

Tara Bennie, Parking Enforcement supervisor, October 29, 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:

Thanks for tuning into the Break Room. I'm Melissa Wissel, communications director for the city of St. Augustine. Believe it or not, Nights of Lights and the kickoff celebration of Light Up Night is less than one month away. And if you are planning to come to St. Augustine for any of the Nights of Lights season, you'll need to find a place to park. So I've invited Tara Bennie, The City of St. Augustine's Parking Enforcement supervisor, to join us. It's been about three years and we are glad to have you back. Tara, welcome back.

Tara Bennie:

Thanks for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

I think it's a good time for us to talk about parking. We've, we've actually had quite a lot of changes. We've discontinued the park now card. We are continuing the discount for St. John's county residents. We have a mobile app, parking garage rates change, lots of stuff. So where do you want to start?

Tara Bennie:

So I'd really like to start with the fact that we've extended our parking hours so the hours of enforcement we've added Sundays. So we now enforce from 1pm to 9pm on Sundays and then instead of 8 to 5 Monday through Saturday, we're now 8 to 9. That was already existing in the Fort parking lot, but we've expanded that throughout the city. So keep an eye out and

make sure that if you're parked in one of our city owned locations that you pay attention to the hours of enforcement.

Melissa Wissel:

And I want to mention, I want to reiterate, city owned, city managed.

Tara Bennie:

Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

With the city, the P, the parking logo that looks like our Park St Aug app and our city crest.

Tara Bennie:

So there's a few things that'll differentiate.

Melissa Wissel:

Help us help our listeners know which ones are ours. Because people often call you and say but I was in a city lot and they're not.

Tara Bennie:

Yep. So a couple of the things that differentiate us from some of the private parking lots are our standard pay by plate signage in the area. You'll see our city crest that says City of St. Augustine and our pay stations. So you'll see the blue P on the side of them again with the blue P just to ensure that no one else has something similar. If you see that you can go to the pay station or look at the signage in the area just to make sure that it's ours.

Melissa Wissel:

And the code, the area,

Tara Bennie:

For your section.

Melissa Wissel:

That's only going to work.

Tara Bennie:

Yes, that's only going to work in our city owned lots or city managed lots. And that's one of the other signs that you'll see in those areas where now that we have the mobile app. We started with the mobile app in 2019, so we've continued on with that. And there's zones, different zones throughout the city. So you're going to see our Park St. Aug signage that's going to help you to know what zone you're in, how to enter it there on your mobile app to pay for your parking session. And that's one of the things that we can help you with at 50 Bridge street there at the financial Services center or obviously by calling our office and speaking with someone in the parking division. We do still have just to hop around a little bit. We do still have the park now cards that are in circulation currently that were previously purchased. We are not selling any more park now cards. That's been almost a year now since we stopped selling them. And we want you to obviously use the funds on those cards, but we do not want you to miss the discount. So don't wait until you're out of money on the park now card to register for the resident discount. We try to make it as seamless and easy as possible. So basically you can either go online or in person. Some folks prefer the in person interaction to assist them in filling out the application, which you can completely do at 50 Bridge Street. You just need to bring a driver's license and vehicle registration. Keep in mind that one of the things that if your driver's license and vehicle registration have not been updated to show that you have proof of St. John's county residency, bring that extra form of proof with you and we'll get you entered into the system.

Melissa Wissel:

You gotta be a St. John's county resident.

Tara Bennie:

Yes. And this will give you a discount of 50 cent an hour instead of \$2 and 50 cents an hour at the pay stations. And as you drive into the parking garage, you'll pay \$3 instead of 20. So you get that perk as the St. John's county resident. But we do have to enter you into the system.

Melissa Wissel:

So you got to register.

Tara Bennie:

You do

Melissa Wissel:

And you don't have to use the app for that.

Tara Bennie:

No. And you also don't have to visit 50 Bridge street to register for the discount. You can go to our website, which is parkstaug.com Right. There's a link Resident discount park. Now once you go to that link, you just fill out the application, upload a copy of your driver's license and vehicle registration and this will be sent directly to us. Will you enter you into the system for the parking garage, the pay stations and the mobile app. With that being said, there is a misconception that you have to have the mobile app to pay. The mobile app is only for folks that like using apps. So if you prefer to go to the pay station and pay, then that's certainly still avenue that you can still get the discount. However, keep in mind that if you get stuck at a restaurant, if you're on the other side of, the other side of town. Yeah, the other side of town, you can re up and refeed the meter from your app without going back to the pay station in your zone. Because we do enforce zonal. Okay, so you can't park in the fort and then refeed a meter around city hall here. You have to go back to the fort. So save yourself the time if you are even remotely tech savvy because it's a pretty simple app to use.

Melissa Wissel:

So I find when I travel so many cities use them, yes, they're different. I have yet to find the same one in in any given city as another. But that's okay. They're all generally the same. You download the app, you put in your zone, your card, your whatever, and off you go.

Tara Bennie:

And keep in mind that you know there's always someone in the office Monday through Friday to help answer those questions as they arise. We just want to make sure that the correct information gets out because more and more folks tend to think that you have to use the mobile app and maybe they don't favor a mobile app and that's just not the case. One thing to keep in mind though is you do not use the mobile app to enter the parking garage. As you drive into the parking garage, the camera system reads your license plate. If you've been approved for the resident discount, you're going to pay the attendant the \$3. So you're not going to use your mobile app whatsoever once you drive into the parking garage.

Melissa Wissel:

Are there stations in the parking garage?

Tara Bennie:

There's not ... the attendant and drive in for the day. Now it is \$3 per entry. So if you leave and come back, you'll pay the \$3 again.

Melissa Wissel:

But you could go in and come back three times, six times before.

Tara Bennie:

Before you ever. Yeah, absolutely.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, let me just do a quick. Let me just remind folks, if you're just now tuning in, you're listening to the break room. I'm Melissa Wissel, communications director. I have Tara Bennie with me in studio. She is the parking enforcement supervisor giving us lots of great information about parking downtown. And remember, we are parking, talking about parking in lots and spots. Lots and spots. City managed city parking. Of course, you can't park where there's a yellow curb or where it's a loading zone. All of that doesn't count. Resident. Resident zones and things like that. All aside, I do want to remind folks about the resident discount. You just mentioned it. We're not really talking about parking garage because that's Denise's zone. Yes. But we do want to remind folks that the resident discount in the parking garage is \$3 a day, \$20 without the parking discount if you're not a resident or not registered. And I do want to remind folks if you didn't know this and I want folks to listen. Other than during nights of lights, there is a time where after 9:00pm it's a flat rate of \$5 and that is after 5:00pm excuse me, after 5:00pm it's a flat rate. So if you come in later in the day, you don't have to pay that \$20. But during nights of lights, and I don't recall exactly when that's going to go into effect, but they will keep it at the 20 rate during that high season. But if you're not registered and you come down to go to dinner in the evening, still go to the parking garage, it's going to be \$5, not 20, which is a good thing. You want to come down for dinner, you're not going to pay 20 bucks.

Tara Bennie:

Absolutely. And that's not for St. John's county residents, obviously, as St. John's county resident, make sure that you reach out to us in parking. I think it's important just to get you into the system and we're able to do that for you.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah.

Tara Bennie:

Also, as we near the holiday season, if everyone can just remember the Florida state rules of no parking on yellow curbs, no facing the wrong direction. If there's a parking stall on the roadway, please make sure to park inside the parking stall. So those are just a couple things that we do cite for. And we notice that periodically we come across someone that may not have that information.

Melissa Wissel:

And we've got that you were mentioning before the card reader at the parking garage. We've got some technology, new technology that y'all are using as well for enforcement in the cars.

Tara Bennie:

We do. So we have license plate recognition now, which replaced the pay and display. So once we activated the mobile app along with that, we went pay by plate instead of having to get a receipt and go back to the vehicle to put the receipt on your desk dashboard. So we tried to make it more user friendly, especially for those individuals that would not be able to come back to the vehicle every four hours to refeed the meter. One thing to keep in mind is if you are here and in the downtown area for long term, as opposed to just 2, 3, 4 hours, it might be best for you to park in the parking garage so that you don't have to go back and worry about refeeding the meters or you don't have to go into your mobile app and feed for more time. So if you intend on being here long term, that long term parking is really intended to be the parking garage.

Melissa Wissel:

And we're talking about long term parking like that. We have discount, monthly passes.

Tara Bennie:

Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

Remind us about the. Here's the funny thing. People will say you need to have a downtown worker discount or some kind of a downtown benefit. Because I work downtown, but I don't know that people realize that. We have a program I want you to tell us about that makes it basically a dollar a day.

Tara Bennie:

Yes. So you can get a monthly garage pass and just pay \$33 plus tax a month. So if you're downtown and you work five, six days a week, it's basically a dollar a day for the most part. You're. You're going to get the biggest discount by paying that monthly fee.

Melissa Wissel:

Is it, is it in the mobile app or it's just a registration I do it at 50 Bridge.

Tara Bennie:

I call no to get the parking garage, pass the garage and let them know that you'd like to purchase the monthly pass. You're given a proximity card, which is just a little plastic card that helps you get in and out of the gates as you drive in and as you exit.

Melissa Wissel:

And I can ask the folks at the ticket booth or I can go over. There's usually somebody in and around.

Tara Bennie:

Yes. And they'll be able to register you and get you that pass.

Melissa Wissel:

So before we wrap up, Tara, I want to go back to something you were talking about earlier, which was identifying city managed lots. I think I know you guys get lots of calls from people thinking that they're calling either the Private company or they're calling you to solve those problems. Help our listeners with how we need to differentiate. Or what. What is that misconception or what. What's happening with that?

Tara Bennie:

Yes. So we do have some private parking lots throughout the city. And we do hope that everyone is just cautious and aware that when you pull into these locations, the city is unable to assist if you receive a citation there. So, and by citation, what I mean is essentially they're invoicing you. They're invoicing you for time at a very high rate.

Melissa Wissel:

So we're not ticketing them.

Tara Bennie:

We are not ticketing. It's an invoice that they get for the time that they were there. So there is cameras in these private parking lots that time them as they drive in and time them as they drive out. If they see that there's not an active session from the pay station during that time, they can receive an invoice in the mail stating that they owe funds for being in there, overtime, or maybe they didn't pay at all. And we do get calls, of course, and rightly so, thinking that we may have some input or some assistance that we can provide. And unfortunately, even for our own city employees that may visit these locations after hours, if you drive into these locations, the city of St. Augustine would not be able to assist you if you receive an invoice. But please make sure that you call the number on that invoice because we do hear that periodically there's some assistance that can be given.

Melissa Wissel:

So if you get a citation or a ticket from us, it goes in your window, in your windshield.

Tara Bennie:

Yeah, it goes. It goes right underneath the windshield. And I do want to add to that is when I say that we have heard that there's been some assistance given. I'm not saying that they're voiding everyone's citation. They're voiding everyone's invoices. I'm just saying if there was a, an error on their part, please make sure to reach out to them, but understand that we cannot assist.

Melissa Wissel:

Right. And it's not the city.

Tara Bennie:

Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

Invoicing them or ticketing them, because again, they weren't in a city.

Tara Bennie:

Yes. And they are a licensed business.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay. And that was the other thing is people think that we're, like, out there ripping them off. And those are other privately owned parking management companies or whatever that, that own those parking lots.

Tara Bennie:

Absolutely.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay. Lots of great information about parking. We're going to. We've. We've started our season of Nights of Lights with you, Tara. We're going to also have Todd and X come in and talk about the shuttles and some other exciting, fun stuff. We're going to have Joel Autry come and talk to us about lighting up the plaza. His team does all the lights for Nights of Lights. So thanks for getting us in the spirit of parking and coming down and great ways of enjoying downtown and saving some money while you're at it.

Tara Bennie:

Thanks for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

And Tara Bennie is the kind, kind voice on the end of the phone when you call parking enforcement to ask questions about all this. So thanks for all that you do for our, for our, for our callers.

Tara Bennie:

Thank you.

Melissa Wissel:

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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.