

The Break Room with Xavier Pellicer, Mobility Manager,

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Narrator:

You're 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 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*. I'm Melissa Wissel, Communications Director for the City of Saint Augustine. Thanks for tuning in. We're taking a break this week from all the construction projects happening around the city and taking time to catch up with Xavier Pellicer, the city's Mobility Manager, who is about to step into retirement. X, welcome back.

X Pellicer:

Glad to be here. I'm a short-timer now.

Melissa Wissel:

You are. By the time this airs, since we do record early, you'll officially be retired.

X Pellicer:

Yes. This show will come out next week. Officially, tomorrow is my last day—Friday.

Melissa Wissel:

Wow.

X Pellicer:

On one hand, it's very exciting. On the other, it's really weird. I've worked all my life, so now I'm asking myself, "What am I going to do?" We'll get into that in a bit.

Melissa Wissel:

We'll talk about retirement shortly, but first I want to go back a bit. I was racking my brain, thinking about who to have on, it's always my question on Monday morning. And I thought, oh I have to have X come on. You've been on several times talking mostly about mobility, but that's not where you started. Tell us about your road here. You started in 2011 as a construction inspector.

X Pellicer:

A lot of the locals will know, I was born and raised here in Saint Augustine. I had my own engineering and surveying business for about 20 years, but the bottom dropped out around 2009–2010. I'll give you a tidbit of information here. I applied for the same position Reuben Franklin did, and he beat me out. So I came in second to Reuben on that one. About a year or year and a half later I came in second again to Bobby Jo Manning for another position.

Then Bob McEnroe, who worked as a construction inspector. He had multiple different positions. He had lung cancer and he was going to be out for about a half a year. Martha Graham, who was Public Works Director at the time, and she called me and asked if I was still mad at her for the positions she gave to Reuben and Bobby Jo. I told her I understood. She said they had a need and asked if I could step in temporarily to fill that void. I said yes, I can do it.

Melissa Wissel:

Waited for the perfect opportunity.

X Pellicer:

At first, I was stepping in as a temporary staffing. I wasn't technically an employee, but then Bob officially retired, and in 2011 I became an employee of the City of Saint Augustine.

Melissa Wissel:

Third time's the charm. You've been here ever since, and your position has changed quite a bit. You're an engineer by trade. Walk us through some of those projects. You worked as a construction inspector and engineer. How did you end up as Mobility Manager?

X Pellicer:

When I started, the Mobility Manager position didn't exist. I'm a University of Florida graduate—go Gators. I know Melissa is a die hard Seminole fan. We always joke about that. Good natured ribbing at each other. And then I became a licensed professional civil engineer in Florida. So I came on with the city as a construction inspector and worked my way through various positions.

Eventually, the Mobility Manager job became a thing. At the time it was the Mobility Coordinator. Martha Graham said I have another need here, I need to fill this void, this Mobility Coordinator job. I said I am fully capable of doing that. I'm not just drinking water, water and sewer. I can do mobility and parking, transit, buses, shuttles, and eventually the STAR Circulator, something that started up just about three years ago. That was a new endeavor here at the city.

At that time, Reuben Franklin was the Mobility Manager. I was the coordinator, working under him. As Reuben moved up—first to Public Works Director and then Assistant City Manager. Once Reuben moved into those positions, I stepped into the Mobility Manager role. There's been a lot of cool things, I remember way back when we first started in 2016-2017 shuttling

Melissa Wissel:

You've overseen a lot of growth in that area.

X Pellicer:

Absolutely. When we first started shuttling around 2016–2017. I had very minimal help and we were creating the wheel. A lot of the residents were challenging how much it was costing. They nickel and dined me on every thousand that we were spending. I had to justify every little thing. But within the first year or two, we proved it worked, and people liked it. And since then it's grown a lot.

Now with funding from FDOT about three years ago, we evolved into the STAR Circulator. That's the little downtown loop. During this past Nights of Lights season, we expanded service to Saint Augustine Beach, and it was a huge success.

Melissa Wissel:

That's got to be exciting for you. Particularly as you're heading into retirement. The circulator, the shuttles, people were skeptical about is this going to work. Is it going to be a

need? Not only now is it a need, but it's become part of our transit system. That beach circulator was, "oh we'll do that someday." And now you've seen it come to fruition.

X Pellicer:

One thing that really helped on that was the funding from FDOT. They basically provided 100% of the funding for that. So that is what really enabled us to kick it in. More recently, after traffic challenges during Nights of Lights last year, with the commotion over all the people, traffic and overloading, The city reached out to the county for additional funding for this past season. A majority of the funding went toward expanding shuttle service. We greatly expanded the number of days we were shuttling. Todd Clark has taken over the shuttling part of it. I leaned on him for him to handle this since I had plenty of other stuff to do. He did a really good job of that.

We shuttled nearly 70,000 inbound passengers—that's about 140,000 trips total when you count return rides. That was just passengers on the buses. That's a lot of people.

Melissa Wissel:

That's incredible.

X Pellicer:

We've done a lot of unique things in the past several years. We were really building until 2019. Then COVID hit in 2020 and 2021 and things slowed things down, but by 2022 everything came back strong. But in 2023 it really built and especially 2024 we just got slammed.

Melissa Wissel:

You're leaving behind a great legacy. Whoever your successor will be. Before we go, I want to talk about one of your favorite projects, if I may say, is Spanish Street.

X Pellicer:

That is fairly recent, not too long ago. We rehabilitated Spanish Street from Kenner Street to Orange Street. That was really a second phase of the original project. Reuben headed up the original Hypolita Street, the southern portion of Spanish Street. And then I took on the next phase of that which was continuing Spanish street all the way up to Orange Street.

It was exciting and very challenging. It required every skill I had—engineering, local knowledge, and communication with residents and businesses. The goal was to keep everyone happy and keep the project moving. Any little things that would pop up, I would just take them on myself.

Melissa Wissel:

You're very calming. You just take it in stride. You go back to the office to think about it, and then reach back out.

X Pellicer:

The biggest thing on that was just to keep everybody happy. Keep the project moving. Keep it progressing and keep everybody happy. And that was challenging at times but it finished up everybody was happy with it and it's a really that's kind of a feather in my cap if you will and that you know there's been several different projects but that's the big one.

Melissa Wissel:

Well and it's a beautiful project and I think it's really kind of a role it's a it's a model for other projects I think that I've heard some of the commissioners talking about that was a great success it went from vehicular to pedestrian residential there's no cars down there now and I know a lot of the mobility efforts that you have started are going to continue on. You've set a great precedent. Before we sign off, let's talk retirement. You mentioned, "what am I going to do?"

X Pellicer:

I've got plenty to keep me busy. My wife will keep me busy. She works from home, so that will be interesting. I'll be piddling on things around the house and she'll be in there working, so it will be interesting to see how that goes. I've got a long list of projects—cleaning the garage, cleaning closets—things I always avoided because I was "too busy."

Melissa Wissel:

Now you don't have an excuse.

X Pellicer:

Now I don't have an excuse. I'll have to dabble into that a little bit.

But the really exciting part is grandkids. We have a son and a daughter. They're both married now and living in St. Johns County so they're not too far. My daughter and her husband, they had a little baby boy, he's about eight months old. I used to joke around with my with my wife and everything or with everybody saying when I got married I was number one. And then my son came along and I was bumped down to number 2 and then Kaylie came along and I was bumped down to number 3 and then Kaylee 's our first grandkid then bumped down the number 4 and now my son and his wife Bethany they are expecting twin boys this June. I'm getting bumped down 5-6 real quick. Next thing you know my wife will kick me out the door. She'll keep me around because she'll want help taking care of the grandkids.

Melissa Wissel:

And taking some trips and just getting to enjoy life.

X Pellicer:

Yes. My daughter's already lining me up for babysitting. I haven't even retired yet.

Melissa Wissel:

You don't even have to check your calendar now. You're going to get up in the morning and say what am I what am I scheduled to do today everybody's got your time X, we wish you all the best in retirement. We'll miss having you on The Break Room. Keep in touch. Thank you for all of your hard work, all these years and the legacy you leave behind.

X Pellicer:

It's been cool. A lot of really great experiences with all my coworkers. and just friends throughout Saint Augustine. I always want to be an ambassador for the city of Saint Augustine and so that's what I always strive to do and I and I'll continue to do that but I just don't want I won't be doing that as a as an employee of the city anymore, but I'm still around. I'm not going anywhere. I was born and raised here and I'm staying.

Melissa Wissel:

We'll look forward to seeing you around town. Thanks, X. If you missed part of this broadcast and want to go back and listen from the beginning. You can catch it on any of your favorite podcasting apps be sure to follow us on social you'll find us on Facebook Instagram and X @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 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.