

Assistant City Manager, Reuben Franklin, February 25, 2025

Transcript

Narrator:

You've tuned into another edition of The Break Room, a weekly conversation about how the city of Saint Augustine works from those who do the work every day, hosted by the city of Saint 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. I'm Melissa Wissel. Thanks for tuning in. This week I've invited Ruben Franklin to join us. He's the Assistant City Manager. Normally we're here for some type of mobility update or big construction projects, but I'm going to welcome Ruben back to tell us about a new program that he just announced at the City Commission meeting. Reuben.

Reuben Franklin:

Yes, well, thanks for having me, Melissa.

Melissa Wissel:

It's your big news. Drumroll.

Reuben Franklin:

And so, the big news is the city is starting a new program.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah.

Reuben Franklin:

It's called the Citizens Academy. It's done. Many cities and counties do it, and but this will be the first ever Citizens Academy for the City of Saint Augustine. Very excited about that and it's such a great project to get to work on and. Help facilitate so I'm looking forward to. Getting folks more engaged with the city. The whole point of the Academy. Of a Academy like this is so that citizens can meet government officials. Get a better understanding of how government works. And so, through that we're going to take multiple days, about five days. One Wednesday out of the month. And we're going to take you on a tour of our water treatment plant facility of our wastewater treatment plant facility, introduce you to all of our workers, city workers that are running the plants. Solid waste. Planning and building, and we're just going to go through the motions to. Get a better understanding of what the city is and who the people are that work at the city.

Melissa Wissel:

So, and maybe answer a lot of questions and maybe get some people to realize it's easy to sit and be an armchair quarterback for the jobs that we do.

Reuben Franklin:

Yeah, I'm very excited to. Work with so the. program's going to have about twenty participants. There'll be applications available on city website. And so, it's a first come, first serve basis. So, if anybody 's interested, you'll fill out, go on our website and fill out the application. We do have a couple of criteria; one is that you live in the city or own a business or property in the city. That you're over eighteen years old. And that you can commit to attending the classes. And then we're going to limit the class size to twenty and it will be on a. Come, first served basis. So, if you're listening to this and you're really excited about it, go get your application in, because we're going to take the first twenty applications as long as they meet the criteria that we mentioned. Before.

Melissa Wissel:

And it. Oh. Go ahead.

Reuben Franklin:

Oh, and then we're just envisioning that the classes are going to be from one to five PM. One Wednesday.

Melissa Wissel:

Not a huge, not a huge time commitment, but couple of hours on a Wednesday. And we have the our projected start date was or is.

Reuben Franklin:

The first class is scheduled for Wednesday, March 26th. That class would be getting to know your city. So, kind of a high-level overview Meet City administration, the city manager, assistant city managers, city attorney. We are going to have welcoming remarks by Mayor Nancy Sykes-Klein, and it's just going to be a very. Informal discussion take you on a tour of City Hall. Introduce you to the other directors and then have an open discussion of what you know. High level government 101 for. A small city like ours is getting to the budgeting. we do budgeting things of that nature. And then you'll leave. And that will kind of set the groundwork for the following Wednesdays to come.

Melissa Wissel:

You want to go ahead and give us that. we got a few minutes. We got a lot of time. Go ahead and go through. I think before we talk about the program, I do want to mention or just have you mention. We've got this model from Florida League of Cities. The county has done something similar. We have leadership St. John's so we're basically kind of taking those concepts and really bringing it home to the city.

Reuben Franklin:

Yeah, that's correct And so leadership. St. John's is run by the chamber here and I just recently went through that program, So I got a good bearings and understanding of what to do. So, when the city manager asked me to work on this program, I was excited because I really think it's going to be beneficial. To our citizens to learn about the government because we do a lot of great things, a lot of things that you don't see on a day-to-day basis. You can get upset about traffic congestion and things like that. Every city deals, every popular city deals with crowd congestion. But there, there's a lot of things going on behind the scenes. From creating clean drinking water to treating our wastewater so we're not impacting our environment, the whole gambit in between with planning for new developments and engineering. That you if you go through this Academy, you're going to have a much better understanding of what goes on. And I would find it hard to believe you walk Away not being impressed with what we do.

Melissa Wissel:

Right, absolutely. I would agree with that. Go ahead. If you go on down, give us a little bit of what people can look forward to learning. I Think it's a great line up.

Reuben Franklin:

Yeah. So, March twenty sixth would be the first class and that would be getting to know your city. Followed by April second examining safety and security in the city. So that's where we plan to do walking tours at the fire department, sit down with Chief Aviles and talk to him and meet the firefighters and maybe go on a ride in a fire truck through downtown. You'll get the first-hand experience to see those turning movements that they have to make. They're pretty incredible in navigating our narrow streets in our historic district. Followed by tour of the Police Department and sitting down with Chief Michaux. And we're going through the insurance and outs of daily operations of our Police Department. How we handle events, and then we'll round out that day with a topic of IT and cybersecurity. Once you leave that day, we'll come back April ninth. That's understanding the inner workings of utilities and public works. So that's where we're going to go to wastewater treatment plant, water treatment, Solid waste and really talk about all the ins and outs of public works, street maintenance, streets and grounds. Stormwater. April sixteen. It's exploring the nuts and bolts of planning and building and development. That's going to go through our planning and building department. And talk about our planning and zoning board our citizen boards.

Melissa Wissel:

Right, yes.

Reuben Franklin:

So, We have citizens that run boards that make decisions.

Melissa Wissel:

I'm hoping when people go through this Academy, they want to serve on a board

Reuben Franklin:

And that's one of the points of The Academy Is to get people interested in. Participating and participating on these citizen boards because that's one of the great things about the city is it's run by. Our citizens, and so we'll go through code enforcement, historic preservation, our community outreach and what we're doing with homelessness initiatives, engineering and development our capital improvements plans. our community redevelopment agency. Between Lincolnville and the historic area and our new area set up in West City, talk about resiliency as well. Then we're moving on to April twenty-third. That will be our last class day. That's discovering other city services. So, it's a walking tour. We're going to hit the downtown parking garage; the visitors Information Center use the star circulator to get around town. Go check out the municipal Marina and have a mobility and parking discussion so we can go over our policies and why we do what we do. And what that money and the revenues that we generate, what that goes to pay for city services. And then once you get through all that, we're going to have April twenty-eighth at the City Commission meeting a graduation.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah.

Reuben Franklin:

So, we'll call. Up and give you a certificate. And hopefully we have a successful first class.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah.

Reuben Franklin:

And then if this is successful and something the Commission wants to continue, we would see doing this every year in the springtime and just hopefully over the years we get people that are very interested, engaged, engaged and engaged and you might find yourself serving on the planning board or our historic Architecture Review Board or one of the many different boards that we have or committees.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah.

Reuben Franklin:

That we utilize to help guide and make decisions for the City of Saint Augustine.

Melissa Wissel:

I think I hope people take away from it. I did leadership St. John's, and you really do step away from those type programs. Enlightened where you have no idea and I can say even just working for the city, there's things that. I never knew where were in the day-to-day happening, so we encourage our listeners to go to the city website, citystaug.com. It's A home page story. Fill out your application. Get that submitted the first Twenty applicants that qualify will be. Accepted. We'll let you know if you're just not tuning. You are listening to The Break Room, and I have Reuben Franklin with us. We're just talking about a new citizens Academy. We've got just a few minutes left, Reuben. I do want to get your take what was your biggest take away from Nights of Lights? I know we've talked to the city manager a couple times and putting you a little bit on the spot. What was your biggest takeaway from Nights of Lights this year, having seen it over the years operating the shuttles and what are you looking forward to in terms of the next steps?

Reuben Franklin:

Well, my first take away was it was wildly popular. That lots of people came to the city and I think we all saw the effects of that from, you know, the businesses having a good year, but also our residents being, you know, caught up in the crowds and traffic congestion, so.

Melissa Wissel:

Fatigued. Yeah, yeah.

Reuben Franklin:

Really, when you look at the numbers, we kind of rebounded from COVID twenty nineteen was a really busy year and then COVID hit and then we kind of had suppressed numbers. Up until last year and then we saw the numbers rival and just surpassed what we had in 2019. And so, we have to do a better job of the crowd. It's a big event, it's popular and so I think the opportunity here is that everybody saw that and when everybody's on. Same page.

Melissa Wissel:

And as long it goes on long, it's not just a week or a weekend.

Reuben Franklin:

And so that's the hard part about thinking of it as an event, because it is so long. So, we got to start small and target the really busiest days and we can do a better job of crowd management, traffic control, and really focusing on satellite parking. You know, one of the things that we heard was, you know, the shuttles are caught up in the same traffic. Everybody else is. So, we're going to start working on getting managed lanes. When people do use our shuttles, they can get into town. Easier and then you just really have to focus on not letting cars go really internal into that historic down, you know, town plan area, which is kind of Cathedral, Cordova Street, the Bayfront and Orange Street, all those streets inside of that.

Melissa Wissel:

All the looky-loos, no looky-loos

Reuben Franklin:

And then focus on keeping traffic moving as. So, the good thing is that when everybody recognizes the problem, then we can get we can implement things that are productive. So that's what I'm looking forward to. Is going into next Nights of Lights with a better plan in place and then seeing how that works and then tweaking that plan.

Melissa Wissel:

Fourth of July.

Reuben Franklin:

Fourth of July. Yeah, it's going to be a first big event that we've got some ideas that the city manager talked about with new restrooms, bathrooms, closing down some streets to traffic to help facilitate better traffic circulation.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah, get those pedestrians moving and keep everybody happy. It'll be interesting to see, of course. Fourth of July is a one-day event and it's hot. Lot of different lot of different. Components I guess you could say it's just a little bit different, but I'm looking forward to seeing how we do.

Reuben Franklin:

Yes, yes, me too. And Fourth of July is a little different than Nights of Lights. We're going to learn from it and adjust accordingly.

Melissa Wissel:

Excellent. Well, I'm excited about the Citizens Academy. Good Luck with that. We'll have you back to hear how it's going or at the very least I know we'll have you back after the fact. With raving reviews, I'm sure.

Reuben Franklin:

I'm looking forward to it. It's very exciting and it's one of those projects or creating a program that I hope looking back has a long-lasting impact and it's one of the reasons I love coming to work for the City of Saint Augustine. Is I get to work on fun projects like this.

Melissa Wissel:

Great. It's a great outreach opportunity to bring in our Residents to see how we do things and all that good stuff. Thanks for coming down.

Reuben Franklin:

No problem. Thanks for having me.

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 Saint Augustine. Join us each week as the Cities 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.