

The Break Room with Jacob Webber, Grants Administrative Coordinator 06.17.2025

Narrator:

You 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 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:

Hello and thanks for tuning in. I'm Melissa Wissel Communications Director for the City of St Augustine. If you've recently seen or heard about derelict vessels being removed from our local waterways. You can thank the City of Saint Augustine's Grants Administration Coordinator Jacob Webber. He's responsible for seeking out funding for the city that helps to offset the cost of large scale and small-scale city projects, where otherwise those costs might otherwise prohibit us from getting the work done. Jacob, welcome to your first time with The Break Room, we're happy to have you.

Jacob Webber:

Thanks for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

So you've been with us all of three-ish months.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah we're just going on 3 months and a couple of weeks.

Melissa Wissel:

You've and you've already been participating with the communications department.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah it's been a blast.

Melissa Wissel:

You've been on TV. You've been on 105.5 beach 105 and and now you're here in The Break Room.

Jacob Webber:

That's right yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

The best of course.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah no this is a this is a great environment nice and cool and I it's a great space.

Melissa Wissel:

I don't know If we've had our, we have had our grants administrator on once before. It was a couple of folks ago. But interestingly enough you really have been very busy with what you do as our grants administrator. We've got a couple of topics and I want to talk about them derelict vessels, waterproofing of City Hall and our beloved lions that were really protecting we're not removing, but let's start with derelict vessels. Tell us about the grant money and what basically what grants administration is all about.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah, so big part of my position is actually being the project manager for these derelict vessels and getting them out of our waterways. And so a big part of that is finding funding that we can use to get these out so it's not a burden on the you know city budget and right now we're working really heavily with the Florida Inland Navigation District in Saint Augustine Port Waterway Port Beach

Melissa Wissel:

District.

Jacob Webber:

District. Yeah. And really utilize that funding to get these bad boats out of the water. It's been great you know I started back in March and we really dived right in and we had a handful of these vessels get out and since then they've just keep popping up. Originally we had contracted to 9 and right at the very end of our project there was one that got approved and so we ended up doing 10 yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Excellent, and so tell us a little bit just we want to give a shout out to FIND and the Port Waterway District. They have their, what we call, a special taxing districts so they have their own pots of money. Can you tell us a little bit about the dollar amount, I think it was 83,000 or 86,000 something.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah yeah so with that you know additional boat, we ended up being around 87,000 total and so FIND has a small derelict vessel removal grant that they offer. And like you said they're both, both these you know the Port District and FIND they have their own special taxing district where they levy property taxes to get funding so they can fund their different you know respective missions. And so we go out and seek that funding and it's for this program it's a 75/25 split so FIND will fund up to 75% of the project. And that's where the port district came in and kind of supplemented that extra 25 so 75% of that 87 will be from FIND and the other 25 from the Port.

Melissa Wissel:

And the city in terms of the city of Saint Augustine, do we write a check? Or we get reimbursed for all.

Jacob Webber:

Of this yes so this is all reimbursement. Sometimes with grants it's often reimbursement agreements you know. You enter into a contract and agreement with whoever the funder is and then you perform the work, everything's verified that you did it exactly how you're supposed to and then they send you a check for that work that you did.

Melissa Wissel:

Congratulations on that. I know I'm a boater and I've spent a lot of time with people who are on boats and you really do you drive around on your vessels. And sailing and you go, man how do these get left here? Is there anything that is a pattern that you can speak to like where do they come from is it sometimes it's hurricane, sometimes they just get abandoned, that's like a broken down car on the side of the highway.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah, you can imagine if you're you know driving on the road and you see whatever on the side of the road or any hazards you kind of think, oh man, what happened and how'd that get there, but I'd say there's probably no determined pattern for them you know a lot of them are from hurricanes and sometimes you'll see them out there. And they're the responsibility of FWC, for example, because of that hurricane damage which is another state entity we work with a lot for getting these vessels out. But it could just be the hurricanes, bad luck, you know you're navigating the vessel a little too close to some shallow water and ended up getting you know some damage, and now you don't know what to do with that boat. So really that's where you we can come in. If law enforcement does you know their process as far as contacting these vessel owners and saying, hey what's going on? You know can we get you to move this boat? And when it gets to a critical point where the vessel is dangerous or it's potentially, you know, leaking pollutants or things like that, that's where we can step in and they can declare it derelict. And then we jump in and get that out.

Melissa Wissel:

And they're removed, taken over to I think Saint Augustine marine center? Is our destination and then they get destroyed, moved out where do they go?

Jacob Webber:

Yeah, so we worked with flagship this time around to get these vessels and remove them they took him to Saint Augustine marine center, which we've worked with a lot in the past. And so they can take them out, destroy them, kind of crush them there and then they take that material and they find a proper waste site to get you know dispose yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

That's a great project and we thank you for that work and our waterways continue to get beautified because of that work so we thank you for that. If you're just now tuning in you're listening to the break room I'm Melissa Wissel, communications director for the city, and I have Jacob Webber with us this is his first time on The Break Room. He is our grants administration coordinator. And Jacob, like you and I talked, that that station identification means we're about halfway through our chat today, but I do want to go back. Let's touch a little bit on the waterproofing that's really kind of a sneak peek and then we'll come back and talk about lions. Give me just the the quick and dirty or clean, as it were, of of the waterproofing of City Hall. We don't want to steal anybody 's thunder.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah so it's actually my deputy director, Barbara Moore, she's managing that project. But it is state funded, so there is you know that grant funding part portion of it, but Barb's really been all on top of it. And it's really touching up the places you know City Hall, Lightner Museum, that really needs some extra love. Some extra attention, making sure we can keep that building nice and clean like you said.

Melissa Wissel:

We'll get, we'll get Barb in here in the next week or so as well. But, let's talk about lions. We've been talking about lions removal, and we want to be clear it's really an opportunity to

protect so go ahead and tell us about the project, why the lions are being temporarily relocated.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah, so FDOT is planning a seawall improvement project. So right, you know. Right there where the lions are, and The Bridge of Lions and the Marina. That seawall, they're going to start construction work and so part of that means they're going to be doing all this sort of service around the lions. So they've asked us to remove them, really to protect them, you know with everything that's going to be happening around them we want to keep them safe. We want to make sure they're out of the way. Just so FDOT can have a very smooth process while they work there and you know we're going to take the opportunity to make sure to do some extra work on them, conservation work, preservation work, however you want to right call it. We're going to make sure that they're sustained and they're here for a very long time. You know away and then once FDOT is done, they'll come right back and they're going to be nice and shiny and super beautiful just like they were before.

Melissa Wissel:

And they've been they've been temporarily moved before. Anything different this time? Can you give us any? Where are they going? Do we know who's going to be doing the work? I think you did an interview, on television and we were keeping it on the down low and then that very night at the Commission meeting we had the unveil so give us any insight, if you can, who how that's going to go down.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah, so yeah yeah, this is a little felt a little bad about that, of course, I was like, oh man, I I I wish I could offer some more detail. I just don't know at this point because you know how to get approved by the Commission first so now that we have it approved we get you know it's full steam ahead and so we're working with the same contractors that we worked with before in 2005 when they were first removed so they're people who are familiar with the lions and moving them. One thing we learned from last time is, we had used one trailer and so this time, you can find that video on potentially on YouTube and when you watch it you kind of shiver a little bit. You're like, whoa, but you know it it all worked out, and it was great. So that this time we're going to do 2 trailers.

Melissa Wissel:

Putting all that precious cargo in one trailer could be a little.

Melissa Wissel:

Nerve wracking.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah,

Jacob Webber:

Yeah, and it it again it worked, out but, you know better safe and you learn things. And you improv, right, so this big improvement is using 2 trailers being incredibly careful with this you know these historic landmarks. And, but the part that's great is we get these people who've done it before and so while we are improving that you know little things to improve it we have that familiarity with the project.

Melissa Wissel:

I think it's going to, I'm going to say I think because I want to quantify it, but I do believe it's going to be Joe Siegel and Enzo Torcoletti doing that work. Which we're very excited about. I know the mayor was very excited about that as well. So moving along we still have a few minutes let's also talk about some of the other things we talked about grant funding and your job as you know going to get the money what's another one that's coming up that we can sort of keep an eye out for this coming in the future.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah so, there are a couple of things we're kind of looking out for right now. In just a week I'm going to be defending a grant we have with FIND for the salt run dredging project we have going on. Also I'm working a lot with FEMA to receive some reimbursement for hurricane damage from Milton. So that we have some Marina repairs that will be taking place very soon, some repairs on the lighthouse boat ramp and also there's reimbursement

possibilities for the labor that happened during that time. So anything the city eventually or had invested into that storm and we can ask FEMA for some extra money to get back from that.

Melissa Wissel:

And that's also right at the lighthouse dock as well or yeah, the boat ramp.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah so the the boat ramp and the Marina both are having funding from FEMA to do some construction work on them for really repair work from the hurricane damage. And then we have from FEMA, they also offer some reimbursement for things like waste removal, you know with any of the debris that was down during the storm. Any sort of work we did to prep for that storm can get reimbursed by FEMA.

Melissa Wissel:

Nice. The salt run dredging you mentioned defending the application so just because we apply doesn't mean that we get the money. Tell us a little bit about that, when you say defending? And there's only so much money, but a lot of people want it OK.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah that's right. So FIND covers 12 different counties along the East Coast and each county essentially has an allocated amount of money they can get for this waterway assistance program. WAP. So, every year everyone applies for this you know select amount of money, and this year we had I think over 70 applications for this Waterway assistance program. So there's a lot of people all trying to get funding for their different projects, great news for the city, is that dredging is number one on FIND's priority list. So there's definitely some extra grace there when we go and present it, and we've had a rich history with FIND in this kind of project before where we've done work with them you know previously.

Melissa Wissel:

And hopefully they dredging helps to prevent the boats from running aground to get abandoned.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah

Melissa Wissel:

So, there's a cause and effect there.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah a little bit of well if we can keep the channel nice and deep and wide then hopefully we'll have less of those vessels in the waterways.

Melissa Wissel:

Excellent, well you're keeping very busy. You've gotten a lot accomplished already in your mighty 3 months here and we look forward to lots more great work. So thanks for coming down and being on The Break Room.

Jacob Webber:

Thanks for having me it's a blast.

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

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