

The Break Room: Jamie D. Perkins, Neighborhood Services & CRA Manager, December 10, 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. This week in studio, we are catching up again with Jamie D. Perkins. She's our neighborhood services and CRA manager. Jamie, I'm just gonna jump right in. Welcome back. You came back. You were with us in September.

Jamie D. Perkins:

Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

You were with us again, I think earlier this year. Again, you've got a lot going on, so I want folks to know there's still lots to talk about.

Jamie D. Perkins:

I think I'm becoming a fan favorite because people around town are saying like, I love hearing you on The Break Room.

Melissa Wissel:

I love it.

Jamie D. Perkins:

I feel like I'm on all the time now.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, and you and I, we were talking about this on our way down here. It's a great conversation. You've got a lot that you're working on. I love what you're doing. It's an easy conversation and I think it's something that's very uplifting and positive to share with the community.

Jamie D. Perkins:

Well, you know, I always like doing this with you.

Melissa Wissel:

I'm happy to have you. Let's talk about. So this was this when this airs, it will have been last week. But we just came from the Lincolnville park dedication. Tell us about that.

Jamie D. Perkins:

Yeah. Lincolnville park in honor of George and Ollie Smith is located at 81 Weeden Street. It was a wonderful, wonderful event. Ribbon cutting ceremony to officially open the small pocket park in honor of some great people from Lincolnville that have done some work, I guess I'll say kind of under the radar, unsung heroes. They haven't really received the recognition that a lot of the big names, individuals that we all have heard of before have received those recognition. But this park I think is a great opportunity to just kind of recognize somebody or a couple who has done great things in Lincolnville throughout the years.

Melissa Wissel:

So. Yes. And their family was here. Yeah, they moved here. You said they arrived here in the 50s. They were very active during civil rights.

Jamie D. Perkins:

Right, right. But even in with the work that they did in 1964 during the Civil rights movement and era, I think a lot of their work actually comes after that too. They have just been a vital, honorable component of the Lincolnville community. Like, people talk about how they could just go to their home and if they needed food, they knew they could go to the Smith family to eat, you know, get solace, respite, you know, just a sense of family. And they've always been the family that kind of brought people in. If they didn't have a place to live, you know, they kind of. They would create a reset button for people.

Melissa Wissel:

a little haven.

Jamie D. Perkins:

And then they also have some. They have commercial property there. So they have, you know, ownership in Lincolnville. And they're one of the few African American families that are original to the Lincolnville community, that are still in the community today.

Melissa Wissel:

It was beautiful to see because when you talk about the family, the family was there, their son came down from North Carolina or South Carolina. It really. It was a very touching ceremony. Really did kind of bring back that, like, sense of family and community. It's a beautiful park. It's gonna. It is setting a standard, I will say.

Jamie D. Perkins:

Well, I'm. I'm very pleased to have it added to what I think the city already has as a thriving pocket park set of parks. Here in our city, we have an inventory of some great recreational spaces. And so adding Lincolnville park, in honor of George and Ollie Smith on Weedon Street.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah.

Jamie D. Perkins:

To that inventory, I think is just impeccable work. So, yeah, it does set a standard. And. And we're happy to keep climbing.

Melissa Wissel:

And it's beautiful. So if you've missed it, go down to the corner of Weedon into Haven, and you can't miss it. It's got beautiful coquina pillars and an entryway. There's some park benches, there's a checkerboard and a chessboard, some seats. It's really a beautiful space. So I hope folks will go down and check it out. And thank you for that. But moving on, we've got another park project that I want you to share with us. I know we've talked about it before, but it's open, it's operating, but we are going to still do something big about it in the beginning of the year.

Jamie D. Perkins:

So it's soft open. So we've been working on Eddie Vickers Park and Dr. Robert B. Hayling park, actually completing our master plan and completing the recreational improvements to those spaces. One of the highlights, though, is, of course, the sports courts improvement. So we now have six pickleball courts and two basketball courts. Both sets of courts, basketball and pickleball alike, are full almost every single day. I go out and take photos. I have a set of pickleball fanatics that send me pictures almost every week to say hey, the parks, the courts are full again. And so I'm really excited that users are getting such great use out of these newly improved sports courts. They are soft opened and we do look forward to having I guess a grand reopening in the early part of the calendar year.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay, I'm not going to spoil any surprises, but you and I have talked about maybe getting something involving staff, pickleball and basketball.

Jamie D. Perkins:

So I hope so.

Melissa Wissel:

And stay tuned.

Jamie D. Perkins:

Hopefully some of our residents will come out and we can have a really good time and just enjoy..

Melissa Wissel:

And I shout out too. Also, we've been re renovating the Gallimore.

Jamie D. Perkins:

Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

And so the Gallimore center itself.

Jamie D. Perkins:

We're doing great things.

Melissa Wissel:

It's going to be beautiful, going to be beautiful down there. If you're just now tuning in, you're listening to the break room. I'm Melissa Wissel, communications director for the city and I have Jamie D. Perkins with me in studio. Neighborhood Services and CRA Manager.

Let's talk a little bit about CRA, Community Redevelopment Agency, not to be confused with Community Redevelopment Area. And we have areas under the agency. Did the CRA have part to have a part in the Lincolnville ribbon cutting in that Lincolnville redevelopment in that design or was that part of Neighborhood Services?

Jamie D. Perkins:

So no, that was all CRA. That was all CRA for the Lincolnville Park.

Melissa Wissel:

And so is Eddie Vickers

Jamie D. Perkins:

Eddie Vickers is all CRA. So it's not Neighborhood Services right now. Neighborhood Services is kind of, I don't want to say small, small sounds insignificant. But we're mainly focusing on our Neighborhood Grants, which is also doing great Neighborhood grants. We just issued five grants. Actually we awarded, I should say five grants. And our next application cycle is in January. So Neighborhood Services is mainly focusing on neighborhood grants right now. And the CRA is doing all the improvements and redevelopment things that you see.

Melissa Wissel:

So redevelopment 25, you wanting to talk about that? Let's do an unveiling. Drum roll please. It's an unveiling. We're going to talk about it now and then we'll have you back.

Jamie D. Perkins:

our Community Redevelopment Agency in our very first special district Community Redevelopment Area, which is the historic area downtown near our parking garage, was established in 2000, which means that in 2025 our Community Redevelopment Agency will turn 25 years old. So the city has had CRA for 25 years in 2025. So we're looking forward to maybe celebrating that in some really significant way with the redevelopment 25 and doing some things in our special districts that our residents and stakeholders can enjoy. And we

can look at a way to just recognize the work that we've been doing throughout the last 25 years.

Melissa Wissel:

I think that's something too, that we really do try to talk about when you're here is the work that you do and the funding that you use to do those projects is not general fund. You get the money through a different funding source. So these are great opportunities to improve areas of the city that are experiencing blight or showing blight and improve them. We haven't. You and I have talked a little bit about, but what we're trying to do is to do something in each of those areas. Right, right. We're going to do something.

Jamie D. Perkins:

I would love to do something like that. So we're still early in the planning stages and hopefully in the early part of the calendar year we can get a schedule out so residents can have something to look forward to. But I think we would like to, you know, recognize each area in a special way, something that is significant to their particular special district or specific special district, and have some events throughout the year that will celebrate Redevelopment 25.

Melissa Wissel:

Remind our listeners the areas.

Jamie D. Perkins:

Yes. So I'll set them in chronological order so that way people can, you know, have a better understanding of what they are. So we have the Historic Area Community Redevelopment Area, Lincolnville Community Redevelopment Area, and newly West City Community Redevelopment Area.

Melissa Wissel:

So that's a perfect per. Perfect segue into. We've got a few minutes still, so we've got time. I want to talk about West City CRA. They've been having meetings. They're getting a little excited over there. They're starting to pull together.

Jamie D. Perkins:

Yes. I'm loving just seeing all of the camaraderie through the residents and stakeholders, business owners in West City, how excited they are about being a part of building the community Redevelopment Plan, which is really vital to the success of a CRA. The redevelopment plan kind of acts as our tool book and it defines what we can and can't do in these special districts. So we have our steering committee who's working really diligently with myself and our consultant to build out what our strategic plan will be. And then we have stakeholders that are an unofficial capacity that are, you know, providing input. So we are having these in public engagement meetings with them. And looking forward to getting another public engagement meeting on the calendar early in January. And then we have this new. What I'm just hearing about is the West Augustine Business association is recently being established, and they've reached out to us and wanting to have some input and provide insight on what they like to see in West City in the CRA. So it's just exciting all around. People are really engaged and they're, you know, they're. It's like a. Like the momentum is just continuing to build. So I'm excited about that.

Melissa Wissel:

The business. Excuse me, the business association, I think, is probably something that, I don't know that you could. I don't know that that would have come out of either of the other two, because it's not how those areas are made up. But I think West City has always had that potential. And I think if they've tried to get together in the past with that type of an idea and it didn't work, the CRA really, I don't want to say forces it, but it really gives them something to buy into. How does the plan come together? The steering committee has been meeting, I mean, officially, but it will disband probably once the plan is in place.

Jamie D. Perkins:

So the steering committee is set to dissolve after we adopt our plan. But basically what we're doing now is we're utilizing the information that we were receiving from our public engagement initiatives to build out the plan. The steering committee is kind of advising or guiding that process, as we do in public meetings. We use that information to build a plan.

We bring it back to them for their approval. It will go before our Planning and Zoning board because they are what the state calls our LPA or local planning agency. So they also have to have some input on it. It will go before our agency, which is also our commission, and then the agency has to send it over or ask for approval from the commission, which just gets a little bit crazy because it's the same group of people, but. And then we'll also have input from city staff because we have great colleagues, obviously our directors, that have input, things that we need to know. See how those information, strategic plans that are in our plan, how that will impact the work that we're already doing because we don't want to reinvent the wheel in the CRA.

Melissa Wissel:

So when you say a. Can you give me an example of a couple of guidelines or things maybe from one of the other CRAs?

Jamie D. Perkins:

Yeah, I can even speak from. From our Draft plan for West City. So our plan talks a lot about obviously infrastructure improvements, water and drainage efforts. Affordable housing is a big one. A lot of people in the community are really concerned that, you know, as the community continues to grow, redevelopment.

Melissa Wissel:

Get that parking garage on the corner.

Jamie D. Perkins:

That people will, you know, they want to make sure that the people that live in the community are stabilized. So we have a lot of that commercial development business acquisition there, there. I mean, it's full of really exciting opportunities. And then of course there's the recreational component. Everybody wants to have some type of recreation in their, in their neighborhood. And, and I don't blame them. You know, you need to be able to get out and enjoy your community. So we're hoping that we can introduce some of those.

Melissa Wissel:

Sidewalk improvements.

Jamie D. Perkins:

Absolutely.

Melissa Wissel:

I got that on my street.

Jamie D. Perkins:

Yeah. Lots of capital improvement efforts are, are being introduced in the plan. So. Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

So West City CRA and Redevelopment 25 in the new year. And you mentioned the neighborhood services grants.

Jamie D. Perkins:

Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Is you awarded?

Jamie D. Perkins:

We did, and I can't remember all of them. So we received so many applications this cycle. So I was really impressed with that. I'm so happy that communities, neighborhoods, organizations are getting involved in wanting to do these great projects in their own community. Small scale projects, of course. So \$3,000 is the maximum grant award to

nonprofit organizations that are within one of the communities within the city municipality. has to be in our, obviously in the city limits. And we accept applications every quarter between the 1st and the 15th. So January, April, July, October, they can submit applications to us and they get vetted through staff and then they, if they pass the minimum criteria, then they go over to our application review committee. And if they score of 15 or higher and we have funds, we got to have funds. If we don't have money, we can't do anything. But if we have the, if the funds are available, then they get awarded and they can go out into their community and do great things. So.

Melissa Wissel:

And the next applications open up in January.

Jamie D. Perkins:

January 1st.

Melissa Wissel:

All right.

Jamie D. Perkins:

And the deadline is January 15th, 5pm in my office.

Melissa Wissel:

Two weeks. Get it together, get it in.

Jamie D. Perkins:

And, and you can start working on your application now. So, you know, I really encourage everyone, like if they're interested in doing a neighborhood cleanup, if they want to do a community garden or some type of planting or signage or whatever it is that they think their neighborhood needs, that maybe, you know, is a small scale project that the city wouldn't

necessarily take on. But that a neighborhood group could take on. Start putting your application together now. We're looking for those exciting projects and we want to be a part of those.

Melissa Wissel:

So wonderful.

Jamie D. Perkins:

Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

And it's all on the website.

Jamie D. Perkins:

Yep. It's all out there.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, that's a wrap. Thank you for coming and filling us in again.

Jamie D. Perkins:

You're welcome. Thank you for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

Thanks, Jamie. If you missed part of this broadcast and want to go back from the beginning, you can catch this and other episodes at citystaugradio.com. we want to keep you informed about what's happening in and around the city. Be sure to follow us on social. You can find us on Facebook, Instagram and X @citystaug. Thanks 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.