

Sustainability Specialist, Liz Johnson, April 1, 2025

Transcript

Narrator:

You tuned into 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. This week, I'm sharing The Break Room with Liz Johnson, our very own Sustainability Specialist. It's that time of year where we like to engage our residents and the community about Earth Week and share all the events planned for that Liz. Welcome back to The Break Room.

Liz Johnson:

Thanks for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

You give me a little backstory on your coming to the job to the City. I know it's not really what we talked about, but I want folks to hear how did we get you?

Liz Johnson:

About a little over a year ago, I was hired and I started out as an intern for the City as Sustainability Intern with one other person, Ingrid. And we interned for about six months and then this full-time position opened and I applied and got the job.

Melissa Wissel:

Excellent. And give us a little backstory. Now folks go sustainability specialist. What is that? Why do we need that? Not that I'm trying to get you to defend your job. But it's an important role.

Liz Johnson:

It is. Yeah, it's an important role. And I think that the City just kind of grew into needing it because we had the Tree Canopy Program going. We had the compost program going and then it was somebody needed to manage all that and all the recycling events too. So, I think that the City just grew into it

Melissa Wissel:

And so, sustainability is all about, is it fair to say that sustainability is sort of all of our green initiatives?

Liz Johnson:

Yeah, all our green initiatives and then how it interacts with the community and our economy and all of that.

Melissa Wissel:

Which brings us into Earth Month, Earth Week. We've got, or we also call it Environmental Awareness Week. Tell us about that. We're kind of doing some stuff on social throughout the month but then we focus on Earth Environmental Awareness Week. Give us the rundown on that.

Liz Johnson:

So we have Environmental Awareness Week running from April 21st to April 27th. On Tuesday, the 22nd, we have Fish Island Walking Tour with JB Miller who is the Land Management Coordinator. And just walking through Fish Island with JB Miller is awesome

because he knows everything about the trees, the plants, everything about the birds, the history. He's just he's amazing.

Melissa Wissel:

yeah, he's amazing. So, if um, so Fish Island is the property over by the 312 bridge that the city now is managed, we own it, we own part of it. We also have partnership with the state, so we manage the property. How do I get signed up?

Liz Johnson:

So, we'll have an EventBrite that opens on April 1st. And the link will be on the website.

Melissa Wissel:

OK.

Liz Johnson:

There's 15 spots so they filled out pretty quickly last year. If you're interested in going, get your spot.

Melissa Wissel:

Get your spot quick.

Liz Johnson:

We are encouraging you to wear walking shoes and sunscreen, maybe some bug spray. And then maybe bring some binoculars in case you want to see.

Melissa Wissel:

What time of day is it?

Liz Johnson:

It's from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Melissa Wissel:

So hopefully let's see that Tuesday, April 22nd could be warmer by then, could be rainy. If it's muggy, probably definitely wants a bug spray.

Liz Johnson:

Yeah. Long sleeves.

Melissa Wissel:

Maybe like a long sleeve over shirt kind of thing, yeah. Yeah, JB 's a walking encyclopedia.

Liz Johnson:

Last year when we were doing it, he, somebody, looked at me and they were like, who is this guy?

Melissa Wissel:

He's amazing. Yeah, yeah. And he's ours. Yep. Yeah, he comes and works with. So, what else have we got going on for Earth week?

Liz Johnson:

So then Wednesday, April 23rd, we are doing a storm drain marking activity for the Fullerwood community. This is kind of just an important reminder for the Community to remember. Rain goes down the storm drain. And understand the city 's part in the storm water system.

Melissa Wissel:

Do I sign up for that?

Liz Johnson:

This is not a sign up, but if you're interested in doing this as your community or if you have like a group that wants to do it, then you can reach out to me, and we can schedule a time and figure out a place to do the marking.

Melissa Wissel:

So, this is in Fullerwood. What other neighborhoods have you done this? I'm kind of throwing you on the spot with that?

Liz Johnson:

We've done around Flagler in and round city hall with Flagler students.
And then we've also done those are the only ones that I've been here for.

Melissa Wissel:

And it's so when you're talking about community organizations, it doesn't necessarily have to be if I live in Davis shores, we're not necessarily going to put a medallion in Davis shores, although we could.

Liz Johnson:

Right.

Melissa Wissel:

But it's if you want to learn about why we do this and then come and participate. Is it something that's just ongoing all the time anyway, regardless of whether you've got people to come and help you?

Liz Johnson:

Yeah, we're so part of the permit that we hold is engaging with the community and having the community come and mark the storm drains with us. Yes, but this is an opportunity that can happen at any time throughout the year. Just reach out and we can schedule a day.

Melissa Wissel:

Doesn't have to be Earth week or environmental awareness.

Liz Johnson:

Get a group right. Yep.

Melissa Wissel:

And remind me one more time. What is the importance of the medallion? What is it? Does it say storm drain on it? I know I've seen one in your office.

Liz Johnson:

Yeah, it's. It's a little red medallion and I think it says only rain down the storm drain or only storm water leads to local waterway. And it just reminds people that any of the trash or any of the fertilizer or anything that they're using is going into the local waterway if it's going down the storm drain.

Melissa Wissel:

So, don't hose your driveway off with your soap right, and don't use your pesticides and then run it off into the street, right? But keep them open. Them clear.

Liz Johnson:

Keep them clear of debris. Yeah. No leaves. Sticks. Make sure rain can get down there.

Melissa Wissel:

Only rain. Yep. OK, only rain down the drain. And then moving on. Well, if you're just now tuning in, you're listening to The Break Room. Melissa Wissel, Communications Director for the city, and Liz Johnson is here, she is our sustainability specialist. We're talking about activities for environmental Awareness Week, which is part of our Earth month recognition. The week of April 22nd through the 26th, and we're up to Thursday, April 24th. This is a good one, yeah.

Liz Johnson:

So April 24th. We have a resiliency walking tour. With Jessica Beach, our Utilities.

Melissa Wissel:

She's our Chief Resilience Officer, yeah.

Liz Johnson:

Chief Resilience Officer and Deputy Director of Utilities and Public Works and she will be doing a tour. You can also sign up through Eventbrite.

Melissa Wissel:

This one 's an Eventbrite. Do you know how many spots?

Liz Johnson:

I think there's ten. It's hard when it gets over ten because it's through downtown area and then she'll just point out some projects that we have going on through the city, how they're being funded, projects that have already been done through the city in terms of resiliency. And it's pretty interesting, she. At the high watermark. From hurricane Matthew.

Melissa Wissel:

Right on the on the Bay front. Yep.

Liz Johnson:

So Yep, and those fill up quickly too.

Melissa Wissel:

It's a cool tour.

Liz Johnson:

Make sure you sign up.

Melissa Wissel:

Is that something I'm gonna. I'm gonna put you on the spot a little 'cause. I don't know if this is if this is a yes or no. May not know. Does Jessica do these? Like yours with the storm drain marking, could a Neighborhood Association ask for one?

Liz Johnson:

I don't know if a Neighborhood Association has ever asked for one. She does do them with groups like I know if we have consultants or if we have.

Melissa Wissel:

DOT comes through, yeah.

Liz Johnson:

Right. She will do this tour with them, but last year we opened it up to the public so they could kind of see what the projects are and everything 'cause. They are really interesting, and you have no idea what's going on until someone talks about it and. It was popular.

Melissa Wissel:

So, I think people will be interested in.

Liz Johnson:

Right.

Melissa Wissel:

We also just started just a quick aside. I'm excited about these tours because it feels like it's also kind of a nice parallel. We've just started the Citizens Academy, so. All of this engagement with our community is a real shift for us. It's really exciting that you're part of it too, OK? Thursday Resilience Walking tour now on to Friday. Big day.

Liz Johnson:

Yes, Friday is a big day, April 25th. We are doing our Earth Day recycle event. This is at 601 Riberia Street. Where you can recycle your used cooking oil. Do document shredding. We do have a limit its three boxes per household, and then any old or used electronics. You can recycle also. This is a really popular event. Our last event we had 252 residents come.

Melissa Wissel:

Oh my gosh, that's a lot.

Liz Johnson:

Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

Was that the highest one?

Liz Johnson:

I think it was.

Melissa Wissel:

I think they keep like every year they seem to get bigger and bigger.

Liz Johnson:

Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay, so you heard it here 252. Let's get it more than 252.

Liz Johnson:

And. This is a a popular event, especially after tax season, and so the shred truck has filled up before, so make sure you get there early it's from nine a.m. to one p.m. and.

Melissa Wissel:

That's a drive through.

Liz Johnson:

Drive through you don't even have to get out of your car.

Melissa Wissel:

Put it in the trunk, put it in the back seat. Drive through. Do you know if we're going to have leaf bags? I think I put you on the spot about that last year.

Liz Johnson:

Yes, we will have lawn leaf bags.

Melissa Wissel:

For pickup, so do those run out same thing?

Liz Johnson:

Right. They do. Yep

Melissa Wissel:

So, get there early for your shredding and then pick up your leaf bags so that you don't blow your leaves into the drain. Hey, there's like a pattern here. Yes, good job. You came up. That all on your own. Good for you. That's awesome. OK, but not to be ending on Friday, we go into Saturday with one more.

Liz Johnson:

Yep, into Saturday. We're doing one more Fish Island walking tour for the people that maybe work during the week and can't attend the weekday one. Um, it's with JB Miller. Fifteen spots and you can sign up through the Eventbrite. Same time also.

Melissa Wissel:

What's your favorite part of this week in terms of like of these events? Do you have a favorite? Is there any particular thing that you do that's like your favorite?

Liz Johnson:

I love putting it all together and engaging with everyone.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah.

Liz Johnson:

And then once it's all put together and it's in full operation, I love to see it all play out.

Melissa Wissel:

I'm gonna bring up something that we're not doing this year just because you've tried, yes. And not to a great response, which is unfortunate, but I do want to mention that we have tried to. What did you call it?

Liz Johnson:

A sustainability workshop.

Melissa Wissel:

A sustainability workshop, where we had explain what it was. I know we're not doing it, but I just want the community to realize that, you know, there's other things that can be done. But if we don't get the kind of response, we need we move on as the things that do work.

Liz Johnson:

Right. So, we're doing something similar with a lot of local schools that are not open to the public. But we had tables where we had solid waste recycling, compost, anything about native planting in monarchs. We had a table with water conservation, stormwater, fog, fat, soils, and grease, illicit discharges. And then we did a big presentation. People could do early sign up for compost bin. There was a lot of different things. We did it the last two years and last two years we did not have the turnout that for the energy that we put into it.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, it's a lot. I think on a one-on-one basis though I think that these activities starting Tuesday, just to recap, Tuesday is a walking tour with JB Miller from 10 to 12. That's also, is it the same time on Saturday, 10 to 12?

Liz Johnson:

Same time.

Melissa Wissel:

So, Tuesday, the 22nd, a walking tour with JB Wednesday is storm drain marking not necessarily a sign up correct?

Liz Johnson:

No, you don't need to sign up. It's just. The Fullerwood community.

Melissa Wissel:

OK Fullerwood community. So, the fuller wood folks are gonna get that. If this is something that sounds interesting to you, this all of this information will be on the website and then Thursday is a resilience walking tour. That's with Jessica. That will have a sign up. Just load up your car and come on down between nine and one and remind me again, where is it?
601

Liz Johnson:

601 Riberia just at the end of Riberia near the wastewater treatment plant, a little further down than the Galimore.

Melissa Wissel:

OK. And there'll be signs that morning and you just drive through and drive on out and be on your way. And then again on Saturday, the 26th. Another. Another sign-up opportunity to have a walking tour with JB Miller of Fish Island and if you haven't been to Fish Island, have you been?

Liz Johnson:

Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah, it's beautiful. They've really done a tremendous job. We just did sort of a ribbon cutting with that final. In holding peace? So, did you make it?

Liz Johnson:

No, no. Yeah, it seemed to be beautiful though.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah, there was a lot of people. Were very pleased. It's a little bit of a hike to get in there, but that's the whole point, right of getting out there.

Liz Johnson:

Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, you've got a lot of other things going on that we didn't even get to. Other sustainability projects other outreach. So, will you come back and talk to us?

Liz Johnson:

Sure, of course.

Melissa Wissel:

Ah. Well, I think that's a wrap.

Liz Johnson:

Great. Great talking to you. Thank you.

Melissa Wissel:

Thanks for coming. Glad to have you. Thanks for coming in. You can now find us on your favorite podcasting app. Look for us on Spotify, Apple Podcast, Spreaker and more if you missed part of this broadcast and others check out a listing of all of that at CityStAugRadio.com. We want to keep you informed about what's happening in and around the city and that you hear it here from the people doing the work to make it happen every day. Follow us on social you can find us on Facebook, Instagram, and X, at 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 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.