

The Break Room with Jacob Webber, Grants Administrator and Eric Mauldin, Harbormaster, December 2, 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:

Welcome to *The Break Room* thanks for tuning in. If you're a boater in Saint Augustine and you frequent the lighthouse park boat ramp and the floating dock then you've probably already seen the work being done over there so who better to tell us what's happening than Jacob Webber the city 's grants administration coordinator he's the one responsible for getting the funding to pay for it and Eric Mauldin the city 's harbor master he's the project manager and the one in charge of getting the work done. Welcome back to you both.

Jacob Webber:

Thanks

Eric Mauldin:

thanks very much.

Melissa Wissel:

We got a double whammy today so let's start with the money. Jacob give us a little bit of the background we've had you on before talking about some of the other work and the grants programs that you're able to administer how did we get the money and what do we do with it how does all that come together for us.

Jacob Webber:

And so right now we have funding through the Florida and the navigation district FIND and the Saint Augustine port waterway and beach district which we kind of call PORT. We put that application in last year to get this funding in anticipation for these repairs for hurricane damage from Helene and Milton which affected. The boat ramp on that dock there and then also the Marina docks.

Melissa Wissel:

And OK so we're in we're we're at the end of 2025 and you just said hurricanes Helene and Milton right hurricane yeah Helena so those were in 2024 let's go back over a little bit how the funding process works you mentioned the port waterway and FIND but then we've also got some FEMA money so how does that. How does all that work?

Jacob Webber:

Right. so basically we go through an application process with FIND and then PORT kind of steps in and they offer a match to whatever funding we receive or vice versa kind of depends on what the application is what kind of project it is. In this example PORT would be funding 75% of the project and FIND would be funding 25% now like you said hurricanes were last year we're almost 2026 so normally we'll get funding from places like FEMA for big time disasters like Helene, Milton. But that funding takes a while to get they have a longer process. And you have to go through a couple more hoops right to get that and show your you know damage and whatnot and what it's going to take to get back to your pre storm condition so with FIND and PORT money allows us to mobilize quickly get out there and repair while we still work in the back end. On any FEMA funds for long term funding and.

Melissa Wissel:

So when we talk about getting the FEMA funds we were talking before this. About reimbursements so we essentially then reimburse FIND and or PORT depending on how much we get the money from FEMA. The goal is ultimately to get the money from FEMA.

Jacob Webber:

Right yeah the goal is to get the money from FEMA you know so long term project and it's really important in the grants world that you don't duplicate benefits when you have funding for one project unless it's a match or you're you're working with those funders. You don't get the same grant for that same project so when we get that funding eventually from FEMA you know working with them on trying to get it then when we get that we can return what was given us from FIND and from PORT back to them.

Melissa Wissel:

And it just makes this good stewards of that financial backing that we're not going to double dip as it were no double dipping.

Jacob Webber:

Right it shows that we're responsible we're keeping track of things and we're doing our best to be you know the best financial managers write the best stewards as you put it of their funds. And then it opens it up to you know anything we return can then get reused for any other projects that are out there other hurricane projects you know in the state potentially or just any other projects that help whatever mission we're working on.

Melissa Wissel:

Got you and Eric I'm going to switch over to the operations welcome welcome back to *The Break Room*. You've been put in charge of overseeing the operations of this does this have to go out. Beforehand and know how do we know how much you're asking. For and maybe. Maybe I've introduced you but I'm still back on the money scene.

Eric Mauldin:

Yeah we'll uh we'll create a scope of work based on the damages that each site and then go out for solicitation for bids and depending on what contractor is awarded we'll see the price from that point and then that'll get entered into FEMA.

Melissa Wissel:

And the project started last week we're hoping it's going to end this week anything. I mean not that what itself on the way.

Eric Mauldin:

Yeah it it's on schedule to be completed first week of December it may already be completed at this point but hopefully it is.

Melissa Wissel:

OK. Right.

Eric Mauldin:

And then uh yeah once they're done with that they're going to move on over to the Marina and start that project.

Melissa Wissel:

And just so everybody knows the dock was safe.

Eric Mauldin:

Yeah the docs being safe this whole time. Some of the wood components and rods were compromised but they weren't in a way where it was be any hazard to any public using the dock. We have monitored it for the whole year and if there's any point where we had got any additional weather to make further damages we want to shut the dock down luckily this season we didn't see any of that hurricane damage in addition to what we had already experienced. So the dock was still able to be used for the public.

Melissa Wissel:

OK. And it was just the floating dock though

Eric Mauldin:

Yes correct just the floating dock.

Melissa Wissel:

there is an impact but there may have been so if you've been over there and you're not able to get in down the ramp maybe there was equipment in the way or who knows what but that's What that was all? About and will they will they repair what's there will they replace it with a whole new.

Eric Mauldin:

No it's all the concrete your new floats are staying the pilings are staying it's all the wood structural members and the 3 rods on the dock

Melissa Wissel:

Circling back on an on other projects that you guys have done in the past we've still got some time how did the derelict vessels. Go I'm not sure if we've circled back since that project and we're you both involved in that.

Jacob Webber:

Yeah. One as well yeah we definitely were.

Eric Mauldin:

Yeah they're they're not my backyard so I'm definitely involved but Jacob's handles most of all the administration for it yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

He pays for it

Jacob Webber:

yeah Eric is kind of the eyes on the water you know yeah he gives me good feedback on what's going on when you know I'm not out there he has the boat so it's easy that kind of flag him down be like hey what's what's going on but?

Melissa Wissel:

How did we do on that project?

Jacob Webber:

Great yeah the 10 vessels that we discussed earlier in the year all gone all destroyed and. And we've been moving forward so chances are by the end of the year we're looking at 16:00 removals total. We since the 10 have done 4 more vessels and 2 floating docks so we've been busy trying to make these waterways safe and yeah just it's great partnership with Eric trying to catch these things and then obviously law enforcement jumps in and they kind of keep us in the loop like hey we got another thing coming up or not and so It was great.

Melissa Wissel:

so I'm going to I'm going to put Eric on the spot a little bit when you say law enforcement so I saw a press release come out. The county are.

Eric Mauldin:

Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

We can you give us a little bit that was.

Eric Mauldin:

Yes and county has yeah they have a dashboard that the Saint Johns County Sheriff's Office Sergeant Aaron Braddock developed and it it allows all of the different agencies municipal state local agencies to kind of have their own central database to be able to see who has already started the derelict process on this boat or where it's at in that process as well that way they're not stepping over each other and they can all be on the same page and that helps to speed that process up to where then they give us the removal paperwork for the city to remove it if it's within. The port district

Melissa Wissel:

OK very good. Are we do we? So they show us when we have stuff. As well.

Eric Mauldin:

Yeah yeah they do Yep and that daily boat viewer is on the municipal Marina 's web page as well down at the bottom so there is a link to that for the public to be able to view.

Melissa Wissel:

Sorry OK. OK so if I see a boat out there that I think is derelict I can go to that dashboard and see if it's being addressed or not.

Eric Mauldin:

Yes yeah you can do you can go to that dashboard see where it's at pictures that are updated on it it may or not may not be real time for it's a different part that the law enforcement sees versus the public but any questions they can reach out to the Marina or law enforcement to get a more up to date.

Melissa Wissel:

Very cool on our website on your website wow I'm impressed that's awesome.

Eric Mauldin:

Yes on our. It's there.

Melissa Wissel:

I'm going to also go ahead and chat about another upcoming project I know we're branching out a little bit from the floating dock over at the ramp but we also mentioned once that's finished we're going to move over to the Marina let's go ahead and talk about that one while we're here too so the Marina is that also FIND, PORT waterway?

Eric Mauldin:

Yeah kind of the same type of project just. At a much. Larger scale the boat ramp dock is a small dock versus the Marina so once they're done with the lighthouse part will be over to the Marina we are doing some mitigation over there. Couple of hurricanes back we had replaced all of the pilings that you guys see that was one mitigation effort now the hurricane sense has damaged different areas so we're looking at those areas now to strengthen those up with larger wood wailers we're actually installing some steel plates in between the wood wailers kind of create the dock mortar rigid and. That some severe weather.

Melissa Wissel:

So it doesn't have that waving effect.

Eric Mauldin:

Yeah yeah that way you know you wanted to move with the waves in a sense a little bit but not too much so we're going to try and subdue that down a little bit and see how that works.

Jacob Webber:

And that just kind of going off that kind of mitigation part that's kind of why the FEMA process is a bit. Longer they kind of split up their funding so they have public assistance and then they have hazard mitigation so we have to go get the funding for the general project get back to precondition you know and then after that kind of in the same kind of process once they determine OK you got this much funding for your just get your docs back

to normal. You need to talk to us about your mitigation options what are you thinking about strengthening these docs what are you going to do and so Eric 's again been my. Super super helpful and giving me those details and going to FEMA and explaining to them this is what we're working on.

Melissa Wissel:

So the floating dock you said is public safety public assistance.

Jacob Webber:

Public Assistance.

Melissa Wissel:

And is it because of the what that dock's purpose is versus mitigation is basically mitigation like you said is bringing it back to the way it was. Or making it stronger.

Eric Mauldin:

Yeah making it stronger yeah you know we talk about a lot how much this stock does get damaged by storm year after year so but each year we do do these mitigating factors to strengthen it just each year we it finds that the next weakest point so then we mitigate that and eventually hopefully we have a fully hardened dock that can sustain some of these storms.

Melissa Wissel:

Is it the breakwater only or is it?

Eric Mauldin:

For this one yes it's the breakwater only we have a few other small damages and other areas but as majority is all just on. The breakwater dock.

Melissa Wissel:

And the breakwater dock is if you're driving across the bridge and you look down over at the Marina the breakwater is the long one that runs parallel.

Eric Mauldin:

To the bridge.

Melissa Wissel:

So when you replace the pilings. Can you tell me how much higher the the purpose of replacing the pilings was to have more height exposed correct?

Eric Mauldin:

Yes so it's a different material as well so we had concrete 18 inch concrete pilings those will flex some in a storm but they tend to crack down at the mud line and some of the storms they cracked a little too much and failed so now we went to much larger steel piling. And those went 5 foot further embedded into the ground and then 5 foot higher as well because. Not only get that surge of water you get the wave action on top of it so you don't want the dock itself to actually jump over the pilings at all so we went taller as well and those will flex with the storm but they won't actually crack like the concrete is a little much last much much longer.

Melissa Wissel:

It's a lot. Of a lot of activity and not to put too fine a point on it but it doesn't take a hurricane to create wear and tear on the docks.

Eric Mauldin:

No no I mean nor'easter season winter season I mean just exactly just everyday boat traffic and the motion of the water you know it's constantly wearing down at the dock.

Melissa Wissel:

And talking about big boats we've got do we have some big ones coming in this season that we can look for hopefully they. Can all lit up with pretty lights?

Eric Mauldin:

Yeah I mean daily we're in our transient season since the beginning of November and it lasts throughout January then picks back up in the spring but every day we're having a 30,40,50 boat turnover every single day though you'll see a bunch of yachts either in the early morning or late in evenings middle of the day the marina looks a little empty because everyone's out travelling but right before sunset you'll see a full Marina each day.

Melissa Wissel:

keeps you guys busy yeah and anything else to add on that with the with any of those projects Jacob what else have you got?

Jacob Webber:

You know funding wise it's as far as FEMA goes and Milton right we're we're very close to kind of finishing up our funding package with Milton I got one more project we call it cat a which is kind of reimbursement for any sort of debris removal that we did and so once that's tied up we get to submit this big package to the state. And state reviews it and then they send it back to the Fed and then it goes back to the state and then it comes to us and so that's kind of exciting we'll see bunch of reimbursements fingers crossed right coming down for all that Milton damage and work that we did. We also have you know it's kind of a teaser I suppose we have the lion project coming up very soon funded by FDOT that should be coming right after Nights of Lights so I'd say enjoy your time with the lions you know they are going to come back but we're going to make sure they're gone just while FDOT does their project there on the seawall give them a little Polish you know make sure they're nice and right and then bring them back once it's a safe environment for them to be back.

Melissa Wissel:

OK well you're keeping busy keeping us tidied up and you mentioned the package so that closes Milton so when you push out when you request that money you have to put all the all the projects you want are in the package

Jacob Webber:

Yeah so it's just this package and it kind of depends on what the damage was Milton was relatively a smaller storm with some of the other ones in the past that we've had but that package gets kind of finished up it gets then sent and obligated and once it's obligated we kind of just work on hey we need reimbursements for XYZ now that we now that we know we have the funds.

Melissa Wissel:

Excellent. Well thank you both for coming that's it we're out of time thanks appreciate all the hard work and and the good stuff that's going on in our waterways so.

Eric Mauldin:

Thanks for having us.

Melissa Wissel:

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Narrator:

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