

## The Break Room: Mayor Nancy Sikes-Kline, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025

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 happy New Year. I'm Melissa Wissel, communications director for the city of St. Augustine. We've been running a series of interviews with our city commissioners. And this week it's time to hear from Mayor Nancy Sikes-Kline, in her second term as mayor and kicking off her 16th year as a city commissioner. Mayor, welcome back to The Break Room.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Hello, hello, hello. Good morning.

Melissa Wissel:

Happy New Year.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Same to you. I'm looking forward to it.

Melissa Wissel:

Sixteen years.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Yes. Long time.

Melissa Wissel:

That's a long time. But your second term as mayor, your first term went well and you've got a few things to finish.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Yes, we sure do.

Melissa Wissel:

We can either start with where we are now, looking forward, or do you want to give us a little background? I always like to kind of remind folks who are new, we've got a lot of new residents. Who is our mayor? Where, where did you come from? How did you become our mayor? You started out on HARB in 1996.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

That's right. Well, I had done, yes. And I had done quite a bit of community service before that. I had been past president of the Junior Service League when the lighthouse was the project, the keeper's house and the lighthouse. And I had worked on Save Our Bridge. And I had done a couple other things, Cross and Sword board, things like that. And just really wanted to get more involved in the city and saw an opportunity, wanted to see more historic preservation focus and archaeology focus.

Melissa Wissel:

So I want to ask you a question, putting you on the spot a little bit only because it comes up every now and again. And I am glad the decision was made that it was. But there's an often, sometimes a little bit of debate. Why did we keep the bridge? You mentioned that you were

on the Save Our Bridge. It's so beautiful and historic in the two lanes. But if I recall, you guys were in a position and you said, we're gonna keep it the way that it is.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Right. And it is refurbished. So it's rehabilitated. But anything that the DOT proposed would have had to come under their new guidelines. And as we know, we see a lot of times these new guidelines are really change the look and the feel and the character. And so many of us were dedicated to keeping the old one because it's just elegantly beautiful.

Melissa Wissel:

It really is.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

I compared the arched spans to a pearl necklace. Just gorgeous. And we couldn't have gotten that with a new bridge. It would have just been more modern looking and sleek and things like that. Even despite the fact that they could have. They would try. They wanted to try to make it look historic, but it just wouldn't have that.

Melissa Wissel:

And it is so it is the picture of St. Augustine unless you could have really put it back the way that it is, which we did. So I just wanted to kind of put that on the record. So thank you for answering that question.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

And thank the community and thank the nation because we had a lot of input from at the national level. But also thank the DOT. The DOT was really enthusiastic and they embraced it and they did a great job. So beautiful.

Melissa Wissel:

Talking about the bridge. Every now and again people bring up the flags. Why can't we put flags back? So let's clear that one up too while we're talking about that. We can't put flags back up on the bridge because of the way that the piers were built. So we'll just put that right out there.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

That's right. There's no fixture to put the flag on. So if you know there. And that's. That's really the stumbling block. It's just won't work.

Melissa Wissel:

And it looks beautiful during nights of lights. So we'll have a little bit longer for that to enjoy that here through the rest of January. Anything else? So over your time and the organizations you've been, what are some of the biggest changes that you've seen?

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Well, you know, the city has a few more people. I think we're at 16,000. But what we've really seen is the impacts of the growth around us, surrounding us. So that has been really the thing that I hear people are most impacted by is. And of course more visitors. We're on the world stage now and we're on every list. I just saw a new list. Southern Living put us on the Christmas Town list. Just keeps happening.

Melissa Wissel:

I cringe when I see those lists.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

I think it just happens all by itself. I don't think even. And everybody's like, no, the TDC stop advertising. Of course, that's impossible because they're statutorily required to advertise. That was what the voters voted for and can't put that back in the box. But, yeah, I've seen a lot of changes. We're getting hit by hurricanes. That's a change.

Melissa Wissel:

We're getting better at reacting to them.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

We're growing in resiliency by the day. We're learning, learning. We see what's happened to some of these other communities and we've already been there and done that. And it's so, you know, when this last round of hurricanes came through, we were prepared. We said that we're prepared. We know the drill. Most of us and the newcomers that are here as old timers, we know how to help them get prepared. So I think we're in a good position. And that is definitely something different that we've seen. We see more sunny day flooding events, which is unfortunate, but of course, the city's tackling those. And I just want to say, you know, as I go to the Florida League of Cities and I hear these other cities that are trying to catch up where we started in 2016, elevating our lift stations so that they're out of the flood waters when the hurricanes come, these other cities are, you know, they're just now figuring that out. And we're already, for the most part, we've done all of our lift stations so that when we do get flooded, they don't turn off, you know, necessarily. I mean, they could. I can't guarantee them, but they're not going to get flooded and they're not going to lose power because they're flooded like they did in 2016 with Hurricane Matthew.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, and we do other things. One of the things that always intrigues me is how roundabouts are considered resilient transportation solutions. I heard that when we were talking about all the changes that are gonna happen out on the island. We get that fire station moved and that roundabout goes in. I know it's a safety feature, but at some point somebody said something like, well, but it's a resilient solution. I'm thinking, how is a roundabout? But it's because there's no electricity.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

There's no. There's really nothing. Once, you know, you just sweep the road and pretty much, you know, you're back in business. So it's really, it is a very resilient feature, and that's going to be a great change. I think that's going to be a really good change to make that curve safer and move that fire station. And I'm really appreciative that the city commission was all in favor of doing that.

Melissa Wissel:

That's going to be great. If you're just now tuning in, you are listening to The Break Room. I'm Melissa Wissel, Communications director for the city. We are interviewing Mayor Nancy Sikes-Kline as part of our series of interviews with our city commission in the new year. We do have a few minutes left. So what other things, past or present, do you feel like are things that are front of mind for you?

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Well, I would say I would put that in the category of things that get me excited. And what gets me excited is what we're calling, you know, refreshing. Looking at things with fresh eyes in the city to beautification, you could call it beautification. I don't really love that word, but. Because it doesn't really encompass all of what I'm thinking about. But I'd like to just look at the city with fresh eyes. And we have some landscaping areas that we could say maybe a little tired or a little worn. And we've got funding to do some new landscaping. US 1, we got some money from DOT to do some landscaping on US 1, which will be really nice. The signage, looking at signage. We have some derelict signs out there. They're working on. The staff is working on tracking those and getting them cleaned up. We need to do that every few years and take a look at the signs. Do they need new signs? You know, I've looked at some of those brown signs, the directional signs that the DOT does, and some of those need. They need to be replaced. And, you know, just things that we kind of take for granted. Our entrances, they're out north of town where San Marco and US 1 come together. Working on that area. There's a fountain out there, but that really needs to be freshened up. Looking at the outer gate

Melissa Wissel:

The one over on the island, looks really nice. It's got the new branded crest with the St. Augustine established. It's real clean, fresh. That looks very nice over on the island.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Then that's. That's going to be nice. And it needs lighting at night. It's dark at night, but it needs, you know, there are a few things that need. And it's like we work on these big things. and it's all the little things like that. They're not really little but they feel little sometimes

compared to the bigger issues that we deal with like you know, hurricanes and homelessness and the mobility challenges that we have.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah, the little bit. All that's going to get wrapped up. I think we're going to start the San Sebastian, the river at King Street. King street rehab is going to start this year so that we, we kind of punted that to this year with some other things. But I think it's going to hit. We're gonna have to hold on.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

It's gonna be challenging. It will be challenging. And the maintenance of traffic, routing of, you know, the detour is not wonderful, but it's something. It just has to be done. That bridge has. It's old and they already kicked it like you said, the can down the road another year. So it's gonna be difficult.

Melissa Wissel:

So we're asking for your patience now.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

We're asking for your steel yourselves.

Melissa Wissel:

Yes. Be ready. Yeah, we're all ready for it. But maybe some good will come out of it. I know that there's some redirection of some of the streets and closing down some of the traffic patterns that may give us the opportunity to put some changes into effect temporarily and see how they do for potential for permanent change.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Well, always try to keep an open mind about the things like that. So. But yeah, and then we have of course this was the year of the King street takeover. I guess we'll. It's been a while. It's not this year. Was it this year? It was last year.

Melissa Wissel:

It's coming. Yeah.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

But we did take over King street and so the DOT no longer, A lot of people don't realize this but San Marco, Anastasia Boulevard, US 1 and King Street, Avenida Menendez are all DOT roads. Until recently the city, we have taken over King street. So that is now in the care of the city and we're going to see some changes in the coming years there. I think they'll be really good changes and I think that was a well supported idea. We'll see some changes coming in the next couple years. At the foot of the Bridge of Lions.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah, that's going to be a while.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

There's a lot going on.

Melissa Wissel:

That's not going to happen next year.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

It's not going to happen next year. I think we need to get through the San Sebastian Bridge rehabilitation first. But you know, I know the fatigue that we get when we have these projects. It's extremely impactful to the city. Just because we're so tiny. I mean, we're like 10 square miles. You know, we're just a really tiny little postage stamp size of a city. People

get the misunderstand. They think because they have a city address, you know, that they live in the city, but it's really only, you know, 16,000..

Melissa Wissel:

Very small.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

It's a very small little area. So. But yeah, we've got. And then did we talk about mobility.

Melissa Wissel:

We got just about a minute or so left.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Okay. Well, you know, the mobility people are always concerned about traffic. And of course, you know, right now, because we're in Nights of Lights, it's. We're all being impacted. Sure, everyone's being impacted. But like I see people say, a lot of the locals say, well, I don't go downtown. Well, that's probably a good thing. You know. You know, the residents know how to navigate and this is not a good time to try to go downtown in the evenings. You know, during the week it's not so bad. January is gonna be much better. We know we're going to get to enjoy those lights. And if we do decide we want to go downtown, Don't bring the car.

Melissa Wissel:

Right?

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Don't bring the car.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

So, you know, just park it once and then take onto foot because it's. Don't try to drive through downtown

Melissa Wissel:

And you get your resident discount to get into the parking garage.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

That's right. Park on the edge. Or, you know, if you can find a way into town. Uber, if. If you can get an Uber. I see a lot more Ubers than I used to. And then of course, we have the shuttles. Which are working out very well.

Melissa Wissel:

Our circulator runs from the visitor information center also. So that's the other one. Now that we're back into January, the circulator will start up its hours again. 10 to 10, 10am to 10pm and so you can park at the parking garage and take that STAR circulator down to the south end of St. George Street. We did not talk about the updates at the VIC, but we are out of time.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Oh, okay.

Melissa Wissel:

So I'm gonna have to have you come back.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

That's right. We've got lots of good stuff coming along on that one. But we'll talk about maybe when we're a little further down the road we can talk about those things.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, happy New Year again and thanks for coming in to talk with us.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Thank you, Melissa. We appreciate 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.