

Transcript

00:00:00 **Narrator**

You 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.

00:00:20 **Narrator**

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 Augustine.

00:00:27 **Melissa Wissel**

In late June of 2024, the City of Saint Augustine and the Castillo de San Marcos held public meetings to discuss the future plans for the seawall in downtown. It's been there for hundreds of years, but it's time for it to be replaced. But we're not just talking a facelift. We're talking a serious lift altogether. So I've invited Jessica Beach, our Chief Resilience Officer, to join me in studio Jessica, welcome back.

00:00:49 **Jessica Beach**

Thanks, Melissa. Great to be back.

00:00:52 **Melissa Wissel**

I love talking with you about all the stuff you do because it it was a relatively new topic when I started.

00:01:00 **Melissa Wissel**

And.

00:01:01 **Melissa Wissel**

Sea level rise, resiliency. All this stuff and.

00:01:04 **Melissa Wissel**

Now it's a thing.

00:01:06 **Jessica Beach**

It's definitely a.

00:01:06 Melissa Wissel

It's a thing I want to start the talk, though. It's not just about the sea wall. I mean, you deal with a lot of flooding issues. We've done tide flex valves and all kind of stuff, but it's a change in our environment globally and we are on the forefront of it because we sit right there.

00:01:22 Jessica Beach

MHM.

00:01:26 Jessica Beach

Yes.

00:01:26 Melissa Wissel

Are we are at sea level? Yes.

00:01:28 Jessica Beach

We are, we are.

00:01:29 Jessica Beach

Getting it now.

00:01:31 Melissa Wissel

And we started. So I'm going to rewind a little bit. You neither you or I were at the city when the seawall South of the Marina was replaced. There's a bit of history to that. Can you give us a recap and then sort of walk us up the sea wall and tell us what else is?

00:01:47 Melissa Wissel

Happening. Sure. So the sea wall.

00:01:50 Jessica Beach

That South of the Marine you just mentioned it the project was completed in 2013, but it was actually like over a decade in the making. So I think in 2000, 2001.

00:02:00 Jessica Beach

It was a planned project that they were trying to find funds for. It was essentially eroding overtime with all the wave action and hurricanes. It was starting to fall apart and collapse, and so the city at that time was looking to figure out what can we do for that seawall. It's very expensive. So it took time to secure funding, design permitting.

00:02:20 Jessica Beach

That the big piece was the public engagement and originally they wanted to do the wall a lot higher than what it's been built today, but the public.

00:02:31 Jessica Beach

Support at the time was again is that bucket that balancing act that we're still talking about today?

00:02:36 **Melissa Wissel**

I'll pay to live on the Bayfront. I don't want to be looking at the.

00:02:38 **Melissa Wissel**

Backside of a sea wall, right? Yeah.

00:02:39 **Jessica Beach**

Exactly. And it's when you look at.

00:02:41 **Jessica Beach**

The original sea.

00:02:42 **Jessica Beach**

Wall. It's around elevation five, and then the new piece it was done is at elevation 7. So it's a couple feet higher when you're thinking about the view shed piece of that you think of all the businesses and the houses right along the Bayfront, there was a lot of pushback community from the at the time. So they did compromise and they.

00:02:59 **Jessica Beach**

Got to an elevation that everyone can agree to, so that's where it is today. So now if you start moving N that.

00:03:06 **Jessica Beach**

Is essentially the model, so a lot of people like the look and the aesthetics of.

00:03:10 **Melissa Wissel**

Directly the sidewalk. Yes, there.

00:03:14 **Jessica Beach**

Was a promenade that was added in there, so it has a multiple benefits. There was a mobility component. We actually have water quality treatment that's been added into the project and then it was raised higher. So it was multiple benefits for the project. So once it was done, it's a one lots of awards. It's essentially served as the model for anything else that wants to be done along the Bayfront.

00:03:32 **Jessica Beach**

So moving N we actually have a a gap elevation gap between where the Marina sits and then the 2013 seawall. We can get flooding through that low point. And so we have federal funding. We're waiting for FEMA to approve us for construction, but the design is done and that's right South of the Marina. So that's like where the Marina building is and where the new restaurant.

00:03:47 **Melissa Wissel**

That.

00:03:53 **Melissa Wissel**

Current. OK, OK.

00:03:53 **Jessica Beach**

Correct. That's the gap. So that's.

00:03:55 **Jessica Beach**

Waiting for construction approval so that will raise the low point. And then if you keep moving N, we've got the Harbor Master Park that was funded through the FI, ND Florida Inland Navigation District and we raised that 2 feet, added sidewalks and the connection point to take from the South of the bridge lines to the north of the Bridge Alliance.

00:04:13 **Melissa Wissel**

And how high is that?

00:04:14 **Jessica Beach**

That's at 7 as well, so that's so that's essentially the target elevation that the city has been working on for projects on the South side.

00:04:15 **Melissa Wissel**

The same.

00:04:19 **Melissa Wissel**

And this in the South side of.

00:04:20 **Melissa Wissel**

Bridge.

00:04:21 **Jessica Beach**

OK, so now as we're talking about today because of all of the, you know, the storms that we've had recently and also the age of the infrastructure, there's also the segment of seawall that the Department of Transportation owns. And they also have been to Commission just recently. In addition with the with the Castillo, talk about public meetings and basically talking about their projects.

00:04:42 **Jessica Beach**

They have funding to be able to rehabilitate their existing seawall. They're going to be raising it so there's a lot of renderings. There's a lot of videos, a lot of good information out there to show the public what that's going to look like. But again, that one's going to be raised even higher. I think that target elevation is 8 1/2 feet.

00:04:56 **Melissa Wissel**

When you come from the new crossover.

00:05:00 **Melissa Wissel**

The road crossover king or whatever that is as you go towards.

00:05:05 **Melissa Wissel**

Davis shores, you go across the Ridge, you come across that along the water that's going to look.

00:05:11 **Jessica Beach**

Higher yes. On the north side there is a section of it that they own that dot owns right around the bridge. So that Gibbs Park, where they call Gibbs Park. That section is part of the projects, is gonna be picking up where our Harbor Harbor Master Park ends and N all the way up to the Fort.

00:05:12 **Melissa Wissel**

And what? OK.

00:05:26 **Jessica Beach**

So that will be raised and they're going to be doing, you know, a lot of work for the seawall, for their section, and it's going to provide, you know, aesthetics to talk about mobility components and also the resiliency and flood protection piece of that.

00:05:37 **Jessica Beach**

Which leads us to the Fort, right? So they had, this is really their first official public meeting and they are trying to protect 350 years of of history. So this has been a cornerstone for the Saint Augustine community. It was built by the Spanish in 1672 to defend Florida and the Atlantic trade routes. And so now it actually.

00:05:57 **Jessica Beach**

As the oldest masonry fortification in the United States, and so it's kind of a unique piece.

00:06:04 **Jessica Beach**

It's complicated. They have a really nice design team helping the Fort go through that process and they have funding to the project. They've actually had this on their list of of wanting to do it for decades. But now that the Funding's come available, they're actually able to move forward with that particular project.

00:06:18 **Melissa Wissel**

So if you're just now tuning in, you're listening to the break room. I have **Jessica Beach** with us. She's our chief resilience.

00:06:24 **Melissa Wissel**

Officer, we're talking about the seawall replacement along the Bayfront, part of some resiliency initiatives that the city is doing, as well as the Fort Jessica. I want to ask you a question more of a philosophical when you look at.

00:06:38 **Melissa Wissel**

The South development and that that 7 foot they elevated and we've we've also seen and you we said it was a compromise you know they didn't want it as high we wanted it actually higher.

00:06:50 **Jessica Beach**

Mm-hmm.

00:06:51 **Melissa Wissel**

But what we've also had to see then is not just along the seawall, but because it's what we're talking about. They've also been lifting their houses. So even though we're we're putting this sea wall up and elevating it doesn't necessarily stop.

00:06:59 **Jessica Beach**

Mm-hmm.

00:07:04 **Melissa Wissel**

Up certain flooding.

00:07:06 **Jessica Beach**

Yes, that's very important point to remind our community is like the flooding is I call it complicated because there's different types of flooding, but a lot of you know, just doing a wall is not going to protect the city. It takes multiple lines of defense and there's different strategies depending on what you're trying to protect or adapt to. So a lot of the houses in the city, not just along the Bayfront, but those are very visible.

00:07:26 **Jessica Beach**

They've been lifting because there's houses were built before, you know, there were floodplain maps and now we know what we know today, it's going to be continuing to worsen the future. So they're trying to protect their their assets for.

00:07:37 **Jessica Beach**

That too.

00:07:38 **Melissa Wissel**

But it's not enough to say, well, it's not going to fix it anyway.

00:07:41 **Jessica Beach**

So why bother? Correct? Yes, there's still benefits, yes.

00:07:42 **Melissa Wissel**

So there are things.

00:07:43 **Melissa Wissel**

That will it will benefit, yes and.

00:07:47 **Melissa Wissel**

You think public the, the, the, the public climate, if you will, has changed, has gotten better people, they're frustrated, but they get it a little more now.

00:07:53 **Jessica Beach**

For sure.

00:07:55 **Jessica Beach**

Yes. Yeah, I think because you had in your opening comments about how low we are, I mean we're experiencing the flooding today. Is this not like a predicted in the future thing? This is a today thing that's going to get worse in the future. So we've been pretty aggressive on all the options on how are we going to try to prepare ourselves for the future. And I think our community is in that same.

00:08:15 **Jessica Beach**

That same mindset.

00:08:16 **Jessica Beach**

That we've had many properties that have flooded, they've rehabilitated, they've lifted, they've ripped out drywall, replaced. They basically tried to flood proof their properties and it's becoming to the point of flooding, fatigue to where, you know, they are like, what else can be done. And so that, you know, the city's doing things, our communities doing things, but it takes a collective.

00:08:38 **Jessica Beach**

Community working together to try to help our entire city become resilient in the long.

00:08:43 **Melissa Wissel**

Run. Tell me about what you and I were talking about the adapt.

00:08:48 **Jessica Beach**

Live adaptive design.

00:08:50 **Melissa Wissel**

Yes. So talk about that. So let's take the South side where we say it's at 7G, which maybe we should have done 8, but we can't, we're not going to go rebuild.

00:08:51 **Jessica Beach**

Yes.

00:08:58 **Melissa Wissel**

That again, but.

00:08:59 **Jessica Beach**

Not for a while.

00:09:00 **Melissa Wissel**

But now that we look, but now you've told me, though, that we're coming in in this new design, there's a way to design it with sort of like a if you need to change it.

00:09:09 **Melissa Wissel**

You can go back later.

00:09:10 **Jessica Beach**

And yes, that's the essence of it. And I think it's important as we're we're thinking in the future, but we're also looking at the reality of today. So again, it is that balancing act, especially with the view shed along the Bay.

00:09:21 **Jessica Beach**

Front. You know, if we were to try to build a 12 foot wall that probably would not go well with our community because that substantially alters that. The view should issue. So and right now they're they're building and designing towards what makes sense for today, but also being mindful of the future. So in the design, it maybe takes a little bit more.

00:09:26 **Melissa Wissel**

No.

00:09:41 **Jessica Beach**

Effort or funds to essentially structurally support a higher wallet at some point in the future so we could go back in theory and and raise on or add on or whatever it might be. So that's being foresight. And so the park is looking at that do T is looking at that the city is doing that on other projects as well. So we're all thinking.

00:10:00 **Jessica Beach**

Ad.

00:10:01 **Melissa Wissel**

It's a lot to to.

00:10:02 **Melissa Wissel**

Digest. So before we sign off, where are we? I'm going to go back to one of our other.

00:10:06 **Melissa Wissel**

Favorite projects Lake Mary Sanchez.

00:10:10 **Melissa Wissel**

Are we anywhere?

00:10:12 **Jessica Beach**

We are, Melissa. As a matter of fact, I can. I can share some updates.

00:10:14 **Melissa Wissel**

I'm putting you on the spot. You all can't see the. The look on Jessica's face.

00:10:20 **Jessica Beach**

I want to get that project done before I retire. No it's it's happening. We have a funding. We actually got some really good news with our grant funder. We were under some time constraints because it was federal funds being funneled through the state.

00:10:22 **Melissa Wissel**

Yeah, you, Yvonne.

00:10:34 **Jessica Beach**

That they've actually.

00:10:35 **Jessica Beach**

Moved it into 100% state funds for the project, which is actually a big deal. The listeners would be like, oh, what's the big deal about that? Federal is way more complicated, way more things we have to do. There's lots more reporting. So that actually loosens the constraints on the project, which is going to help. And we're actually moving forward with splitting the project into two phases.

00:10:39

That's you.

00:10:56 **Jessica Beach**

And we can start construction on the north side potentially next year.

00:11:00 **Melissa Wissel**

Oh my gosh, that's like tomorrow. That's like tomorrow. And and and and.

00:11:00 **Jessica Beach**

Like we hope to get the design wrapped up.

00:11:03 **Jessica Beach**

Go out to bid and actually start now that comes with its pain because of construction and we're talking right around City Hall. But the project is moving forward. So I hope to come back with a little bit more detail in the near future for maybe a future breaker.

00:11:17 **Jessica Beach**

We can talk about that project more.

00:11:17 **Melissa Wissel**

Well, I I appreciate you bringing us that information. I know sometimes it's.

00:11:23 **Melissa Wissel**

We don't like telling people too many things too soon because things change.

00:11:27 **Jessica Beach**

It changes this and this project is poster child of things changing. So yeah, there's once we have some more solid dates and schedules and things like that, we will be pushing that out. But there's just a lot of moving parts with it. It's complicated with any of these capital projects, whether it's the Fort dot or.

00:11:44 **Jessica Beach**

They do take time to go through the design, the permitting, and then actually getting to construction. These are three to five year projects at a minimum.

00:11:50 **Melissa Wissel**

Minimum. Well, and that ties in. Also, you know you've still been working with the Army Corps. They're they're heavily involved in all of these.

00:11:55 **Jessica Beach**

Yes.

00:11:57 **Jessica Beach**

Yes, these projects, yes. So there we get keep them plugged in. We have monthly meetings, we have more internal, more coordination meetings with them. They're looking at the ultimate big picture long range strategy for the entire city. So we have these smaller projects that are.

00:12:12 **Jessica Beach**

Planning and this gets taken into account with the Army Corps modeling. So just I know we get that question a lot. It's like it is all integrated. There's been a lot of coordination efforts between local state and federal entities and all of the things with that too. But they will be looking more big picture long term and that's you know that that will take.

00:12:30 **Jessica Beach**

Some time to.

00:12:31 **Jessica Beach**

Get through that study Back Bay.

00:12:31 **Melissa Wissel**

And that's the.

00:12:32 **Jessica Beach**

That is, the Back Bay study, yes.

00:12:34 **Melissa Wissel**

And we're we're making progress on that.

00:12:36 **Jessica Beach**

Yes. Yeah, we have the our monthly meetings that we have. They'll show the schedule and.

00:12:40 **Jessica Beach**

If assuming we stay on schedule, we're probably going to have like a signed report in February of 2028. That's like officially like it's done and then we would move into two preliminary design engineering actually start moving into the implementation side of.

00:12:53 **Melissa Wissel**

It with whatever their recommendation.

00:12:55 **Jessica Beach**

Correct, yes. So we're we had a kickoff like a meeting, public meeting back in April.

00:12:56 **Melissa Wissel**

Well.

00:13:01 **Jessica Beach**

Just to talk about.

00:13:02 **Jessica Beach**

Kind of where we're at. When they looked at damages and flooding and different storm suites and things like that. So that sets the stage for what type of strategies and alternatives can we start looking at. And so we're in the middle of that. So we should be having some some things to share with the Community and our next public.

00:13:17 **Melissa Wissel**

Meeting in October. And that's not necessarily we build the wall around everything.

00:13:21 **Jessica Beach**

Not necessarily. It's looking at everything and yes, natural nature based features, it's looking at ring walls, pump stations, walls, potential flood gates, lifting houses, flood proofing structures is everything's on the table. So we'll be looking at that closer and what really kind of filters through and and makes the most sense economically, environmentally and engine.

00:13:22 **Melissa Wissel**

This.

00:13:24 **Melissa Wissel**

Environmental and that kind of thing.

00:13:42 **Melissa Wissel**

Because we want to be here in the next 4.

00:13:44 **Melissa Wissel**

150 years.

00:13:45 **Melissa Wissel**

We don't want to be another law city of Atlanta, exactly.

00:13:50 **Melissa Wissel**

Well, Jessica, lots of information, great update and thank you for all the work that you do. We'll look to see what happens with the sea wall. Any can you give us a date, time, timeline, time frame of when we're looking at any of this?

00:14:03 **Jessica Beach**

They're all on. These are different projects or in different timelines. I know the Department of Transportation, they're looking to finish design between now and 2025 and then moving into construction like late 25, early 20.

00:14:16 **Jessica Beach**

Six or for the section that's right along the Bayfront, and then the Fort, I think they're on a similar schedule, but I haven't looked specifically, but it's going to be within the next couple of years that you'll we'll be.

00:14:16 **Melissa Wissel**

For our seawall.

00:14:27 **Melissa Wissel**

Seeing things happening and it's not going to be this.

00:14:28 **Jessica Beach**

Calendar year and probably not next correct and I guess the big thing for the four is they do have open public comment for right now and I think.

00:14:31 **Melissa Wissel**

OK.

00:14:36 Jessica Beach

They have until there's like a July 17th. Deadlines for the public to have comments for the park and their their specific projects too. So we've been trying to help.

00:14:44 Melissa Wissel

Get the message out. Well, great information. Thanks again for stopping by the.

00:14:48 Jessica Beach

Break room. Thank you. Glad to be.

00:14:50 Melissa Wissel

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00:15:07 Melissa Wissel

Instagram at City Saint Aug until next time, thanks for tuning in.

00:15:11 Narrator

You've been listening 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 Whistle, has in-depth conversations with the people who make our town work to meet the needs of our community. See you at this time.

00:15:23

Yeah.

00:15:27 Narrator

Next week, for another edition of the break room.