

The Break Room with Reuben Franklin, Assistant City Manager, September 2, 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:

Welcome to *The Break Room* thanks for tuning in I'm Melissa Wissel communications director for the city of Saint Augustine. With the Saint Augustine city Commission recently passing a new ordinance to increase illegal parking fines, I've invited assistant city manager Reuben Franklin back to the studio to give us the details. Tell our listeners what we can expect, what we can look for when we are searching for those sometimes elusive legal parking spots. Welcome back Reuben.

Reuben Franklin:

Thanks for having me Melissa.

Melissa Wissel:

The last time you were here we were talking about Nights of Lights that's a whole nother topic we'll cover that another week, but I do want to talk about the increased fines for illegal parking. Take it away. Why why did, starting with why was this necessary.

Reuben Franklin:

Yes OK. Well it is Nights of Lights related and so this past Nights of Lights and every Nights of Lights parking becomes an issue. We have a shortage in parking spaces our parking

garage fills up, our on- street parking even private lots are all full. That leaves people circling looking for parking and what ends up happening is that they start to park illegally in the city too close to intersections, blocking fire hydrants, they even get further into the neighborhoods start blocking driveways, so that's the legal parking that we're talking about. For years it's been a \$35.00 fine so if you parked illegally and get caught you get issued a. \$35.00 ticket. Not uncommon during Nights of Lights for somebody to have our parking enforcement officer there and say well how much is the ticket. And we say \$35.00 and they say write the ticket we're not moving so we've increased it from 35 to \$100.00 and that's an effort to get people to park legally and then if they're not to use our satellite parking go out to where we're running free shuttles. And come in and and the intent is to provide a relief to our neighborhoods, maintain access for emergency vehicles. And so that's really why we're doing it. We don't want to penalize anybody that's parking in a metered parking spot and time expires like you know at times expired on me you know in a in a spot I don't want to get hit with \$100.00 ticket so that ticket remains \$25.00 if you're in a actual metered parking spot. So really we're just focusing on that illegal parking. Ways that we assign illegal parking we use signage that says no parking. We use yellow curbs or painted curb yellow is a no parking zone. We use signage for commercial loading zones so all those things if you're parking in there and their signs or it's yellow curb that's illegal parking. And we'll be issuing tickets leading into this Nights of Lights they'll be \$100.00. We'll also have little rider. signs on their signs to the smaller sign underneath that says \$100.00 fine so people can see it. Our hope is by displaying \$100.00 that we it's a deterrent and so people look at that and think twice before they just park and walk away. That's the hope.

Melissa Wissel:

OK well and you mentioned the yellow curbs I know Commissioner Garris was concerned that the yellow curbs were not marked that's a that's going to be an ambitious task, but you guys are working on sprucing up the yellow color.

Reuben Franklin:

Yes so yellow curbs. That's a program it's not a project you don't paint the curb yellow one time and walk away from it. Weather and it fades over time like anything so it needs attention and so we're going to make an effort. Commissioner Garrett brought that to our attention, her concern was that the faded curbs it wasn't going to be fair for people so we're committed to going and freshening up the yellow curb we should be doing that annually anyway it's a it's a program we need to be going through and painting our curbs to maintain

them. So we're going to make that push going into Nights of Lights. There's also an appeals process so if you feel that you have been unfairly issued a ticket there there's an appeals process that you can go through and you wind up going through our the county court system but you get a chance to. plead your case. And so there's that as well.

Melissa Wissel:

The do we only ask you this do we do we take a picture of it when when if I get a ticket that I'm illegally parked is there a is there photographic evidence that the city has.

Reuben Franklin:

Oh yes.

Melissa Wissel:

OK right.

Reuben Franklin:

So obviously you haven't got an issue the ticket

Melissa Wissel:

No I have not.

Reuben Franklin:

But when you go to pay if you're issued a ticket you go online to pay it and the first thing that happens is we show you the photo so when you get your point puncher ticket number and you'll see the actual photos of the illegal parking and we did that as a way to show what the evidence is that we have. So it it kind of cuts down on people just appealing. Willy nilly if you will so yes, you get photos of it.

Melissa Wissel:

Well I will put a mention out to our listeners because. I personally was not ticketed but I had some friends over and I was not aware of this rule that there's a certain distance I think it's 20 feet it might be 30 within an intersection so if an intersection is not curb yellow curbed be aware if you park too closely to that intersection you also could get a ticket even if it isn't yellow curbed.

Reuben Franklin:

That's correct yes state law. Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

So I just want to make sure that's a state law I didn't know that so when I went to parking and I asked I was told well no it is the law and I said OK here's my credit card. So I did pay the ticket

Reuben Franklin:

Yep, I've paid a parking ticket too. What happens it's not something that we want to be punitive about, but it is a city and you know people do park all over the place especially when we get our peak seasons and crowded times it gets stressed and we're just trying to crack down on that. And hopefully people don't see it as the you know the City's being mean and.

Melissa Wissel:

Right or we're lining our pockets that was one of the criticisms that.

Reuben Franklin:

Right or yeah or that we're doing it as a money grab. That's not the case and really from a public safety perspective and then from our residents so I mean we hear from the residents that surround the historic district of people are parking all over their neighborhood and so that it's an effort to bring a little bit of quality of life back to the residents during this peak

season. And then we bring attention to our shuttling, so you know when the garage is filled up. Check before you come into town, we're running free shuttles during that time. So park on the periphery, take one of the shuttles in and you won't have to worry about it and spend that \$100.00 downtown

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah take yourself to dinner.

Reuben Franklin:

What we want you to do is to come to dinner and spend that money in our historic district.

Melissa Wissel:

So if you're just now tuning in you're listening to *The Break Room* I'm Melissa Wissel communications director and Reuben Franklin is with us he's our assistant city manager we're talking about the recently established increase in illegal parking fines. Couple of things that you just touched on the first thing I want to remind folks. Remind me the footprint remind our listeners the footprint because I will say the reference I gave to where it happened to me was in my neighborhood which is not in the historic district doesn't mean that it wouldn't apply but this particular illegal fines increase is specific to downtown.

Reuben Franklin:

Yes great thank you for bringing that up. So through talking with the City Commission we did not go citywide with this illegal parking fine increase. We focused on the historic downtown area. So, the northern limit of this boundary is Old Mission Avenue the southern limit is South Street and then the 2 rivers, the Matanzas and the San Sebastian. So anything inside that boundary illegal parking was changed from \$35.00 to \$100.00 so when I say protect the neighborhoods those are the neighborhoods that we see impacted by spillover parking. When all the parking inventory in that historic district's taken up people start to go into the neighborhoods to park because they're within walking distance to the historic downtown.

Melissa Wissel:

Well and you mentioned the Star Circulator or maybe you didn't mention the Star Circulator. During the normal year if you will if you're parking at the parking garage you can use that Star Circulator to help you get around town. You mentioned the satellite parking, but you also touched on, but I want you to say it again is look before you come or you said I think you said. Check before you go so let's remind our listeners about that cool web page that we have, The Parking Finder.

Reuben Franklin:

Yes, so we've put a lot of time and effort in developing the Saint Augustine Parking Finder if you Google that it will come right up. Saint Augustine Parking Finder. so you can find real time parking availability in the downtown parking garage if you look on the right now you know it could say that it's 40% full, but that's real-time information. Then we also have likelihood of finding parking in other areas that we're using historical information so like the Fort parking lot the parking around the Plaza so you can actually look at it and use it and say I want to come downtown at 5:00 PM today and help plan your trip and you can actually click, punch in 5:00 PM and it will show you where there's likelihood of available parking downtown.

Melissa Wissel:

I did not know that.

Reuben Franklin:

Yeah

Melissa Wissel:

it's a it's like Waze, when you go into Waze, you tell it you want you want to get there tomorrow at 3:00 and it'll tell you when you should leave.

Reuben Franklin:

Exactly.

Melissa Wissel:

Really?

Reuben Franklin:

Yes so we're using what we're doing is we're using historical parking information when you go and punch a ticket in and pay for your time we're taking all of that and then we're looking at trends and so we're applying that to future you know time so we know when the peak times are. With Smart Saint Augustine, which is a project that's underway it's a \$15,000,000.00 federal grant part of that project is bringing real time parking so we'll get out of the historical trends and we'll actually start to populate the Saint Augustine Parking Finder with more real time parking in our parking lots and getting our shuttle lots set up and that as well. So keep checking on it and start to utilize the Saint Augustine Parking Finder to help plan your trips to downtown Saint Augustine.

Melissa Wissel:

And you can find it citystaug.com forward slash parking Finder we went with that as well. And also a reminder as locals, residents, county residents even, let's talk about the ParkNow card and the ParkStAug app. The card goes away September 30th so you got one more month.

Reuben Franklin:

That's right.

Melissa Wissel:

If you've got money on your card if any of you know we're talking about somebody you are not familiar with what we're talking about that's OK. But we want folks to also start using the ParkStAug app.

Reuben Franklin:

Yes.

Melissa Wissel::

Register

Reuben Franklin:

So yes so the the future is the Saint Augustine parking app if you don't have the app it's you can go and apply online and then we just track you by your license plate number, but there's no need to have the ParkNow Card anymore. The technology that was used was getting phased out anyway so we part of it was that we just didn't have the capability to continue that program on. I will say when they created it back in the day in 2005 to 2007 it it was something new not many people had done something like that where we had this park now card you could put money on and apply a discount for residents and locals so but we've taken that and we're not getting rid of the discount but we've transitioned it into the mobile app which is our passport app, ParkStAug. And then also we recognize not everybody wants to use the app so we've created another way which is that when you sign up we just track it by your license plate so you walk up to the kiosk and the pay station if you've been approved you punch in your license plate and it applies the resident discount.

Melissa Wissel:

And that does work in the parking garage.

Reuben Franklin:

And it works in the parking garage and it applies for all Saint John's county residents as well.

Melissa Wissel:

So you want to go to the website which is ParkStAug.com, register your vehicle you gotta upload your registration and some form of ID or proof of residency.

Reuben Franklin:

That's correct.

Melissa Wissel:

And once we approve you then there's just an annual renewal I think it's you have to upload it every year.

Reuben Franklin:

Yes. I don't believe they have to upload it every year, we don't wanna get into checking that every single year and this is we have seen quite an uptick of people applying for it so we've we have people working to try to get them approved as quickly as possible.

Melissa Wissel:

Right. Well we've almost run out of time we were also going to talk about construction on King Street. The King Street bridge construction, real quick, tell us about the King Street construction that we've been seeing. Are we almost finished with that? And then we'll just have to have you come back and tell us about the rest of it.

Reuben Franklin:

Yes, we're almost finished with it. 3 weeks to go, but the barrels and the detour should be coming down shortly. They finished the installation of the water main just for people listening that was our major artery, when you think of water main systems and it's kind of like your own circulatory system. That was a major artery vein for the city and for potable water so we put that under the river and that was to make way for the reconstruction of the bridge. We had to get our water main out of the way so they can come and deconstruct the bridge and build a new one in its place. and.

Melissa Wissel:

We can't wait for that.

Reuben Franklin:

Everybody can't wait for that but the nice thing about that is is the bridge is tentatively not going to be closed for this upcoming Nights of Lights. They will be closing the bridge after Nights of Lights which is a relief to I know city staff and and probably residents as well and businesses.

Melissa Wissel:

Yes. So yes a sigh of relief so. Well we should see the barrels be going away here in a couple of weeks we're going to get through Nights of Lights and then we'll have you come back and talk about King Street and what that's going to look like because that's that's going to be another major communication outreach for us.

Reuben Franklin:

That's correct yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Well alright well great information hopefully that answered everyone's questions and thank you for coming down to The Break Room again.

Reuben Franklin:

Anytime.

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 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*.