

The Break Room with Tara Bennie, Parking Enforcement Supervisor, October 7, 2025

Narrator:

You've tuned into 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:

Well, there have been some concern about the recent changes to the illegal parking fees downtown, so this week we are rebroadcasting The Break Room episode with Tara Bennie, So with that, thank you again for tuning in. Welcome to *The Break Room* thanks for tuning in. I'm Melissa Wissel communications director for the City of St. Augustine. The Commission has recently updated the parking ordinance and the changes go into effect as we head into our busiest time of year Nights of. Lights. I've invited our parking enforcement supervisor Tara Bennie back to join us. She's here in *The Break Room*. Tara, welcome back.

Tara Bennie:

Thanks for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

Last year in November kind of sort of about the same time we were talking about parking in general there wasn't a whole lot going on but this time we really do want to remind the listeners of the change. It's kind of not really anything different but we're really getting on that enforcement of illegal parking.

Tara Bennie:

Yes so for for those locals those tourists that are parking legally downtown there's going to be no change. What we find is when there's a large influx of visitors. Locals into downtown we get a lot of the questions of OK, this reserved space, I'd like to park here I know that it's reserved but how much is the ticket when we say \$35.00 you would be surprised at how many people say just go ahead and write the ticket. So we'd like to obviously avoid that. Avoid those yellow curbs, too close to driveways, blocking driveways so this was one way that we found to hopefully cause a deterrent to park illegally.

Melissa Wisse:

It's more it'll be more of pain in my wallet to be charged \$100.00. Then to go back over to the parking garage or maybe use the free shuttles.

Tara Bennie:

Right so folks are less likely when you tell them that there's \$100.00 citation or they see that it's posted \$100.00 when you take someone's reserved space or block someone's driveway or park on that yellow curb that's too close to the crosswalk we just want to alleviate those problems. The expired meter ticket because you were trying to get back to where your car was parked those are remaining \$25.00 so we're not raising those in any way.

Melissa Wissel:

That's the illegal. And it's funny too because uh you and I can chuckle about this, but people were getting really upset. Yeah the City's increasing their fine. Well, that's because we don't want you to park illegally so it's really just that like you said it's \$100.00 to deter the oh I'll just take the \$35.00 ticket.

Tara Bennie:

Right and move on I think that people thought it was across the board, and it's not. So we definitely want to make sure that folks realize that we're not raising all of our parking citations but for those that are willing to park illegally and they believe that \$35.00 is you know not a problem we would like for them to stop doing so.

Melissa Wissel:

Stop doing that and it is in the downtown core.

Tara Bennie:

Yes

Melissa Wissel:

That's the other piece of it that folks do need to realize you will still get those tickets for the illegal parking on yellow curbs and the exterior neighborhoods but in the downtown core historic district is where this is going to be put into place.

Tara Bennie:

Yes exactly so where we see that on these narrow streets downtown the influx of visitors and and locals that may park illegally that we really see a lot of the issues from old mission to South Street and then from essentially the water to US one and we are you will see the signs posted.

Tara Bennie:

Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

That's that's one of the reasons when we say we will be enforcing as we come into Nights of Lights we had a target date of October first. Be on the lookout but most importantly you need to be looking for the marked signage. We are going to be very clear about that.

Tara Bennie:

yes so we are going to freshen up the yellow curbs you know that that's something that we we do hear about is is making sure that they're they're visible so we're going to freshen up the yellow curbs that are already existing we are going to add \$100.00 fine signs so that folks know where this is happening. So you're going to see a lot more signage and then you'll also obviously see the yellow curbs that that are there for no parking.

Melissa Wissel:

And hopefully that that will be another it's very clearly marked.

Tara Bennie:

Yes

Melissa Wissel:

And you guys do take pictures

Tara Bennie:

we do

Melissa Wissel:

of the violations so and something else to note there as well I know when assistant city manager Ruben Franklin was bringing all of this up to the Commission, you can appeal .

Tara Bennie:

You can.

Melissa Wissel:

Is it an appeal?

Tara Bennie:

There's an appeals process so once you receive the citation or if you receive a citation there is the payment screen so there's a website there that you can go and you can actually look at those pictures that were taken you can look at the ticket itself and then in that portal there is an appeals process? So. If the mobility team reviews that appeal and they stand by the citation itself you know you can even go further and set a court hearing to go before our Saint Johns county judge for traffic court and appeal it further. So we have this great parking Finder website that will allow you as you're coming into downtown to pull up where parking may be available for you to occupy space, legal space, in some of our metered areas downtown. There's a like essentially a likelihood or possibility of it being full so it helps to guide you to the right location without you having to circle.

Melissa Wissel:

And it's CityStAug.com/parkingfinder. You can also do a Google search on Saint Augustine parking Finder but those those keywords you want is parking Finder and whether the spaces are available or not it's also handy because it just shows you where all of the. Parking is.

Tara Bennie:

Yes, exactly. So one thing that it will help you do is guide you to city metered areas. That way if you're concerned with OK I want to use my resident discount well this is one way to make sure that you're not going to try to go into a private parking lot where you're not going to get that resident discount this helps to guide you to our city locations.

Melissa Wissel:

Well and you've just queued us up perfectly for the next question which is how are we doing on our resident discount car registrations vehicle.

Tara Bennie:

So we've been very successful in 2019 we started inputting license plates for Saint Johns county residents into our system and that has grown. So we're at about 24,000 that our Saint Johns county residents that are entered we see them continuously coming in because as we've posted we've put it out there, thanks to you, the ParkNow card itself is going away so September 30th is the last day that the ParkNow card can be used any funds on it

Melissa Wissel:

So repeat that again.

Tara Bennie:

September 30th yes

Melissa Wissel:

This September 30th right around the corner.

Tara Bennie:

so September 30th yeah the last day that's the last day to use the card but you don't lose those funds so I think that's one thing that's important for folks to know is that you're not losing the money that's on that card you have until December 29th of 2028 so that's December 29th 2028 to request the refund and you do that at 50 Bridge Street. So you have to turn in the actual card itself so that we can read the funds on it and get a mailing address to cut that check and mail it back. It's also a good time to go ahead and either before then or while you're there fill out the resident discount if you haven't already done so. One thing that we really want to make sure that we impress is try to do that resident discount application whether it be online at our ParkStAug.com website under the link resident discount park now. Try to do it before you're planning on coming downtown because it is going to take us a little bit to get that in. At any given time we seem to have 500 in the queue with folks continuously applying so there are quite a few people applying.

Melissa Wissel:

Wow. But that's what we want.

Tara Bennie:

Exactly so it just means that it's successful. Once we get you in for the resident discount as you drive at the the park now card is obviously no longer needed you drive into the parking garage the camera system reads your license plate for discount you pay the attendant the \$3.00 instead of 20 when you park in any of our pay station areas you have the option to use the mobile app. Or feed the pay station itself we've put you in for discount so your license plate is going to give you that 50 Cent an hour instead of \$2.50 an hour. So it's quite a savings and you're automatically in the system so no more do you have to carry a card with money on it or figure out a way to get into downtown to charge money on a park now card. But one thing to remember that we do hear from the public is I've downloaded the mobile app I saved my license plate number the system. I figured would know that I'm a Saint Johns county resident that's not the case those so we do want to make sure that you complete that park that resident discount park now application whether it be in person or online because that's how we know to enter you into the back end system for the discount we are not connected to the DMV in anyway, so we do not automatically know until that resident gives us their information.

Melissa Wissel:

So if I excuse me if I'm a resident. And I download the mobile app and I put in my license plate number to my mobile app on my phone if I have not applied for the discount to the city through the park Saint Aug mobile website

Tara Bennie:

and been approved

Melissa Wissel:

and been approved.

Tara Bennie:

You're going to pay \$2.50 an hour yes

Melissa Wissel:

So ParkStAug.com is the web address I can, can I register through the mobile app or do I need to go online to the website? I have to upload my license plate registration something to prove that I'm a resident.

Tara Bennie:

Drivers license and vehicle registration so you can do it from your phone which is super easy but you would still have to go to the website so ParkStAug.com and then not in the mobile app itself.

Melissa Wissel:

OK. To register your car with the city.

Tara Bennie:

Exactly exactly and one thing to also note is that every single license plate so if you have multiple license plate numbers they all have to have a separate application so that we can get them entered because every 10 years Saint Johns county gives you a new license plate number so we'll just make sure that we update that as it happens.

Melissa Wissel:

Renewals do I renew every year.

Tara Bennie:

So every 2 years you will get an e-mail to the e-mail address that you set up on the application and that e-mail will just ask you if you're still Saint Johns county residents you will reach out to us let us know that you've received the the renewal notice and if your address is changed if your phone numbers changed any of that. And we'll go ahead and extend you further so there's nothing you need to do other than reach back out to us.

Melissa Wissel:

And it's free yes there's no there's no fee to register.

Tara Bennie:

no just free

Melissa Wissel:

free to register registered resident discounts \$3.00 to park in the garage instead of 20 and We're going to keep an eye on all those illegal parking don't want people to be doing that Watch out for your parking Finder mobile app or I'm sorry website what else?

Tara Bennie:

I think that covers it for yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah.

Tara Bennie:

we go into the holidays hopefully parking well getting a discount avoiding citations

Melissa Wissel:

excellent and then and then you can take Christmas off and relax super Tara, thank you for coming in and talking to us about all things parking we've got Denise over at the parking garage as well and we've got Todd who's managing mobility in the bigger scheme of things so you guys do a great job. Down at 50 Bridge. Meg of course and the other enforcement folks, see the minute you start mentioning one you gotta mention them all.

Tara Bennie:

Xavier keeps us all together thank goodness.

Melissa Wissel:

Yes he does and Chris and a couple of the other enforcement folks. Well thanks to the whole team.

Tara Bennie:

Thanks so much for having us.

Melissa Wissel:

Excellent. Hopefully this rebroadcast of The Break Room interview with Parking Supervisor Tara Bennie answers your questions about the changes to illegal parking fines downtown. And as always, thank you for tuning in. If you missed part of this broadcast and want to go back and listen from the beginning you can find us on your favorite podcasting app look for a complete listing this broadcast, previous broadcasts and all of the podcasting platforms at CityStAugRadio.com follow us on social to keep up with all of this parking information at CityStAug you'll find us on Facebook, Instagram, and X. Until next time, thanks for tuning in.

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*.