

Liv Johnson, Sustainability Specialist, July 8, 2025

Narrator:

You're tuned in to 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 Saint Augustine. This week I've invited Liz Johnson back to The Break Room she's our sustainability specialist. We were here last time talking about all of our earth month activities those things have come and gone. Liz welcome back you've got some other things to talk about we didn't get a chance to cover it all.

Liz Johnson:

Yes, thank you for having me again.

Melissa Wissel:

Let's just jump in. I know the we can circle back on you know, how we, what we did for earth week and or environmental Awareness Week, but let's talk about some of the other projects that you work on. We talked a little bit about how you came to be at the city and what the sustainability specialist does, so let's just continue that conversation.

Liz Johnson:

Great. Yeah so last month we planted 25 trees on residential properties and they're full mature trees and.

Melissa Wissel:

That was part, explain. Let's go back, that's part of the tree canopy so explain that.

Liz Johnson:

The tree canopy program. If you are a resident within city limits you can apply June first for the tree canopy program, and you there's different species that you can choose from they're all native species. They've been pretty consistent throughout the years, but we've changed a few here and there. And. Then once you've applied, we review your application we do a site assessment.

Melissa Wissel:

You have to live in the city limits.

Liz Johnson:

Yes, live in city limits.

Melissa Wissel:

Would have to be in the right of way or can be on your private property.

Liz Johnson:

It can be in your backyard, it can be in front yard, wherever you like it as long as it's a place where it's not going to hit power lines or run into your house at some point.

Melissa Wissel:

so we do that every year

Liz Johnson:

We do that every year. We've done it for the last 4 years and in total we've planted 168 trees. And we've had 12 different species of trees planted through the program.

Melissa Wissel:

So I'm terrible with plants is it my responsibility if I get the tree I have to keep it alive?

Liz Johnson:

Once the tree is planted. On your property it is your responsibility to keep it alive. Water it every day. It takes a lot more water than you think. You'll get watering instructions, and we'll follow up with you and make sure the tree is doing OK.

Melissa Wissel:

Do a drive by and look and make sure I'm having killed it yet. OK is it so every year on June first and do I get to pick the species?

Liz Johnson:

Yep. you pick the species and then we ask for your first choice and second choice and then depending on the spot and the once a site assessment is done they'll tell you if the species will survive there or not they'll ask about flooding.

Melissa Wissel:

OK and do people get rejected just because it doesn't work out or they don't they thought they lived in the city limits and they don't, that kind of stuff.

Liz Johnson:

Yes yeah we have a lot of people that apply that live even all the way in Jacksonville so yeah I do

Melissa Wissel:

Hey the word getting

Liz Johnson:

yes the words getting out I love that everybody wants the tree too but it's only within city limits and we do have to turn away a few people that do not live.

Melissa Wissel:

OK do you know how many we're going to get? In terms of how many trees we're going to get this year it's probably too early to know.

Liz Johnson:

We do around 30.

Melissa Wissel:

The first year it was like a rock concert selling out.

Liz Johnson:

Yes. The first year I think we did like 82 or something and they were like that. Um that may be too much.

Melissa Wissel:

yeah, great enthusiasm but we need to cap that.

Liz Johnson:

Yes

Melissa Wissel:

Well, it's good to know that our community is that aware.

Liz Johnson:

Yes, and every once in a while we'll get updates from people and they're like this is the tree that I got planted 4 years ago and tree looks great and it's a great feel good program.

Melissa Wissel:

Oh let's put let's let let's let's remind let's give that one to Rachel let's look let's move out let's think about that as a good way to. Uh you know promote some of that that would be a fun social campaign yes where are they now.

Liz Johnson:

Yes yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Where are the trees now OK well it's brainstorming OK so that's our trees what else have we got not recycling I keep saying that?

Liz Johnson:

We have the mayor 's monarch pledge that we just resigned and we've been doing this for 5 years, it's where we do outreach. Talking about how important native milk wheat is and how it's important for the migration of monarchs and then we also plant native milkweed at City Hall we've planted it at the wastewater treatment plant before and we encourage everybody to get native milkweed. Rather than non-native because it's

Melissa Wissel:

it's not quite the same. So, if I go to the nursery you know I talked about this so listen up folks if you go to the nursery and you ask for milkweed they may or may not know what you're talking about but there is deciduous and non deciduous which basically means.

Liz Johnson:

The the leaves you want the deciduous one with the leaves fall off so that the monarchs just aren't staying here year round.

Melissa Wissel:

Oh OK oh I didn't think about it that way so we want them to come and then leave and then come back.

Liz Johnson:

Yeah we want them to migrate.

Melissa Wissel:

Migrate ohh there's OK I think we also point out that planted them down by the bridge of lions.

Liz Johnson:

Oh maybe.

Melissa Wissel:

At one point at at some point some season I think we had them around those potted landscaped areas I don't know if they're still down there but. The other one OK so that's the mayor 's monarch pledge and then I keep saying recycling but I what I mean to say is composting that's been another popular one that we're kind of still in the works with how do we how are we just generally how are we doing with that program.

Liz Johnson:

yeah so we have a residential compost program and. We give up to 50 bins away year to residents within city limits that apply and go through the application process and get approved. And we are doing it this year again and hopefully we will have more bins that we're giving out. We're still working out the details on how we're going to give them out and when they're going to be given out but that's something To keep your eye out for.

Melissa Wissel:

so, and that's a that's the composting bin that you is there a particular I know one year it was you had a choice.

Liz Johnson:

We give away two different. OK yeah Tumblr bin and then a stationary bin.

Melissa Wissel:

And is it up to. Me when I apply or is it sort of a while supplies last.

Liz Johnson:

That is still one of the details that we're working on Yep.

Melissa Wissel:

OK. OK so stay tuned for the composting. if you're just now tuning in you're listening to The Break Room I'm Melissa Wissel communications director for the City of St. Augustine with Liz Johnson, our sustainability specialist, talking about tree canopy, Composting, the mayor's monarch pledge and other outreach. You guys do the medallions? You go to the schools? Give us the, you stay busy.

Liz Johnson:

Yeah so we do for for earth week we did a lot of outreach for schools 5 year schools elementary schools and something similar to the sustainability workshop where we had tables and activities for them to do we did a tour of the lincolnville community garden and. That that went really well and then we do also do the storm drain marking so if your community is interested in storm drain marking yeah reach out to me and we can schedule something.

Melissa Wissel:

No rain down the drain

Liz Johnson:

Only rain.

Melissa Wissel:

only rain only rain only excuse me only rain down the drain I'm thinking your toilet is not a trash can is the other one that's not really your that's not really your lane. But that's still being fearful about what you're putting down your Toilet.

Liz Johnson:

Right. right and then we do the storm drain marking activity just to remind residents that it's important to keep the storm drain free of debris, garbage, leaves. Any clogged storm drains cause flooding and.

Melissa Wissel:

Flooding and all that. I'm gonna, tell me about so every now and again I find this funny you and I work on the same hall and so I will walk into our our break room ironically and they'll be like it's like bring in tin cans if you have any of these tin cans bring them in or one day there was a thing on this. On the above the recycle bins that we have. And it was like dos and don'ts of the recycling stuff but you also have a game. That you do. When you go out is it just in the schools or It's that at FSDB you've got a really cool outreach program yeah.

Liz Johnson:

Yeah with this spinning wheel we do multiple things at the spinning wheel we try to make any game have to do with the spinning wheel the past. Event that we did we did it for compost and you spin the wheel and you land on something whether it's trash or recycling or something compostable and you decide whether you're gonna recycle it compost it or. Throw it away so

Melissa Wissel:

So you have to say what So what it is you.

Liz Johnson:

we do we do try to switch up the activity for the spinning wheel but yes we do like to have some fun games.

Melissa Wissel:

Have to say? There was something else that was in there that was a contest or something and I didn't understand what it was.

Liz Johnson:

Oh that was when I was an intern for recycling yeah

Melissa Wissel:

you graduated to more esteemed projects.

OK. OK you were about to say something else sorry.

Liz Johnson:

And like the cans and The Break Room we Jordan who works for environmental compliance she is having the kids make fog catchers.

Melissa Wissel:

Fog catchers?

Liz Johnson:

so yeah any fats oils and grease you know you don't want it to go down your drain.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Liz Johnson:

She made a cute little label to put on a can OK and. Any fats, oils or grease that you have from your pan, scrape it into this can instead of having it go down the drain and then throw it away when you're done.

Melissa Wissel:

yeah that's another that's that's a whole nother can of beans it's a whole nother conversation.

Liz Johnson:

That really say. That is yes.

Melissa Wissel:

Anything else that you want to share with us we what is your favorite part about your job because you have a lot of different things that you do over the course of the year you're in and out you go out on site things you do field trips, what's your favorite part.

Liz Johnson:

I I think I really like engaging with the community I think I like when we have any. Community events most of the events that I do thankfully are feel good and like anybody everybody loves our recycling events and. They just people will come with a tiny little zip lock bag full of electronics and and just drop it off and then like I've been holding on to this for however many months until you have this event so I love that people are aware and encouraging.

Melissa Wissel:

I'm guilty of that. Oh I do want to mention though I mean. One of the recycle events and I had oil. Tell our listeners where do I go how do I drop it off if I miss an event because I don't have to just wait for an event to your point.

Liz Johnson:

Right I I'm not sure if they take oil year round OK but they do take used or old electronics year round at solid waste 601 riveria you just call at the gate and somebody will open it for you and then you can drop off any electronics any. Time of the year you can do the grease.

Melissa Wissel:

Because OK I did that and same thing when you get down there to the end of the road buzz the the buzzer they'll let you in and the oil drop off is actually behind the building when you turn in there solid waste is to your right and the water wastewater treatment plant is to your left. There's actually a like a platform around the back you just drive in and drop your oil.

Liz Johnson:

OK.

Melissa Wissel:

Great like in the container it's like on a little crate yeah yeah.

Liz Johnson:

Yes I know I know exactly what you're talking about yeah it's like a grease trap yeah so used cooking oil then.

Melissa Wissel:

yeah so lots of good stuff and if anybody missed our recycling event when's our next one

Liz Johnson:

our next one is November 21st yeah so same time 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM.

Melissa Wissel:

Same location?

Liz Johnson:

Same place Yep

Melissa Wissel:

What's the one that we do over at Francis field?

Liz Johnson:

that one is for after the holidays it's just used cooking oil and used electronics.

Melissa Wissel?

And November is a shredding event?

Liz Johnson:

Yep we have shredding.

Melissa Wissel:

People always want that shredding. They love the shredding yeah well it's a cardboard well paper products and what's not allowed can you think of a few things off the top of your head just what I shouldn't bring well what I shouldn't bring when I come in November? We don't do tires

Liz Johnson:

we don't do tires we don't do motor oil. we don't do hazardous waste.

Melissa Wissel:

paint things like that. no light bulbs

Liz Johnson:

Yep it's just use used cooking oil yeah electronics and paper shredding document shredding.

Melissa Wissel:

Awesome. Well I think that you keep us busy you keep yourself busy we'd love to have you.

Liz Johnson:

Thank You

Melissa Wissel:

thanks for coming and telling us about all the cool stuff that you do. Don't forget to keep your leaves out of the storm drains only rain down the drain. And with that we'll call it a wrap.

Liz Johnson:

great

Melissa Wissel:

sound good?

Liz Johnson:

yes

Melissa Wissel:

Come back and see us and thanks for everything that you do.

Liz Johnson:

thank you.

Melissa Wissel:

If you missed any part of this broadcast and want to go back and listen from the beginning you can find this episode and more at citystaugradio.com you can also find us on your favorite podcasting app look for us on Spotify, apple podcast, spreaker and more. 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'll find us on Facebook, Instagram and X citystaug and be sure to visit us on the website for all this information more at citystaug.com thanks for tuning in until next time.

Narrator:

You've been listening to The Break Room a weekly program addressing projects and programs offered by the city of St 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.