

Anthony Cuthbert, Assistant Chief of Police, July 15, 2025

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 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:

Thanks for tuning into The Break Room. I'm Melissa Wissel, Communications Director for the City of Saint Augustine. City Commission recently passed a highly anticipated amended noise ordinance. The initiative was led by assistant chief of police, Anthony Cuthbert. He is here with me in studio this week to talk about what that means for our businesses and residents. And of course we'll talk about how things went for 4th of July this year and anything else we can think of. Welcome back chief.

Anthony Cuthbert:

Thanks for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

So the noise ordinance, we were just chatting, give us a rewind where did this come from, why was this so important, and what does it all mean.

Anthony Cuthbert:

Sure, it's probably been in the works for at least the past 5 or 6 years. It spawned from the original concern about our nightlife downtown and there are numerous studies done back in that day and it came up probably 24 months ago, don't quote me on that, but the Commission obviously it didn't get passed so the Commission decided to laser point their

focus on the issues specifically in nightlife. And how it affects the citizens of Saint Augustine. So the noise was one of the big ones so that was something that I tackled.

Melissa Wissel:

Quality of life was a big piece of that the nightlife.

Anthony Cuthbert:

Quality of life is really the whole thing that has to do with nightlife.

Melissa Wissel:

So this amended ordinance so we had an ordinance in place give us the before and after what was sort of the pitfalls of what we had why was it so important.

Anthony Cuthbert:

So before we amended the ordinance it really relied on people to call in complaints. We couldn't really answer anonymous complaints because the way the ordinance was written and the way we do our noise meter readings required us to know where the complainant was and have access to their property. Because we would do a noise meter reading on their property which is the receiving property. So if they were just calling it an anonymous complaint there was nowhere to take that measurement from. So all the officers could do was maybe ask the source of the noise to turn it down.

Melissa Wissel:

Right but then there was no way of saying you know well you're. You're down at the lighthouse or I was in Davis shores or downtown so used to be you had to be able to stand there

Anthony Cuthbert:

Right.

Melissa Wissel:

and measure. Which by the time even by the time you might figure out where the complaint came from was the timeliness was that part of it?

Anthony Cuthbert:

That's part of it. A lot of times location and timeliness because everything 's taken into consideration when you take a noise meter reading. So there's barriers to noise, there's ambient noise, source noise. We have to know where that source noise is coming from. We have to know where the receiving properties coming from so the amended noise ordinance kind of makes that much easier for the officers that are responding because number one we can respond to anonymous complaints. We don't need to know where the property lines are at, except for the source, but we can easily identify where that's at. It also enables us to do a plainly audible which is something that is now legally enforceable.

Melissa Wissel:

You said it's plainly audible.

Anthony Cuthbert:

Plainly audible. That means you and I go downtown. I can hear it. That's plainly audible. So we did months of study on plainly audible and noise meter readings rewrote the whole thing so it's not just based on the arbitrary numbers it's actually built for our downtown area and our residents. So it makes it much easier for the officers to respond and take education and enforcement actions.

Melissa Wissel:

And so talking OK so let's go to that next step the going in do you still have to take readings or it doesn't require reading now is that what that is what that.

Anthony Cuthbert:

It doesn't really require noise meter readings. The way I've kind of envisioned it is for like difficult cases or difficult players and this is where we would probably utilize a noise meter. Plainly audible is really so any officer on the street because it's a perishable skill getting trained on the noise meter and it's it we go through Rutgers University to get it done so that he can only do so many at a time it's expensive. And besides the fact that the people are retiring and moving on to different places we have a hard time keeping noise meter certified but playing the audible is still enforceable so even if my officer goes down there and and goes by the standard he can still enforce it.

Melissa Wissel:

So you mentioned the meter readers and you you so you can we do get trained or we have officers that are trained on it.

Anthony Cuthbert:

Yeah we sure do. My plan is to get more of them certified on it. We increased our inventory of noise meter reading utensils and instruments from 2 to 8 now so there's more available for the officers on the street. So that's where we're at.

Melissa Wissel:

OK do we have the nightlife person now? we have a nightlife.

Anthony Cuthbert:

Yes we do he just came on board last year

Melissa Wissel:

Jabari.

Anthony Cuthbert:

And his name is Jabari White. His title is nightlife liaison so he's focusing mostly on vendor and licensing and Medallions and vehicles for hire downtown area. But he's also tasked with basically communicating with the downtown businesses and bars. He's been educated on the noise ordinance. He can do plainly audible as well but he will be also certified but really he's just down there to have a good relationship with all the business owners and the tourists and the citizens that come downtown and work on anything that that they have an issue with.

Melissa Wissel:

And jabari 's position was also one of those components that even though the nightlife ordinance that was being floated by didn't pass. Yes. That position and that role was something that came out of that that we said we still really need this.

Anthony Cuthbert:

That's correct yeah that was actually part of the original plan and and it stuck. With it even though it got shot down and didn't get passed it it stuck with something obviously that has been identified as a need.

Melissa Wissel:

and he stays busy and he's doing great things.

Anthony Cuthbert:

He does yeah he works evenings on the weekends and Fridays I think he's out till 2:00 o'clock in the morning so if you see him down there he's a busy man.

Melissa Wissel:

And we'll we'll talk about the vendor and the licensing on a different interview I probably have Jabari come down. if you're just yeah he's he and I have spoken several times we're getting some information posted on the website about what he's doing so we'll save that for another interview. If folks are just now tuning in you're listening to The Break Room and

assistant chief Cuthbert is with us. We've just been talking about the noise ordinance before we switch gears is it in effect when does it go into effect?

Anthony Cuthbert:

So came into effect 10 days after they voted in the second reading, so July 3rd was active.

Melissa Wissel:

OK. Have you seen a lot of activity with it yet?

Anthony Cuthbert:

No.

Melissa Wissel:

too early to tell?

Anthony Cuthbert:

No.

Melissa Wissel:

OK. I think and maybe part of it is just knowing that it's changed that there's a way now for people to feel like they they can be heard no pun intended.

Anthony Cuthbert:

And we work to educate first, because obviously it's a new ordinance so we're out there trying to educate if we get complaints we educate and move forward from there.

Melissa Wissel:

And that has to do just in case folks are wondering it's you can play amplified music up until 10:00 o'clock is that correct?

Anthony Cuthbert:

Yeah 10:00 o'clock is pretty much the time that things have to become quiet that's is Monday through Thursday. Friday Saturday Sunday it goes up to 11:00 o'clock.

Melissa Wissel:

OK.

Anthony Cuthbert:

Yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

OK so if it's late and you're hearing a lot of noise you can call and we can come down and we can address the issue

Anthony Cuthbert:

That's it.

Melissa Wissel:

great moving on though before we run out of time we've got a few more minutes left another great greatly anticipated event was this year 's 4th of July. Tell me your what you say I have to give you credit you were out I saw you after at the end standing there at the corner of US one and King Street keeping an eye on things. How did we do?

Anthony Cuthbert:

Compared to last year the crowd was about the same that was the reports. Traffic wise we did expect some difficulty with that because we had some road closures we also had some road construction and that was true. I think in my opinion it went better than expected which is good we only had a slowdown of anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes on people getting out of town. We thought it would be even greater than that. I was at US one and King Street because that's where I thought the flare point was going to be at because of the King Street construction and plus we had a bunch of walking pedestrians going to that satellite parking lot so that's where I stayed most night.

Melissa Wissel:

Feedback on the barriers we had we did some changes we put in some pedestrian barriers that actually they were up for the a good portion of the day. And then once we shut the street down we we took them down. How did those Meridian barricades do and how how did our people behave in terms of crowd control and what did you see or what have you heard?

Anthony Cuthbert:

Crowd control and traffic control everything went really easy. I didn't really get any feedback from citizens other than seeing stuff on social media which everybody always was very thankful for and after the New Orleans incident it was a need that the city identified and we acted on it. Crowd pedestrian stuff like that, nope, no negative comments yeah I mean everything 's been great.

Melissa Wissel:

I think what's what's interesting now that we've kind of gotten through 4th of July is the the barricades, the bathrooms, some of the other changes. I think people what we saw was people felt an increased sense of safety.

Anthony Cuthbert:

Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

The vehicular and pedestrian traffic is a completely different animal.

Anthony Cuthbert:

It is.

Melissa Wissel:

At nights of lights

Anthony Cuthbert:

Yes it is.

Melissa Wissel:

so we feel good about what we've done. at least it

Anthony Cuthbert:

This was a test run.

Melissa Wissel:

At least it gave us a little bit of an idea. Any thoughts or anything. But what. I don't know Reuben's going to be doing a presentation. We don't want to spoil what he's will have said but any thoughts wait? Anything you're thinking you could take away?

Anthony Cuthbert:

I I think it's I think it's going to make things much easier as from a law enforcement traffic standpoint with the Meridian barricades and the pedestrian barricades to keep everybody corralled where they're supposed to be because that's obviously the hardest thing to

control so it's going to be easier for law enforcement and people should feel safer that they see these things out there.

Melissa Wissel:

Did we have more than usual police presence or I should say I was under the impression that we were going to have an increase of presence and that we had additional folks downtown for 4th of July.

Anthony Cuthbert:

There was there was additional officers and it's just like I said this is a test run for nights of lights so you'll probably see more officers during nights of lights. But the barricades and traffic control that's pretty much now nights of lights can be little different because we King Street is going to be closed. OK it will be a little bit more of a slowdown for people just expect it and take your time.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah and people behaved themselves, you felt like for 4th of July relatively?

Anthony Cuthbert:

For The 4th of July? relatively. Traffic and pedestrians. Good but but we did have quite a few arrests that night from bad actors but you know what they didn't ruin the party.

Melissa Wissel:

OK all right well. Good good it was a great night great night you guys it was great to see you all down there. OK so one last thing before we go I know this isn't sort of your lane but I know you're involved with it because you sit on the council continuum of care board. Can you give us any insight, sneak peek, into how we're doing with the drop in day center the homelessness issues. You know I see it it's got a roof.

Anthony Cuthbert:

Yes it does and I can give you a little bit of a teaser because obviously Barry Fox is running that little situation and he's coming on soon. But that construction is moving along very quickly the final processes are now getting completed so we should see it opening probably before October. And it's looking great it's a great little facility and we got a lot of stakeholders and and community partners and interested in helping us with that once we get it opened up.

Melissa Wissel:

The we don't have a date for ribbon cutting or anything like that. Are you seeing changes in general? I know we don't get the emails like we used to. How are we doing overall? Are we seeing a downturn in it or?

Anthony Cuthbert:

Yeah as far as the the homeless

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah, the, homeless, downtown any of it.

Anthony Cuthebert:

The population yeah there's definitely a decrease but I think that's also because a lot of different agencies in in Saint John's are doing such a great job as getting these people into homes and off the street and and that's part of it and also we're also rehoming or reunifying these people with families that can support them and that's an ongoing project that the PD has been doing for the last 20 years and we're we're doing probably 5 or 6 people a week.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah. That's great well and the county has joined the effort

Anthony Cuthbert:

Yes they have.

Melissa Wissel:

with the the the housing on 16 the.

Anthony Cuthbert:

Home again Saint John's.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah home again Saint John's and then also the veterans village on the island so we're seeing a lot of like you just said housing solutions.

Anthony Cuthbert:

That's the problem is housing solutions and all these service providers are doing a great job at stepping up and helping them.

Melissa Wissel:

Well thank you for sitting on that board and and keeping an eye on things and keeping us on on top of it it's it's making a difference.

Anthony Cuthbert:

Thank you I appreciate it.

Melissa Wissel:

Thank you for coming in and seeing us and telling us about the noise ordinance I know you're probably glad to have that off your To Do List.

Anthony Cuthbert:

I am.

Melissa Wissel:

On to other things great. If you missed part of this broadcast and want to go back to and hear from the beginning you can find us on your favorite podcasting app. Look for us on Spotify, apple podcast, Spreaker and more. You can get a complete listing of our podcasting platforms, links to our past episodes, as well as this one, at citystaugradio.com Follow us on social you'll see us on Facebook, Instagram, X and also the Police Department on Facebook and X @citystaug and the Police Department is @SaintAugPD. Visit us on the web at citystaug.com and until next time thank you 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 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.