

The Break Room: Commissioner Jim Springfield, December 24, 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. Thanks for tuning in. I'm Melissa Wissel, Communications director for the city of St. Augustine. We're continuing our five week series of interviews this week as we bid farewell to 2024 and welcoming in 2025 with City Commissioner Jim Springfield. He's halfway through his first term, joining us in studio. Welcome back, Commissioner Springfield.

Jim Springfield:

Hey, I'm glad to be here.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, it's not only welcome back to The Break Room, but a welcome back to the studio. If I recall, you've retired your program.

Jim Springfield:

I've retired as a DJ. the program is still operating.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay. And is that the Grandpa Jim

Jim Springfield:

I was Grandpa Jim. That's right. On the Ocklawaha show.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay.

Jim Springfield:

It was a good time. It did almost 10 years.

Melissa Wissel:

Wow. But you're still on the air. No, you're not.

Jim Springfield:

No, I'm not on the air. The show is still there, but there's different DJs there.

Melissa Wissel:

Gotcha. Okay. Well, we're welcoming you back to The Break Room and talk about some good city stuff. So we spoke with Commissioner John DePreter recently. He is one of our brand new. He is our brand new commissioner. Do you remember what that was like those first few meetings and.

Jim Springfield:

Yes, I do. I do. It was kind of what I expected.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay.

Jim Springfield:

Right. I did not get much feedback at all from any residents, which was kind of. Yeah. For the first few weeks, which is kind of nice. And then we had a very tough thing, some, a very tough item on the agenda right away, the parking lot.

Melissa Wissel:

Yes.

Jim Springfield:

For Mr. Weeks.

Melissa Wissel:

Yes.

Jim Springfield:

And so that started out running.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Jim Springfield:

Right.

Melissa Wissel:

So the residents were gentle. We threw something really big at you. What else is most memorable in this first half of your term? Any things most challenging?

Jim Springfield:

Well, some of the events, some of the topics we've had have been truly challenging, but nothing that I thought was nothing like it happened in the past couple of years. And so I was thankful for that as a new commissioner. But it's fun, actually to do the research and to prepare and to talk to residents and to get emails and phone calls and stuff from people to kind of give you a different perspective. And there's been people that have changed my views. Because of their feedback.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, that's a good thing. Tell me a little bit. Let's rewind just a little bit. Getting here. What inspired you? What was your path to seeking public office? That's another thing we like to hear from.

Jim Springfield:

Right.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, representatives.

Jim Springfield:

Well, I was retired. I retired pretty young at 59 from the school board and then went back to Flagler for a while to work. But I still felt like I had something to contribute. And I've always told people who wanted to change the system to get in a leadership role and change the system. Right. So when I started complaining about things in the city to my neighbors, I said, okay, I got to eat my own words, you know, I got to participate instead of just complain. And I would say that to anybody listening. If you want to get involved, there's lots of ways to get involved. You can get on a committee, you can get on a board, and you can run for office. And it's not what you think it is. It's actually pretty easy.

Melissa Wissel:

Do you feel like the residents are reasonable? I know sometimes you hear from the. I know for me in my position, we always hear the squeaky wheel, the people that have the most voice that they're not happy about. But do you find it's pretty even you think people are reasonable?

Jim Springfield:

Very reasonable. I haven't had but one or two comments from people that I thought was out of touch.

Melissa Wissel:

and you can generally talk them down or come to some understanding. I think one of the things that I find in my job, and you may find this as well, my biggest challenge is to educate that when people get frustrated, I often find that they don't really understand.

Jim Springfield:

They don't know how the city works.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Jim Springfield:

And that's one of the. A big key to it all is trying to tell them, no, The mayor does not run the city like Jacksonville.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Jim Springfield:

The city manager runs the city.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Jim Springfield:

And so that's. It is an education piece.

Melissa Wissel:

What does a day in the life look like for you?

Jim Springfield:

In my whole life as a commissioner.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, I don't know. How much do you want to share with us? We only have 15 minutes a day in the life as the. As a commissioner.

Jim Springfield:

As a commissioner, mostly it's emails, and there are a few people who use my phone number because my phone number is on the card, it's on the website, and that's my direct. It's not a city phone. It's my phone so people can text me and they can write me. So most of the time I'm starting out today, looking at my emails and text to see if anybody has any concerns or what happened. For instance, today I come back from the store and there's a neighbor in my yard saying, have you been downtown yet? And I heard all about, I heard all about that and I do have some things to follow up on that because of the, because of that contact.

Melissa Wissel:

Downtown, meaning it's nights of light Christmas. There's too many people.

Jim Springfield:

Yep. The vendors on avenues.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay. Yeah.

Jim Springfield:

Because they're just overwhelming. Taking up a sidewalk and blocking people. And that's a concern. I've, I've already spoken to the city manager about that once and we need to beef it up.

Melissa Wissel:

and I know my own experience. Again, you go downtown and you do. You come back into work the next day and you kind of ask around. They go, well, yeah, they've got a permit, they're allowed to be there. They this or they that. And then you kind of go, well, then how do we get them off the street? So yeah, there's a whole process.

Jim Springfield:

Yeah, I thought we took care of that last year. So I'm going to follow up,

Melissa Wissel:

We'll have to circle back with you. What's in true fashion of we've got a new year starting, you're halfway through your term. Anything that you're setting your sights on for immediately, 2025, something you want to see in the next two years?

Jim Springfield:

Well, I think something I want to see and I guess we can talk about it now because we haven't talked about it and that is creating a park in Francis Field.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay.

Jim Springfield:

It was part of the original design when they redid the parking garage years and years ago. And I think that the Francis field has a good purpose and it is used well. But I think it could be multipurpose instead of just for events. There are a few people that use it now. They go out and throw the frisbee and there are some people who use it for their dogs. But I think we ought to purposefully try to design it as a useful space. We have the park, the playground there and that we could take all or part of that and make it into a park. And we already got some concepts on paper and we've already spoken to Gabe at the amphitheater and he still could work with our designs and still have his concerts.

Melissa Wissel:

Oh, with Sing Out Loud.

Jim Springfield:

With Sing Out Loud. And other events could be there as well. So that's something I'm going to pursue starting in January, February, bringing it up to the commission and see where we can go. Now, it's an expensive ordeal. It's not something we can do overnight.

Melissa Wissel:

Might have to run again.

Jim Springfield:

Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Start it here first. Let's see. He's going to start this idea. Will you be running? Let's just get right to it.

Jim Springfield:

No comment.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay.

Jim Springfield:

Yeah. That's a great politician thing to say,

Melissa Wissel:

Well, that's a big ask.

Jim Springfield:

It's a big ask. And we're trying to design it up in phases so that we can do phases over time and. But I think it'd be a really good addition to have a city park.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, that field just sits there otherwise, and you drive by it, you go, what's that for?

Jim Springfield:

Right.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, and I, you just brought up a good and interesting point about projects. And a lot of times things take time and when you try to throw it all out there at one time, it doesn't happen. But if you can put it in phases.

Jim Springfield:

Right.

Melissa Wissel:

And this is not the first time I'm hearing of this idea from an internal standpoint, but it may be the first time someone is hearing about this.

Jim Springfield:

Right.

Melissa Wissel:

So you may find you've sparked some interest and get some more emails.

Jim Springfield:

That's true. I hope so. The other thing is that that is prime property right now. Right now we trust the commissioners, we trust the city manager and the assistant managers. But one day somebody's going to offer an absorbent amount of money for that piece of property.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah.

Jim Springfield:

It'd be awful tempting.

Melissa Wissel:

Money talks.

Jim Springfield:

Money talks.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah.

Jim Springfield:

And so in bad times.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Jim Springfield:

That could be something that could happen. But if we already, if we develop it as something that we have, that makes it that much harder.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, and it becomes, it becomes a more valuable asset to us as a park and as, as that other. If you're just now tuning in, you're listening to The Break Room. I'm Melissa Wissel, communications director for the city of St. Augustine, and I'm speaking with Commissioner

Jim Springfield. Back in studio. We are halfway through commission Commissioner Springfield's tenure as city commissioner talking about projects and aspirations. That was just a little recap of other uses for the space on Francis Field. Any other visions that you have in the next couple years? 2 years, 10 years?

Jim Springfield:

No, we do have to, we still have to continue working on the mobility and the parking. That's, you know, obviously we're seeing that right now. Spanish street has turned out to be. I just walked up, parked in the garage and walked up Spanish Street. It's a great thing.

Melissa Wissel:

It's really pretty.

Jim Springfield:

It is pretty and it's useful. There's lots of people always on it when I walk it. And so I think we need to start looking at other options for us to do some walking. Make the city a walkable town. And biking and using alternative transportation is really critical to make it work, to make the city work.

Melissa Wissel:

The parking garage. I want to do a shout out to mobility right now, too, as well. The STAR circulator, you mentioned that you can park at the parking garage. Of course, if you're a St. John's county resident, you have your discounts, \$3. And you can use that star circulator to get yourself down to the other end of St. George street quickly and conveniently. And the parking garage is another great asset as well. What's your favorite thing about being a commissioner?

Jim Springfield:

Well, I guess it would be that I'm actually contributing something. I mean, we just did the painting in Spain, which maybe 50 years from now somebody will say, wow, that was a pretty big deal. And we were able to fund it and to send it and to get it appropriately placed

with no tax dollars, which was a good thing. And so it's there and it's something that I can put my name on and say that's what I helped get done.

Melissa Wissel:

So remind our listeners what that is because I'm not sure everybody knows. And I'm going to tie it into the question of what was your best experience, which I'm guessing has to do with Spain. So tell us about your experience this year with Spain.

Jim Springfield:

Right. We just celebrated the 100th year of the relationship between Aviles and St. Augustine as Sister cities. That's where Pedro Menendez was born. And so during the 450th anniversary, a painting was done in honor of the 450th by Lisa O'Neill. It was nine feet wide and six feet tall. And it was an oil painting of the landing and the first time they were on shore. And it hung in the public library here after the 450th. And I just had a vision to see it in Spain as a gift. And so the 100th anniversary was an appropriate time to have it.

Melissa Wissel:

It's a beautiful painting.

Jim Springfield:

It's a beautiful painting. And it's hanging in their city hall. And it's very appropriate.

Melissa Wissel:

And congratulations, too, because what you were just mentioning about the no tax dollars, you kind of ran your own personally. You wanted to hold that. You wanted to see that happen and you sought donations from businesses, community members.

Jim Springfield:

Right, right. And we had great donations and the sister city organization was the source of all the funds and they wrote the checks and so it turned out to be a non taxable. I mean it was a tax free donation. And the sister city ended up with a little bit of money left over for them to use for their purpose too. So it was a win win all the way around.

Melissa Wissel:

That's great. What do you see coming? We got just a few more minutes left. What else are you doing in your spare time? I know you play in a band.

Jim Springfield:

Yeah, we play in a band. We haven't played much lately, but yeah, Hogtown Creek band with my two brothers and my wife. And we have a good time with that. And Patty and I went to Maine recently and played up in Maine for three hours at a little restaurant. It was real fun. Yeah, that was fun.

Melissa Wissel:

And I think we're gonna get. I'm hoping gonna put you on the spot here, but I'm hoping we're gonna get you down for concerts in the Plaza.

Jim Springfield:

That would be great.

Melissa Wissel:

If not this year, next year we've talked about in 2026 is the 250th got all these anniversaries. But your genre of music plays right into that Americana.

Jim Springfield:

It does, it does. That'd be a real fun thing to do.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, we hope to see you down in the plaza. Concerts in the Plaza. Any other thoughts as we're closing into next year?

Jim Springfield:

No, I'll just tell everybody that if they're interested in getting involved with the city, you have a lot of ways to do that and particularly to use the website and to use the notes if you're not getting the notes on email to get them. Because they really do help me personally because I don't know everything that's going on unless I read it right. And information is the key to knowing what's going on and who to call when you have an issue.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, I appreciate that endorsement of news and notes.

Jim Springfield:

That's right.

Melissa Wissel:

The worst thing is when someone says, yeah, I get it, but I don't always read it.

Jim Springfield:

Yeah, right. Please read it. And on the same topic, the Chamber of Commerce is putting out a things to do in St. Augustine email. And it's really valuable too to tell you know what's going on.

Melissa Wissel:

Sign up for all those newsletters and then read them.

Jim Springfield:

and scan them to see what you're interested in.

Melissa Wissel:

That's right. Well, thank you for coming by. Happy end of this year and welcoming in the new year and we'll look forward to having you back.

Jim Springfield:

Yeah, I can't believe it's 2025.

Melissa Wissel:

I can't either. Thanks. Have a very merry holiday.

Jim Springfield:

You too.

Melissa Wissel:

If you missed part of this broadcast and want to go back and listen from the beginning or check out our past episodes, you can find all the information at citystaugradio.com we want to keep you informed about what's happening in and around the city and most importantly, that you hear it here from the people doing the work to make it happen every day. Follow us on social you'll find us on Facebook, Instagram and X, formerly known as Twitter, @citystaug until next time. Thanks for tuning in.

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.