\$3 billion how many structures?

00:10:34 Melissa Wissel

Do you know?

00:10:34 Jessica Beach

Out of the 8000 structures, that's all all of the inventory within the city. And those are historic buildings. It's it's all of the things that are within the city. So it's a fairly detailed economic analysis that starts the baseline. Next steps is to start plugging away at alternatives that are going to help reduce those damages and that will determine what options we're going to.

00:10:36

Yeah.

00:10:37 Melissa Wissel

OK.

00:10:54 Jessica Beach

Have.

00:10:54 Melissa Wissel

And that's where we get into those funny models that that one, I think several years ago someone said Ohh, let's put a gate in front of the inlet yet it's not.

00:11:04 Melissa Wissel

That far fetched? It's maybe not fetch, yeah.

00:11:06 Jessica Beach

So we actually had this last meeting, we talked about the flooding and the damages and then we start talking about strategies. And so we have things out there that are already existing that may work out. We don't know yet until they do the modeling and the analysis. And so we're getting input from the community on those alternatives. And so we had again break out into where you live.

00:11:24 Melissa Wissel

Alternative psych.

00:11:24 Jessica Beach

Lamas, all the alternatives so as alternatives.

00:11:28 Jessica Beach

Food those you had mentioned, like storm surge barriers, floodgates, natural nature based features, which could be more living shorelines, breakwaters, things that can kind of help soften the blow of those storms coming into the city. Obviously, we've got sea walls. There are also doing things to raise buildings or protect buildings or flood proof buildings. That's what they call non structural. So there's a lot of different options on the table.

00:11:50 Jessica Beach

That we went through and we're getting basically feedback from our community on what they think would work or that they would.

00:11:56 Jessica Beach

Feel comfortable with.

00:11:58 Melissa Wissel

And that that doesn't even really begin to scratch the surface. Now. When you talk about raising structures and we just have a a quick minute or two left, umm, we're still doing FEMA. Yes. And are we approved or it doesn't open again until.

00:12:15 Jessica Beach

The fall, right? So I'm waiting for the application cycle to open for this current.

00:12:19 Jessica Beach

Here, we're still waiting to hear back from last year's applications and the year before that, FY22, we are awaiting FEMA approval for those. It's not official yet, but they've essentially have approved the budget and we're just now waiting for like official letterhead that type of.

00:12:35 Jessica Beach

But it is a long process, but we are still the cycles open and we will be collecting applications and we'll probably talk more about that as it gets closer.

00:12:35 Melissa Wissel

Again.

00:12:43 Melissa Wissel

So keep out the keep out on the lookout if you're listening for the next resiliency walks. Yeah, it sounds like it's great that it's even if it's reaching out to the beach or folks in the county and we have city government week in the fall. So that's an opportunity for us to maybe get with you and do something.

00:13:00 Melissa Wissel

And if you're in a neighborhood or you have a Neighborhood Association and you want to schedule a walk, get in touch with Jessica and the info. All this information is on the website citysaintaug.com. We have the new section called Popular Resources. There is some real quick shortcut to the Resilience pages there for that, so.

00:13:20 Melissa Wissel

Lots going on and thanks for coming and telling us about all those resiliency efforts. We'll get everybody thinking about hurricane season.

00:13:24 Jessica Beach

Anytime. Let me know.

00:13:27 Jessica Beach

Oh, yes, right on.

00:13:28 Melissa Wissel

The corner. We missed it again this year. Me too. Thanks for coming, Jessica.

00:13:32 Jessica Beach

Thank you.

00:13:32 Melissa Wissel

You.

00:13:34 Melissa Wissel

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00:13:53 Melissa Wissel

Dog and again visit us on the web at City sanog.com/resilience for all of Jessica's projects. Thanks again for tuning in and till next.

00:14:02 Melissa Wissel

Time.

00:14:03 Narrator

You've been listening.

00:14:04 Narrator

To the break room, a weekly program addressing projects and programs offered by the City of Saint 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. See you at this time next week for another edition.

00:14:20 Narrator

Of the break room.