

Code Enforcement Manager, Barry Fox, March 11, 2025

Transcript

Narrator:

You've tuned in to 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. 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. Thank you for tuning in. I'm Melissa Wissel, Communications Director for the city of Saint Augustine. Barry Fox, the city's Code Enforcement Manager, is back in studio. Is also responsible for our homeless outreach specialist. He's sort of our unofficial homeless outreach manager. Welcome back.

Barry Fox:

Thank you for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

You've been doing homelessness initiatives and work for a long time since your time as police chief.

Barry Fox:

So, I started it before that. I did a lot. I started a lot with David Shore and then Lauren Luders and then Steve Fricke. I worked with Steve closely. All the efforts. Before this year. Or I'm sorry, all the efforts before me taking this role with City had for homelessness had come through the Police Department and in 2022 2023. We shifted it over to the civilian side because the efforts were coming to the Police Department because we were out there

twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. There are so many service providers now within the county that the Police Department and the city doesn't need a twenty-four hour.

Melissa Wissel:

Police intervention.

Barry Fox:

The twenty-four-hour intervention type thing. So, we've shifted it over to over to a civilian side under me because I was familiar with it, and we do it now with one person. So, with Jessica Rojas, have you met her?

Melissa Wissel:

I have not. I wouldn't know her if she walked into my office to be honest with you.

Barry Fox:

Really. Well, we have to bring her in here.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah, I'd love to meet her. Yeah, I'd love to. Yeah.

Barry Fox:

So, her job is really as a specialist is. When I first created the homeless outreach teams, hot teams or whatever. There was two officers.

Melissa Wissel:

And that was in the police department.

Barry Fox:

And that was at the Police department and their job was to work with the homeless, identify their needs, try to connect them, get them services, Or connect them with family, things like that. So now Jessicas role is kind of like that. We don't really provide a service as a homeless outreach specialist. What their job is to understand and know all the different service providers within the Community because we don't want to duplicate services. It's Not what we want to do. And to know when she comes in to go out and meet homeless people and continue to talk with them and meet with them and make sure that, you know, if they need something that it can be met and they're all, she's always constantly pushing them towards A housing program of some sort, but her job is to know what are current service providers. Our current service providers, what they offer and what best fits them so that she can make referrals to those.

Melissa Wissel:

To the to the population of our homeless.

Barry Fox:

So, it's not like we're providing a particular service. What the service we provide is Jessica's basically a walking knowledge of all the different service providers, so that when she makes contact with a homeless individual that is in need of something. She understands the demographics, the you know, the race, sex, you know, and all of the individual and where that individual could most likely find the services that they are in need of to work towards becoming sheltered so and she makes those referrals. She'll drive them. She'll take them to get their benefits if they need them. Things like that.

Melissa Wissel:

So really, it's also I think sometimes there's this, you know, we've talked about ending homelessness, fixing homelessness. It's going to always be there. But what we're trying to do is provide the individual. To say I've just met you. You're homeless. Do you need something. How can I help? Because not everybody wants to be homeless.

Barry Fox:

Not everybody wants to be homeless.

Melissa Wissel:

But not everybody wants the help. That's OK, too.

Barry Fox:

Right, exactly.

Melissa Wissel:

But, but now what we've done is put ourselves in a position to help that person who says I need something, or I want help. We're a facilitator, if you will.

Barry Fox:

Right. And well, the biggest combatant for homelessness is number one, you got to have the housing units. You got to have the inventory on the shelf, you know the second one is mental health and the third is to keeping people keeping people sheltered. So, you know the concentration, the concentration for us would be if someone was to come to Jessica that are on the border of losing their home. She would work hard to try to connect them with services in the community that could keep them sheltered so that. They don't.

Melissa Wissel:

Become homeless.

Barry Fox:

Become homeless. You know, that's the first step. That's the easy one for a lot of low intervention.

Melissa Wissel:

Low intervention.

Barry Fox:

The second one is the housing market, and everybody knows the struggles there. We don't have to get involved in that, but it's a real struggle in Saint John's County.

Melissa Wissel:

But there is a response out there.

Barry Fox:

There is.

Melissa Wissel:

We. We are seeing housing come. We're seeing the organizations that are facilitating that.

Barry Fox:

There's, there's a lot of good work being done.

Melissa Wissel:

The veterans are being helped.

Barry Fox:

Yep, a lot of good work being done. I think all aspects are being met. Just that there's just it's just, there's a lot of work to do, yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Now it's. It's placing it. It's putting it into use, putting it, putting it into practice.

Speaker

Right, yeah.

Barry Fox:

And then the mental health aspect. You know, that's really hard

Melissa Wissel:

It's hard. Yeah, and.

Barry Fox:

That's the hard one, you know. The hard one. Yeah, I get that.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah, I would imagine the first thing is identifying it and maybe getting the person to recognize it and address it, and then you can get on that path.

Barry Fox:

Yeah, you know, dealing with the mental health aspect is absolutely number one, recognizing it number two, saying I need some help. And number three, steadily getting that help and. What's the term? I want to say. A regimented, treatment is not the structure is not part of a homeless persons everyday life.

Melissa Wissel:

OK.

Melissa Wissel:

Right, right.

Barry Fox:

Struggling with, you know, mental health issues. So, you know you're always dealing with trying to get that structure of when to go to counseling, when to get your meds, when who's keeping your meds. And we're getting better with that because one of the bigger things. Is some people just need their meds, but as a homeless person they can't get the meds the don't know where to keep the meds they. So, you know, that's something that we have to as a as a society have to kind of start dealing with is how are we going to do that.

Melissa Wissel:

Really connecting those dots.

Barry Fox:

Yeah. How are we going to provide those services that provide those? And there are places out there, there are there, Jessica is currently transporting an individual twice a week to his mental health counselor so that he can get his meds, and his mental capacity is clearing, and he is really starting to make a lot of progress, but he's still homeless. So, you know, he's got to get to the point where he can be possibly employed or get clear enough and stable enough that he can apply for the benefits that he needs so that he can move into a shelter.

Melissa Wissel:

Right, right.

Barry Fox:

Yeah, you know, we got Carlos sheltered at one time. And everybody knows Carlos. He was. He got sheltered at one time and the Police Department, we gave him the men and women of Police Department gave him all kinds of furnishings for his little apartment.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah.

Barry Fox:

It was up in Jacksonville and Police Department did a really good time with him and he got on his medication. And then he cleared up. And then he realized. He was in kind of like a facility and he didn't like that.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Barry Fox:

So, he walked away, and by the time he walked away and got back to Saint Augustine. He was back in his state.

Melissa Wissel:

Right, right, right.

Barry Fox:

And everybody loves Carlos. Everybody knows Carlos. And but, but that's kind of the vicious circle that that we deal with on mental health aspect of it so.

Melissa Wissel:

If you're just now tuning in, you're listening to The Break Room. I'm Melissa Wissel, Communications Director for the city of Saint Augustine. Barry Fox is in studio with us. He is our Code Enforcement Manager, but we're talking about a more important program that Barry's in charge of overseeing. Our homeless outreach specialist. He's unofficially our homeless outreach manager. But really, bury what I want to talk about. Great. Great discussion of kind of teeing up the needs and what we really want to talk about too here today is we are getting so close to that facility to the drop-in center. Let's talk about it again.

Barry Fox:

Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

We don't have a date yet. We're close. We're close.

Barry Fox:

Yeah. So, the facility, the Dining with Dignity facility, has come along well. And what we did was we built a facility for Dining with Dignity, put a little more dignity into dining. It is a little a little further away, but you know, some people seem to be concerned about that, but I'm not. Not really concerned about that because what I see going on at the current facility. Location. OK. Is that a lot of people driving and bike in?

Melissa Wissel:

OK.

Barry Fox:

So, I really don't think that there will obviously be a falloff in the beginning, but I really don't think it's going to be a hurdle that's going to last for very long. People Are in need, and they'll go there, but the services that we will offer in addition to the Dining with Dignity will be laundry and showers. Before Dining with Dignity does their thing, and in the evening. So,

the plan was to build a structure, and we'd start off with Dining with Dignity, and then we would do because there was some civil work we had to do because this piece of property had never been. It had always been on septic, and it's never been hooked to city services. And all. So, I needed to. We needed to bring it over to city services. Also, there was some civil work that needed to be done. So, the plan was to build the structure, do the Dining with Dignity because it's single service. You know, stuff goes in the garbage. It does. No washing dishes or anything. And you know the city leaders wanted. No lets you know, let's get it all done. So, I don't. you know, I don't talk about money.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Barry Fox:

Just tell me what you Want me to do and when and I was told get it done.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Barry Fox:

But you know, I'm getting it done.

Melissa Wissel:

The fence is up the building we're seeing starting to peak up behind that fence.

Barry Fox:

So, the fence is up, the building is up, the building is up. Yeah, the building is up now. We're doing the you know, we're doing the paint, the flooring, the showers, the toilets and all.

Melissa Wissel:

Is it a closed in structure?

Barry Fox:

One part of it is one third of it is in the backside that you can't see. Is closed in concrete block and it's got. Two ADA compliant walk-in shower facilities with toilets and sinks and then it will have two washers and dryers. And then it'll have, you know, the air handler and water heater, and then the other side will be like a staff bathroom for Dining with Dignity staff and our staff because Jessica will move there, and she'll start working programs or working her program out there.

Melissa Wissel:

So, if folks are wondering where and what we're talking about, it's the homeless day center. And it is behind the Winn-Dixie that's at the corner of us-1 and 207.

Barry Fox:

Behind Winn-Dixie at US-1 and 207

Melissa Wissel:

And it used to be a furniture store or something like that. So that building ultimately is going to get. We're not sure, but there will be facility for some of these services we're talking about and we've only we've got about two, three minutes left. I want to make sure we talk about that a little bit, but the first thing is the Dining with Dignity.

Barry Fox:

Showers and Laundry.

Melissa Wissel:

And then ultimately the vision.

Barry Fox:

Ultimately, the vision is we build a facility. For Our current service providers, we will not. The city will not be creating duplicate services. We will be building a structure for our current service providers that are within Saint John's County to occupy. To deliver services to the homeless.

Melissa Wissel:

Rotating, we don't know yet.

Barry Fox:

They. Yeah, they can rotate. That's all still to be worked out. The vision is still coming together. But the, you know, the vision is, is that a that a service provider moves in there and runs the programs and with other service providers and they gives them there, there'll be space for them to have offices and you know I think we want to try to get a facility in there for Wildflower Clinics so they can make a day or two. So that.

Melissa Wissel:

Talk about some of those services. We keep saying services. I just want to make sure folks realize that the gamut that it runs.

Barry Fox:

Well, you know, you got to, you got The Wildflower Clinic. You got Continuum of Care. You Got Saint Francis House, You got Home Again St. Johns. You got Alpha Omega You got the veterans. The epic behavior will be there when I talk to them, They plan on trying to have a spot there so there's so many different service providers, but they're all spread out across the county and what we're looking for is we're looking to bring them here. And provide the day services that you know where the homeless can shower. They can eat, they can do some laundry, get some laundry done, and at the meantime, then walk across the campus and be able to go in and maybe get some.

Melissa Wissel:

Have that counseling appointment.

Barry Fox:

Counseling have that counseling. Wildflower Clinics there. You know, get some, you know. Things Like that. Occasionally bring in some services such as. You know from the tech center, such as hair, right? For haircuts, getting ready for job interviews, things like that? Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah. And mailboxes.

Barry Fox:

So, mailboxes are huge.

Melissa Wissel:

That's huge.

Barry Fox:

I'm. So that's huge. Mailboxes are huge only because. You cannot get your benefits if you have benefits coming to you if you don't have.

Melissa Wissel:

And nobody you don't think about that. You wouldn't.

Barry Fox:

A possible you don't think about that.

Melissa Wissel:

Wouldn't think about that.

Barry Fox:

The services don't provide to general. In Saint Augustine. That just doesn't happen. So that's still, I still got to tweak that to make sure that we're on good ground there in reference to that. But it'll be a box system. And but we'll work it out. It'll be. It'll be. It will get worked out.

Melissa Wissel:

And the. Dollar question sixty-thousand-dollar question do we have a date yet of when we're going to start serving food?

Barry Fox:

We don't. Because I thought I.

Melissa Wissel:

OK, close, close.

Barry Fox:

I thought did. But then you know, they came back. Said let's get it all done.

Melissa Wissel:

OK.

Barry Fox:

It was supposed to be phased.

Melissa Wissel:

OK, right.

Barry Fox:

And I've got to up till recently it was going to be phase. So now it's just like, let's get it all done. So, I like it. I appreciate the city 's commitment to let's get it all done. Then let's get it all done.

Melissa Wissel:

Is done and open. Let's stop, yeah.

Barry Fox:

That's great. Yeah. And so that changes things a little bit, but everybody is, you know, really the contractor and everybody involved really kind of hit the ground running with this TBL couldn't be greater and. And they're just hitting the ground running and yeah, they're doing great work so.

Melissa Wissel:

It's great work. OK. Ballpark me, June, October before the end of the year.

Barry Fox:

Let's so, Mister Bertram said Let's shoot for spring. So, I think that's what that's gonna give us about two more months left.

Melissa Wissel:

OK.

Barry Fox:

I got two more months.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah.

Barry Fox:

That's I say we're. Alright, that's and that's what we're. We're working through some permits for the civil services now and everybody 's on board now. Moving forward with that. So, I'm hoping we can make it. Because it'd be nice to get it done in spring.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, we'll have you back when it the next time you come in here, it will be open. I won't have you back until it's open.

Barry Fox:

Oh, that's fantastic.

Melissa Wissel:

We've been talking about this a long time. It's. It's great to see. So, congratulations on the job well done getting this done.

Barry Fox:

Well, a lot of people involved so.

Melissa Wissel:

And you and Jessica and the work that you guys are doing.

Barry Fox:

I will arrange for Jessica to come see you one day.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah, that would be awesome.

Barry Fox:

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 Saint 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.