

The Break Room: Amy Skinner, Planning & Building Director, August 27, 2024

Narrator:

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 Wissel:

Welcome to the break room, and thanks for tuning in. Amy Skinner is the city's planning and building director. And this week in the break room, we have a new topic for discussion, an update to the city's vision plan. Amy, welcome back.

Amy Skinner:

Thank you. Great to be here.

Melissa Wissel:

I don't know if our residents realize this, that it's something that I look at when I'm thinking of things that I have to do on my side of work is the vision plan. The original vision plan was published in 2014. Vice Mayor Roxanne Horvath was the chair of that committee. I believe it was about ten years ago. Give us an update on what we did back in 2014 and why we're revisiting this vision plan here in 2024.

Amy Skinner:

Yes, I think that process was a pretty extensive process. They had several committees, a lot of public participation. It was broken down by kind of subject matter and sort of issues of importance at the time. Deep dive into creating certain areas of interest and then prioritizing certain things to move forward. It really set the tone for the future, for the comprehensive planning, budgeting. The strategic plan kind of comes directly out of the vision plan. The vision plan, I think, was set sort of an overall broad perspective.

Melissa Wissel:

How do we see ourselves?

Amy Skinner:

How do we see ourselves and how do we see the important issues moving forward? And basically, as you said, it's ten years old now. The reality is time flies. It's ten years old. We've gotten a lot of things accomplished. A lot of things have come out of it. We move forward. Mobility, for example, a lot of progress has been made. So, I think the city commission looked at it and realized it's been ten years. That was a pretty extensive process. We feel like maybe overall it still addresses most of the perspectives moving forward, but it's just time to update it.

Melissa Wissel:

And it's really about the guiding. I find I go to it, the guiding principles. Why? Who are we? How do we identify ourselves as our city? As the city of St. Augustine. It's the nation's oldest city. We try to stay away from things like the tourism aspect of things, and there's other entities in the county and here that governmentally do that. We're about our residents, infrastructure, historic preservation. I think city manager John Regan used to say, clean water in, dirty water out, utilities, safe sidewalks, lighting, all the things that keep our quality of life for residents. And that vision plan is really kind of a cool document. It's not very long, it's like four pages.

Amy Skinner:

And I think, yeah, that's the point of a vision plan. It's supposed to be sort of easy to identify, easy to look at. We were in 2014, the city was already seeing some impacts of things and realizing, you know, things were starting to change. So it tried to address livability where we're trying to prioritize keeping it a residential city, keep hoping that our residents are priority, a priority authenticity, as you said, getting into kind of historic preservation and can we stay kind of authentic to ourselves and what this city actually is, including then character, maintaining our character, trying to, not that we can't change, but, you know, we distinctive neighborhoods, it's neat for a reason, you know. And

so, we want to maintain the character and, you know, maintain kind of the vitality of the city. And we use. The vision plan was really the basis for the major, I guess, something that's near and dear to my heart, the major rewrite of the comprehensive plan in 2018, adopted in 2020. I know we throw these dates out there, but these initiatives are a lot of work, big. And so, the vision was a big deal then following that, kind of woven through the update to the comprehensive plan is the goals and objectives of the vision. And that's what sets the direction for 2040.

Melissa Wissel:

Which seems so far away.

Amy Skinner:

Seems so far away. And then here we are. And every, you know, every seven years we're supposed to evaluate the comprehensive plan. So guess what? We're next year, 2025. We're evaluating the comprehensive plan again. So it makes sense to look at the vision now and basically as an update. Are there, what have we accomplished? Are there things that we've seen that maybe we need to focus in a little bit more? So we're interested in really getting the community involved to see how we need to tweak it as it sets the direction again for another update to the comprehensive plan, which then feeds into other initiatives like the conservation Land program, the mobility planning that we've done in the last few years that people are starting to really see. It takes planning.

Melissa Wissel:

You don't realize that the things that we're seeing today actually are the fruits of what are coming out of what was planted, shall we say, to follow that? Yeah, if you're just now tuning in, you're listening to the break room. I have Amy Skinner with us this week. She is the planning and building director. We're talking about the vision plan, the update to a 2014 vision plan. That vision plan is really that, that metric that we measure. How are we doing? How do we know

whether we're doing right or wrong? Are we heading in the right direction, the wrong direction? And we can keep ourselves accountable to that. You mentioned the comp plan and the community outreach. I think when you and I talked about this, we both said this is going to be like the comp plan. So let's pick some locations,

or we can have all of our residents different times of day give us, if you could just give us some information about what folks can be looking for these upcoming community meetings.

Amy Skinner:

Yes. So we really are going to be kicking off this process with a brief presentation at the city commission August 26 meeting. We have engaged the Northeast Florida Regional Council to help us with this process. So they're going to

be working in conjunction with us. They're going to kick it off at the city commission meeting on August 26. We have a series of six meetings that we're going to

put out that are all around the city. The first meeting to really work with the public is September 12. So Thursday night, September 12 at the St. Johns county main Library. Then we go straight to Monday, September 16 at the St. Augustine Yacht Club Wednesday, October 2 at the Willie Gallimore Center. October 16 at, at the Waterworks building. October 29 at the Shiloh Baptist Church on West King Street, and then kind of to wrap things up at the Alcazar Room in city hall downstairs

on Wednesday, November 13. That meeting, we hope, will be kind of a wrap up meeting to sort of make sure that we've heard what the community has said, and we wanted to make sure that we were different locations. So we're going to break it down

into kind of some subject matter at each meeting. But obviously we want to hear whatever anybody wants to say or what's on people's mind at any meeting. So you can come to whatever meeting is convenient for you.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, and like you just said, there's a lot of different topics. If you're just to recap what you were talking about before, you know, we've got livability, authenticity, character, and vitality. Those are sort of the four pillars,

if you will. There were strategic plans, there were things, goals that were set ways of achieving those goals. So we'll be putting out links to the vision plan, the meetings on the one hand. We're here the end of August thinking, oh my gosh, September, all the way to November. But those are basically every other week. So the September meetings are within the same week. Seems just about. And then you get into October, there's three meetings. And then we'll do that recap in November. And I love the fact it's so important, I think, and I want to make a pitch. Thank you for that. You know, it's so important that we have the meetings at different locations. They're all after hours, so hopefully folks can get to them after work. Daytime is so hard for people.

Amy Skinner:

Right.

Melissa Wissel:

But you've got, like you said, the main library, the yacht club, Willie Gallimore, the Waterworks, Shiloh Baptist Church in West King, and then also downtown. So that's really great.

Amy Skinner:

And then they can look forward. And I know we just listed those out quickly. We'll make sure that it's available for the public to look at so you can kind of gauge your schedule. I think one's from five to seven, and then the others are from six to eight in the evening to make ourselves available. And we're planning in the. For the month of November. We'll also have other business on the PZB agenda, the corridor review committee agenda and the HARB agenda. So if you are

able to come to a regular. Or you need to come to a regular board meeting, we'll probably also have that for discussion. And in December, on December 11, we'll have a joint meeting scheduled with the planning and zoning board, HARB, the historic Architectural Review board, and the CRC to bring in our corridor review committee so that they can kind of come to a consensus if and any final recommendations as a group. Because I think these groups kind of need to talk across the aisle, so to speak, and, you know, kind of reconfirm for us, you know, what direction we're looking at, because we are. It's a quick process. We are looking to wrap this up in January.

Melissa Wissel:

That was going to be my next question. So you take all of this input, community input. Can folks email?

Amy Skinner:

Of course.

Melissa Wissel:

Send in emails? Okay.

Amy Skinner:

Of course, there's an email that the regional council will have, and then Jacob Fredriksson, our planning manager, you can email him or.

Melissa Wissel:

And all that we'll put out with our social media messaging. It'll be in news and notes. We'll have all kinds of information for folks.

Amy Skinner:

Yep. So by the end of January, we are trying to kind of wrap this up so that the next budget year, we can use it to help set our strategic plan. And also, over the course of next year, 2025, we can use it to update our comprehensive plan and kind of see then the next thing.

Melissa Wissel:

And then in ten years from now, we'll be back.

Amy Skinner:

And we realize that we've learned a lot in the last ten years. Resiliency, sustainability has come more to the forefront of people's minds, and we understand that a little bit better. It's like every day where we have light bulbs come on about

Melissa Wissel:

Well, our priorities change, and if you don't stop and measure, what have we been doing? What have we not been doing? What's changed? Like you just said, resiliency. If you had said resiliency or sustainability ten years ago, we wouldn't have known what you're talking about.

Amy Skinner:

It wasn't really in our vocabulary where, unfortunately for good and bad, we've had some storms, we have some other things. We have major projects going on now that we understand those issues a little bit better. So how should we kind of guide ourselves into the future?

Melissa Wissel:

Well, and things like the Sebastian River Bridge project, the King Street renovation, traffic circle or whatever, the circulator, the intersection at the base of the bridge alliance, all of those things that we're facing now, you could apply to those tenants of livability, vitality. How do those things impact that? And it's almost, when you look at moving forward on those, you can't help but go back to the vision plan of 2014 and say, does this meet what, what we were hoping for?

Amy Skinner:

I know it's difficult to think about the future and then get into the weeds on specific projects and kind of switch back and forth. But if we don't, just like in your own life, if you don't set goals, if you don't kind of look at the steps forward and how to get there, then you'll never get there. So we've got to keep working on trying to get there, even if it's little baby steps,

Melissa Wissel:

And measure the good things we're doing along the way.

Amy Skinner:

Right.

Melissa Wissel:

That's the other thing is, I think, also recognizing that we are getting some things right and we have this vision plan to measure that again.

Amy Skinner:

Right. So we're proud of how far we've come. And so now we need to make sure we're staying on track.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, and with that, we're done. It goes fast. Thank you for coming and talking and sharing this vision plan update with our residents in the community, and we'll look forward to those meetings in September and October, November.

Amy Skinner:

Thank you. We hope people come out.

Melissa Wissel:

Please come out. Nothing worse than telling folks we have these meetings and people saying they didn't know about them. So please come out and attend the meetings. Thanks a bunch. Amy. If you missed part of this broadcast and want to go back and listen from the beginning, you can now find us on your

favorite podcasting app. Look for that list and a listing of past podcasts as well as this one at citystaugradio.com. Follow us on social. You'll find us on Facebook, Instagram and X @citystaug. Thanks again for tuning in. Until next time.

Narrator:

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. See you at this time next week for another edition of the Break room.