

Julie Courtney, Historic Preservation Officer, April 29, 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, Communications Director for the City of Saint Augustine. Thanks for listening. It's historic preservation month and time to get an update from Julie Courtney, the City's Historic Preservation Officer. We recently recognized the Sisters of Saint Joseph for their monumental rehabilitation of Saint Benedict, the Moor Schoolhouse in Lincolnton. I want to remind folks about permitting, not just for repairs or remodeling, but demolition or partial demolition. We've got grant projects and of course our upcoming historic Window Workshop as part of the History Festival. Julie, welcome back. Wanted to tie all of that up. You got a lot going on. Always seem to. Yeah. Historic city. So that's your job.

Julie Courtney:

Thanks for having me. There's lots going on. We have a five person staff in our historic preservation division. Three archaeology staff, people and then myself, and our historic preservation planner.

Melissa Wissel:

So the tree archaeologists kind of just do that, archaeology digging. So if you look at you and your staff at City Hall, there's two of you.

Julie Courtney:

There's two of us archaeology has so much to do on the site, you know, in the field. I know you've had doctor Andrea White recently.

Melissa Wissel:

Yes.

Julie Courtney:

But they have so much to do once they get all of those artifacts back to the lab. So much more work has to happen.

Melissa Wissel:

She does not come up to City Hall much.

Julie Courtney:

No, we don't see her because they're always in the field.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah. Yes, they're all playing. I think they're playing in the dirt.

Julie Courtney:

You know, I think it's hard work. They would probably one of the hardest jobs, I think being out in all the different conditions and.

Melissa Wissel:

Sure, yes. Well, let's talk about what you guys have been working on. Now, now be somewhere. Tell me. Let's start off with the Sisters of Saint Joseph. They came to our Commission meeting. They're going to be on The Break Room, actually coming up, but. Tell us about that schoolhouse. The history of it, that renovation. It really was a is it considered a renovation?

Julie Courtney:

Yes. I mean, really a rehabilitation? I mean they the this storing some of the parts and restoration of some of those parts of the building, but it was built in the late eighteen hundreds and the Sisters of Saint Joseph were basically there from that time forward on teaching black students. It was pretty remarkable history and the Sixties. You know, the state kind of forced the. Segregation to end at that point and so the school kind of sat vacant for many, many years, and people will remember that and Lincolnville just kind of as an eyesore. It was almost a ruinous, you know, condition and building. Yes. So we are so thrilled to see that.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah, it was. It looked terrible.

Julie Courtney:

They stepped up to really work with restoring and rehabilitating the building. Us builders was in charge. I might had the opportunity to look. Umm. From the building up, you know you know upwards, there was no roof over many. I have parts of the building. John Benoit took us through before the project really began. So it's just been a remarkable one transformation and they, you know, they breathed new life into it and it's now that neighborhood.

Melissa Wissel:

That that was the word I was saying, yes.

Julie Courtney:

And they're a Community Center.

Melissa Wissel:

And there, like I said, we're going to have them on to talk about the work that they're doing, but it really is quite a beautiful. Landmark really. And is it on the register?

Julie Courtney:

Yes. Is it one of the contributing buildings to the National Register District for Lincolnville.

Melissa Wissel:

And they were able to get. Funding and they worked with the diocese.

Julie Courtney:

Yes, and the city, the savings and the Lincolnville CRA was able to help a lot with funding as well.

Melissa Wissel:

So we were involved as well, you know, assuming

Julie Courtney:

Yes, it takes a lot of people to do these big projects.

Melissa Wissel:

Switching gears a little bit, talking about preservation and doing projects, let's talk about permitting. You know it's, I know it's it's for the bane of your existence permitting. We've got

not just. Oh, I want to repair my patio or I want to fix my windows. That's a whole. And I know that's a bad example because that's a whole other discussion and demolitions.

Julie Courtney:

Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

Tell me. Tell me the things that you want our listeners to be sure to be aware of and be tracking.

Julie Courtney:

Yes. I mean, I think it's confusing for some people. I mean, building permits are basically required anywhere you are in Saint Augustine for any work done with the exterior or even the interior, there's permits required. People don't realize, though, that, you know, changing their windows. Out if you know they say. Well, my house is in the downtown, it's not near the water. You know, I really need to have permission for that. And yes, you do. If there's, we have seven National Register historic districts and recently a few years ago we had a partial demolition ordinance passed so if. You know you're changing things to your building if you're contributing building to one of those national registered districts, we can possibly administratively review and approve those changes, but they have to be in kind. They have to be in keeping with the design and scale and size of. The original or what you are replacing and then if they are in the different design or a very different material, possibly we might have to have the historic Architectural Review Board which is called the HARB right review that. So there's a certificate of partial demolition that would be required. At times, yeah, yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, and I think just those words you're talking about historic preservation our ancient city, maintaining our history. So it's not intended to say we don't want you doing the work you're doing. But you can't just go willingly changing something if you're in that contributing neighborhood.

Julie Courtney:

Right. I mean, the architectural integrity can only get lost quickly if a lot of different things, you know, the the different elements of the building are changed, you know, from the original. So we want to try to keep that historic character intact.

Melissa Wissel:

And they can call the planning and building department.

Julie Courtney:

The planning and Building Department does the permits and we have historic preservation staff that review things and we're definitely happy to answer any questions on those.

Melissa Wissel:

So before you go making any major changes to your house, just check it out, give a call down to City Hall and. Then you can move on. Sure. Tell me about the ad valorem projects. That was something that you and I had met you. We talked about clarify that for me. I'm. I'm not even sure what that means when you say that.

Julie Courtney:

Yes, that's program that is to stimulate rehabilitation and it's basically an incentive. For property owners who are going to invest. And doing the rehabilitation properly in their building and there's a list of ways that you would be qualifying to apply for that program or, you know, it could be if you have an individually listed building on the National Register, if you're one of those contributing buildings on in a district, if you're a local landmark. Are in the local historic districts, so. It's a way to get your tax frozen on the improvements of your project. So for the ten years after your improvements have been made, they will actually freeze that tax, raise the raise your property taxes for ten years, and that's kind of a big deal.

Melissa Wissel:

OK. So if I if I make an improvement that's going to create a a rise in my tax my Avalon tax. This basically says OK, but we'll wait ten years, right? And that give you credit for doing these improvements and hold off on taxing.

Julie Courtney:

Mm-hmm. That's. Yes, and that can be done through the cities. The city 's property taxes, as well as the county we help facilitate that to be done on the county 's end as well. So that's a three-step process for application review and ultimately the City Commission approves that. So we. Work closely with the applicants and we've seen some really big transformations lately. Yahala on fifteen Bridge Street is one of them. I mean, when you talk about another building and one 's condition that we've seen it transformed and they definitely took advantage of that program.

Melissa Wissel:

Great. OK, well, I'm going to do a quick identification. If folks are just now tuning in, you're listening to The Break Room. I'm Melissa Wissel Communications Director for the city. And I have Julie Courtney in studio. She's the city's historic preservation officer. I want to talk a bit about one other thing. Your choice grant projects. Or do we want to go ahead? And jump into the Historic Window Workshop at the Waterworks.

Julie Courtney:

Well, we can say I'll just say click, click the view projects are wrapping up and you'll be seeing hopefully in the next few months, we'll be having four story maps published and those are going to be really exciting to look out and we had a recent past survey done for buildings that were constructed between nineteen forty and nineteen eighty. So we'll see the results of those in a few minutes or a few minutes or a few months. Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

Oh wow. Yeah. Yeah, that's it. I mean, it feels like recent history. When you say nineteen eighty. That's cool.

Julie Courtney:

Yes. We look at buildings that are fifty years old or older, and nineteen eighty is just around the corner for that.

Melissa Wissel:

OK. We won't talk about that. Well, that's exciting. And story maps are fun and we'll make sure to push out some information in a release and make sure we get that on our website. Where people can. Find it very cool. So let's talk about this window workshop. I know you've got some folks already signed up for it. Seating is limited, and there's two pieces of it. So tell us about the window workshop at the waterworks.

Julie Courtney:

This is going to be held at our historic Water Works building that's right next to the public, the main branch of the Public Library we will be hosting that. On Saturday, May 10th and. We have awesome. Historical who are one of the leading window reservation companies in the state of Florida who does work all throughout the state. They have two of their staff people coming. It will start at nine AM and they'll do a presentation talking about the value of, you know, keeping your historic wood windows. And the benefits of that, and also talking about how they can become operable. And energy efficient, even hurricane ready. And they'll be doing a live demonstration during that presentation. So you can kind of see what they're referring to when they're talking about the different elements of restoring your wood

window. And then we'll take it outside. We'll give it, give the participants. A hands on opportunity. To understand all the different ways that a window needs to be restored and we're going to focus on glazing, if we have time, we will keep going with the different elements of the window restoration process.

Melissa Wissel:

So it's not just go sit and look at a presentation on a slide deck, you're actually going to, you're going to actually see some.

Julie Courtney:

Live? Yes. You think we're being done live and then take part of that.

Melissa Wissel:

So the. So I the excuse me your your. There's an online registration because it is free, but you need to know how many people are coming.

Julie Courtney:

Yes, we do and we have an Eventbrite page, but if you go to CityStAug.com/preservation resources we have a lot more information for you to go through and then we have the link to our Eventbrite page there.

Melissa Wissel:

OK and again, that's the waterworks. I'm not sure if we. Said when? So the history festival. Is may eighth through the eleventh. There's things going on all around town. It's the fourth year of the festival, and it's really intended to target our residents, which I think our our event really targets the residents since you're assuming it's someone who owns or has an investment in a historic home with historic Windows, may eighth through the eleventh, that's Mother's Day Weekend. But our event is on Saturday morning, so again it was at nine.

Julie Courtney:

It starts at nine AM and it goes to about one thirty. If you're going to stay for the whole thing, but you could just come for the morning presentation, that should last about an hour and a Half and with Friday may tenth.

Melissa Wissel:

And if I'm not able to participate in the hands on the second-half, can I still stay and watch?

Julie Courtney:

There's encourage that they'll be definitely talking through the different steps that they're helping people learning hands on. So I think it would be a great way to just kind of observe and see, you know, what work needs to go into a wood window restoration and

Melissa Wissel:

And historic preservation in general?

Julie Courtney:

Yes, definitely.

Melissa Wissel:

So doesn't even have to. You don't even have to own a home or need to restore a window?

Julie Courtney:

No, I mean, there's lots of people who love historic buildings and are just interested on how things are done. And it's a great way to meet other people who have a common interest.

Melissa Wissel:

That's great. Well, I've you've been doing a program for the history festival since it started and we've been working on them together, so I think this is a great one. So I'm really excited. Don't do if you're listening and you're interested, go check out the Eventbrite reservations because we are getting short on our hands on spots.

Julie Courtney:

Yes. There's a smaller amount of hands on spots because they are going to go in so deep on the on just helping you understand all the different steps. So they want to give people adequate time so they try to limit those spots, but we definitely encourage. Anyone who's interested to contact us if the Eventbrite is full, still reach out to us and we can see how we can squeeze you in possibly.

Melissa Wissel:

Great. Good to know. All right. And so I'll be on the website. Thank you for coming. We're already out of time.

Julie Courtney:

Thank you, Melissa.

Melissa Wissel:

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Narrator:

In 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.