

The Break Room with Tara Bennie, Parking Supervisor, November 11, 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:

Nights of Lights is here. Light Up Night is November 15th and we've got lots of changes this year. It starts earlier and ends earlier, we've got more public bathrooms, more shuttles and major changes to parking downtown for our workforce and residents. Who better to talk to us about that Tara Bennie our Parking Enforcement Supervisor is back. Tara, welcome to *The Break Room*.

Tara Bennie:

Thank you for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

I realize you were here just back in September

Tara Bennie:

yes

Melissa Wissel:

You were talking about Park Now cards, refunds and automation, that's going OK?

Tara Bennie:

yes, yes it's going great

Melissa Wissel:

Now we're on to something bigger and better.

Tara Bennie:

Nights of Lights.

Melissa Wissel:

Lots of parking changes and people are really curious what's going on. What happened, I think people feel like this was a surprise.

Tara Bennie:

sure

Melissa Wissel:

But we've been talking about things all year in preparation. I'm going to let you, you kind of give us all the back story tell our listeners, they need to hear it from you, not from me.

Tara Bennie:

OK.

Melissa Wissel:

Take it away

Tara Bennie:

Yeah so We have been hearing from residents and the business community for the past year. So things started around last Nights of Lights. And everyone has been reaching out to Reuben Franklin, our assistant city manager, who plays a large role in our mobility department as he's been the head of the department for so long which by the way has has now changed. So we have merged with the community services department and Jaime Perkins is now our director. So we are lucky to have the knowledge and the outreach from both Jaime and Reuben to our business coalition and our neighborhood associations. So over the past year Reuben and then of course Jaime more recently have met with them and discussed what happened last year for nights of lights how can it how can it be changed? So this year it was decided that, I'll touch on the residents first. So this year it was decided that two neighborhood associations Flagler Model Land, so that's around the Carrera street Riberia Street area and SAUNA which is our Uptown, North City, Abbott Track area would be our test phases for Nights of Lights residential permit parking. You'll see I'm sure everyone's seen the signs popping up in these areas letting folks know that as of November 15th these residents will be obtaining free permits to park in their neighborhoods but it's going to alleviate the commuter vehicles wanting to see the lights and visit downtown from parking. and taking the spaces in these neighborhoods. So I think that this is a great opportunity for us to put this Nights of Lights parking into residential parking into play for our commuter vehicles to occupy the shuttle areas, the parking garage, locations to where when the residents come home they're able to park near their home. This then also turned into what about our workforce parking. This is the first time that we've done something like this. Now we've always had workforce parking in that we have a monthly parking garage pass. That anyone could take advantage of

Melissa Wissel:

Which is 30 dollars?

Tara Bennie:

It's 32 plus tax per month and that's for 7 days a week 24 hours a day. So what we're doing now is we're also putting into place the Granada lot. That location. Is the reserved parking spaces that sit on Granada street between Bridge Street and DeSoto Place. So that will be available. There's an application for it, for evenings 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM and then Saturdays and Sundays at a monthly fee for those that are working downtown. That same application also has the Flagler College Parking Garage, that's on Malaga Street. Flagler College we

have an agreement with them that while their students are out so from December 13th to January 4th there is a fee on that application that individuals can apply. First come, first serve basis to get a permit for that time frame and have a have another location that they would be able to park when downtown sees an influx of visitors. And then the 3rd location is going to be the Toques parking lot the Toques parking lot itself is for businesses. Managers of the businesses that can apply. They must have 50 or more employees for their business and they can complete that application and purchase a Minimum of 5 and a maximum of 10 passes for that lot. So no one business can monopolize the lot as a whole it is from maximum of 10 there are 47 spaces total so.

Melissa Wissel:

I want to talk about that one a little bit because some of the things that we've been hearing or that we hear about is but I'm you know I only have 2 employees and I my shop is right on Saint George street why do I have to park at Granada why can't I have one of those spots? And it really has more to do with the volume and the turnover ability

Tara Bennie:

Right so essentially what we're looking to do is to pull as many vehicles off the street as possible and we're seeing that for these larger businesses where folks are coming and going all day because it's more shift work we need to figure out where are we going to put them because you know as they're coming in later in the day it's the more difficult to replace that first driver with the second.

Melissa Wissel:

The I want to go back a little bit if you're just now tuning in, you're listening to *The Break Room* I'm Melissa Wissel communications director for the City of Saint Augustine. Tara Bennie is with us she is our parking enforcement supervisor taking on the challenge of implementing the resident and workforce parking for downtown it's kind of been a long time coming. In talking about it a lot this year with a lot of other changes for Nights of Lights. And we are here and it is happening. So, we're hoping to answer your questions here with this conversation. I want to go back, if you will, to the resident parking in the neighborhoods the downtown neighborhoods because what we were seeing I'm going to, let me see if I got this right, we want to protect the residential parking so that if I drive if I live downtown on one of those streets

Tara Bennie:

Lets say Rhode

Melissa Wissel:

Rhode, I go to work I come back someone 's parked there I now can't park because someone who doesn't belong there shall we say who doesn't have a permit is taking up that space so now as a resident I can't park so we really want is that that visitor to not park on Rhode but to go use the shuttle

Tara Bennie:

Use the shuttle or the parking garage

Tara Bennie:

Yes, either one of those that would be available. And this year being our first year one thing I want to I want to mention is I think something that's incredibly important is that whether you're a business or a resident that you really reach out to either your Neighborhood Association or the business coalition and make sure that you're active in that and knowledgeable as far as those individuals. As they're speaking on the business coalition for the businesses or the Neighborhood Association is speaking for the residents they're they're relaying the information also that you're feeling that you're seeing this year. I think that's important. I know that Reuben and Jaime I had mentioned both of them. Reuben Franklin our assistant city manager and Jaime Perkins our community services director at both of them are extremely interactive with both of those whether it be the neighborhoods or the Business community. And the feedback that they are given is really going to affect what happens next year. What do we take from what we're doing this year and replay again next year

Melissa Wissel:

Well and Reuben and our city manager David Birchim have been out all year round talking to neighborhood associations. The business coalition like you mentioned the chamber

organizations that sort of thing if you live in a neighborhood and you haven't heard from them and your neighborhood wants to hear from them you can call Tara, you can call me ,you can call the communications department and we will get something scheduled for you to hear from them or for them to come and talk to your group. One of the other components I want to make sure folks realize is the neighborhood sorry the the residential parking permit that we're doing right now that's only for nights of lights.

Tara Bennie:

It's only.

Melissa Wissel:

this isn't this isn't happening this isn't permanent

Tara Bennie:

no no this is not so this is only from November 15th for the Nights of lights residential November 15th through January the 11th and then the Toques parking lot is a permanent fixture now so we're moving away from the metered spaces and that will permanently be a reserved location or reserved lot. The Granada lot again is going to be permanent so that will be even outside of the nights of lights. The Flagler College Garage those dates are very specific because obviously their students will be coming back to class so December 13th 2025 through January 4th 2026 is the only amount of time that we have those 250 passes.

Melissa Wissel:

In the Granada lot is effectively behind City Hall.

Tara Bennie:

Yes

Melissa Wissel:

and it's an evening, overnight pass if you will 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM

Tara Bennie:

Exactly so that lot is occupied during the daytime by the Lightner museum occupants so from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM it's already reserved so these passes will specifically be evening and weekend passes so 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM and then all day Saturday all day Sunday

Melissa Wissel:

Now let's talk that that ugly word illegal so if you are parked there not during your permitted hours, it's \$100.00 ticket.

Tara Bennie:

it is it's \$100.00 parking fine so be be cautious and make sure you know what day is it as far as especially if you normally work weekends and you come in and on a weekday and be mindful of that because our parking tickets as we have discussed have gone up to \$100.00. For illegal parking but again that is only addressing the illegal parking that's if you were in a location that you were never supposed be.

Melissa Wissel:

And the \$100.00 fine and I'll also just mention in general the signage be on the lookout because if you haven't seen it it's out there.

Tara Bennie:

Yes yes so we.

Melissa Wissel:

Signs.

Tara Bennie:

We have yeah I think what happens is folks tend to get used to an area they drive and they park every day be mindful of where you're going because the location that you normally park may have changed maybe for a short term but it may have changed .So, look for signs we have A-frames, we have signs on on posts. So, monitor the area that you normally park and make sure it's somewhere you can still park

Melissa Wissel:

and long time coming all of this.

Tara Bennie:

It is something that's been a long term request so this is a first go at workforce parking and nights of lights residential and hopefully we see that it helps alleviate some of the problems for parkers for our business and residents

Melissa Wissel:

yeah I know it's it's anything that's change goes through growing pains

Tara Bennie:

It will be difficult for a little bit, but hopefully that this will be a good thing for everyone. And if it's not a good thing you know make sure to let us know that you know what is your recommendation

Melissa Wissel:

and be patient and be kind you guys are doing the best you can it's a lot it's it's a number one issue really I mean it's. It's huge and so we're we're jumping in feet first And you field all those phone calls. Is there a phone number or an e-mail parking@citystaug.com

Tara Bennie:

yes please please reach out to us parking@citystaug.com you can also reach out to us our telephone number is 904 825-1090. with the amount of phone calls that are coming in I definitely recommend that in order for us to get back to you in a timely manner to e-mail that so that we can

Melissa Wissel:

yeah there's a couple of you that get that e-mail

Tara Bennie:

yes

Melissa Wissel:

so it's not just you answering those emails you got a team. Thanks so much for coming down and talking lots of information good luck and good luck to everybody for Nights of Lights this year

Tara Bennie:

thanks thank you.

Melissa Wissel:

If you missed part of this broadcast and want to go back and listen from the beginning you can find this and your past episodes of *The Break Room* at cityStAugRadio.com look for us on Spotify apple podcasts and more follow us on social you'll find us on Facebook Instagram and X our handle is @CityStAug 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 Saint Augustine join us each week as the city's communications director Melissa Wissel has in depth conversations with the people who

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