VIbrant Spaces Podcast - City of Kansas City Melissa & Jared

[00:00:00] **Emily Craven:** Thank you so much, Melissa and Jared, for

[00:00:01] **Emily Craven:** joining us. Thanks for having us. We're excited to be here.

[00:00:05] **Tim Souza:** Happy to be here. We're excited to have you guys with us today.

[00:00:08] **Emily Craven:** All the way from Kansas City, we have heard some wonderful and interesting innovations and examples out of Kansas City from your other colleagues in different departments around the city.

[00:00:20] **Emily Craven:** But we're really excited today to chat to you about what you are doing with in the city itself. How you were changing hearts and minds with your unique brand of creativity and muscle. And I'll let people guess who the muscle is in this relationship. I'll be curious. Maybe we'll put those in the comments.

[00:00:38] **Emily Craven:** But first off, I wanted to ask, Jared, what was it like for you growing up in Kansas city as an artist, right? What has been the biggest, change that you have witnessed in the community that you grew up in?

[00:00:50] **Jared Horman:** Yeah Kansas City, as Kansas City historically, has always been a city that has supported artists.

[00:00:55] **Jared Horman:** It's the headquarters of Hallmark is here, and there's a lot of folks that come here, find a role in a [00:01:00] bigger creative space, and then decide to make, call this home, and plant roots. So there's a lot of entrepreneurship that's led through our, through arts in the area, and so growing up around that, there was always Artists doing very cool things.

[00:01:11] **Jared Horman:** And I remember I actually grew up in a small town outside of Kansas city, but Kansas city was the core artist inspiration for me. And so when I would come here, it seeing the work that folks were doing is what inspired me that, Hey, I could actually consider doing this for a full time career. So that initial impact definitely shaped my trajectory to become an artist to study in Missouri and to follow the footsteps of folks that had continued to create, shape Kansas City as a place that artists thrive.

[00:01:39] **Tim Souza:** So you are carrying that banner, that legacy banner of art forwarded in a really crazy way. And I'm so excited to get into it. But before we do, Melissa, you've moved to Kansas City from New Jersey, and from Jersey City specifically. That change had to be a fascinating one. What place slash location in Kansas City is the most special to you since moving there and why?..

[00:01:59] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** [00:02:00] So it was quite a transition. Thank you for acknowledging that. I'm still dealing with it three years in. Lifelong New Yorker. Living in Kansas City has been amazing and wild. And I will say when I first moved here I cried every day for the first three months because the grass was so green and the sky was so blue.

[00:02:21] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And so I don't know if there's a particular place that I can pinpoint, but the energy and the vibe of just, Living in an area that there is green grass and blue sky all around, and also major metropolitan lifestyle is staggering. And I definitely missed it the first few years of my life, but I'm here now, so I'm having a great time.

[00:02:46] **Tim Souza:** Do you feel that's like adding years back to your life? A hundred percent. A hundred percent. For sure. So there's your favorite part. Melissa gets to be around more. We love that. Yeah. So if we had, I guess the last question I want to ask the both of you as [00:03:00] we get started here is if you had a giant billboard with you, where you can put metaphorically anything on it, any anywhere in this city or on the planet message, would you want to

[00:03:14] **Tim Souza:** I'm sure

[00:03:17] **Jared Horman:** So I think for me, and this, I think, also ties into the work that we do and maybe some of our process is that I probably wanted to just say perfection is the enemy of excellence, and I think that really comes into play that a lot of the projects we're doing, a lot of the new things we're trying to start and trying to launch folks are, there, there's questions of cool, can you build all of this process and build the 15, 20 year plan?

[00:03:41] **Jared Horman:** And right now, we're not trying to build the perfect plan. We're trying to do the cool thing and get it out there. And then we'll continue to pilot it and figure out what the solution is in the long run. And we don't really want the requests to have the perfect solution to prevent us from being able to move forward.

[00:03:57] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Yeah, I think for me I'm going to give you one [00:04:00] that one that I have, and then one that Jared gave me. You probably don't remember this but it was a couple weeks ago. So my, the one that I always go to whenever I need something to like for a greeting card, or like when you're at somebody's wedding, you have to write, I always write, there is no moment other than this one.

[00:04:16] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Because there is no moment other than this one. And if it goes with everything that kind of Jared and I are working so hard on, it's like, Who else but us, right? This is the moment we are the people. There is no moment other than this one. So that's what I would put, but the one that Jared gave me was about joy.

[00:04:33] **Jared Horman:** Okay. Okay.

[00:04:34] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** So you tell it, can you tell

[00:04:35] **Jared Horman:** Which

[00:04:37] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** I think I said, I was frustrated, I think. And we were work trying to come up with something. And I think I said something like there's no spectacle in joy. Is that I say something like that. And joy is,

[00:04:51] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** I

[00:04:51] **Jared Horman:** think I said something like joy is a valid emotion as well. Something along the lines of joy in art, joy in creativity, joy in our work is equally as [00:05:00] valid as pain and suffering and the folk, the things that folks also work through with art. But also art can just bring joy and that can be enough.

[00:05:09] **Jared Horman:** And that is a completely valid and important experience to share with the world.

[00:05:15] **Emily Craven:** I love that a hundred percent. That's how I view art and stories. But also I think how a lot of people, when they think about vibrancy, they're thinking about. Solving the problem and they don't think to themselves, maybe just by providing people a little bit of joy it makes that ability to solve a problem so that much easier and that much easier to take that on.

[00:05:40] **Emily Craven:** And I love asking this question. I love it that we asked this question about billboards because it really sets the vibe for who we're talking to. today. Like this just sets the perfect vibe for the work that you're doing because it's super innovative what you have been building in Kansas city.

[00:05:57] **Emily Craven:** Like there, you have been [00:06:00] Essentially trying to pull the city together in a creative collaboration and this kind of unique aesthetic through not only creativity but codes, right? Like policy and and not just through those dollars. And I know this has a couple of unique components.

[00:06:13] **Emily Craven:** We have this. This top down approach and change from Melissa as the, as a deputy city manager and then Jared as that kind of transformational city professional who kind of advocates for that innovation. So Melissa, how have you leveraged your position as the deputy city manager to I want to say kick up dust to build this impressive kind of cultural structural shift.

[00:06:38] **Emily Craven:** And how did you end up bringing Jared, who is a self confessed just artist into the mix?

[00:06:46] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** I think part of the reason that I came to Kansas City or was invited to come to Kansas City was because of my experience in communication in general. And there was A real disparate [00:07:00] approach before I got here pretty much everybody was just doing whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted, and not really, there wasn't any real vision or directions, so I realized pretty quickly that I needed to unify.

[00:07:15] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** The vision of what city communications could be or what I wanted it to be, or what would add value to the residents here. And in, in thinking about how to reshape it and, creating. A unified vision and articulating what things are Kansas City and what are not Kansas City Chiefs being one.

[00:07:37] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** But also indoor outdoor lifestyle, right? There's certain things that Kansas City just is comfortable with and is just a part of Kansas City's identity. Blue sky, green grass, that's another one. So anyway, just really looking at and understanding who Kansas City is and then building a communication strategy around it.

[00:07:54] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** So that was where I, my starting place was. And then when I realized that I didn't, I [00:08:00] don't, I'm not, I can do words and systems, but I'm not a visual artist and my visual aesthetic isn't built on, I can't project at like, how do I imagine something will look? I can't really do that really well.

[00:08:14] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** So I knew I needed a partner who could be that creative inspirational. collaborator, muse all of those things. And I didn't actually mean to hire Jared to be the creative director. I meant to hire him to be the lead designer, but it came, it happened very quickly that I understood how much value Jared's creativity and vision was going to be towards creating a new environment for how, Cities can communicate with their residents and beyond.

[00:08:43] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And so I just pushed Jared into a role that he didn't necessarily know what it was. And now we're sitting here talking to you guys.

[00:08:53] **Tim Souza:** That's beautiful. And I think that I love that dynamic where you both just laugh because there's obviously I'm sure there was a lot of [00:09:00] conversations around that, but I think I'm going to put Melissa on the spot and maybe Jared this is fun for you to hear why Jared specifically as you identified this person who is going to fill these gaps, why Jared,

[00:09:10] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** I have to just be honest.

[00:09:13] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Okay. So if this comes out in a way that seems harsh, I'm just going to, it.

[00:09:18] **Tim Souza:** Go for it. I'm difficult

[00:09:19] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** to work with. I come from a place that's very aggressive. And like I said, lifelong new yorker, we communicate differently. And so I know that I'm difficult to work with. But I also knew I also have great faith in my own ability to imagine change and see beauty.

[00:09:39] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And I, so when I knew that I had to find somebody that could have a shared vision and shared tech technique and shared, I, he had to be the person it happened to be he, but it could have been anybody had to be somebody that was going to be able to work with me and able to see through my.

[00:09:57] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** of my exterior to understand that [00:10:00] we can create beautiful things together. And Jared immediately did that. What I loved about Jared the very first time I met him. In an interview was I don't know what I asked him. Maybe it was something like yours. If we were going to build a welcome to Kansas City sign, what would it look like?

[00:10:18] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And Jared was like, is it okay if I disrupt the skyline? I was like, You are hired. The question is enough. Yeah. So he shared the big picture and I knew that he was going to be able to, we were able to work together. He was able to work with me. And yeah he was beautiful and talented and amazing and articulate and all the things that you need and you're in your closest collaborator.

[00:10:43] **Emily Craven:** I love that so much. And I think that what I love most about the relationship between. The two of you is that I think that not only do you pair well with each other, and we've heard from other Kansas Cityans that Jared is the nicest, most [00:11:00] diplomatic human being. So I feel that there is a wonderful pairing that goes on there.

[00:11:04] **Emily Craven:** But I think that what I love about the process between what you need to do in the city is that you're basically adding a creative element to everything that the city does, not just in its communication, but just in every. thing that involves Any sort of design or setting an identity, right?

[00:11:22] **Emily Craven:** That's what I, that's what I really love. And so how does your process work? How do you identify what rooms you need to bring in Jared to that table?

[00:11:36] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Practically speaking, if I was going to write out like write it out, I think I would say any public facility. Facing aesthetic. So that's, every way that we communicate should be intentional and deliberate and it should be aware of the details.

[00:11:50] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** It should always be directed towards the person who is experiencing it. And I think that's the value of of bringing Jared and [00:12:00] beauty and creativity to, to really any public facing anything. Because if people are going to be interacting with it, and this is wayfinding science in the community, the way we wrap the streetcar, how do our fleet experience, what is their experience in the world?

[00:12:16] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And how do, what do people think when they see the street sweeper that Jared designed to look like a little blue monster? Everything, it's just every, we just, everything that people have, that we put out into the world Or every part of our infrastructure that we create. We should be in, we should do it with the intention of great design.

[00:12:36] **Emily Craven:** I love

[00:12:36] **Emily Craven:** that. And I imagine that there are a lot of policies that you then take a look at where, you've shoved out into a room, you've closed the door. You've been like sorted out. And you realize that it's like policies that are essentially in the way of being able to smooth out these lines of communication.

[00:12:52] **Emily Craven:** Can you talk a little bit about how you. Look at those policies and attempt to make uniform changes in that.

[00:12:59] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Yeah, that's a good [00:13:00] thing about bureaucracy, right? There's so every, there's a policy for everything except surveys. We need a survey. We, too many people are doing too many surveys. But we can utilize the policies that we have to ensure that we're creating something special every time.

[00:13:23] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And some of these exist already in cities across America. 1 percent for the Arts is one that people know about, right? But It doesn't. Yes. And if you don't have 1 percent for the arts, any city who doesn't have it advocate for it and advocate not just for 1 percent for the arts on your buildings, advocate 1 percent for the arts as part of a parks or an open space tax so that you have a regular piece of revenue, not just when you're building infrastructure.

[00:13:48] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** But that aside, there are lots of policies. Even how do we repave roads? And or how do we create bike lanes? This is a battle I've been having for maybe a year now, not a [00:14:00] battle, but I told them I want the person on the bike lane. Can you picture a bike lane? And there's like a little person on a bike with a helmet on indicating that it's a bike lane.

[00:14:08] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** So I want them to alternate it with a person with a ponytail, which we did in Jersey City, right? So it's a regular person with no hair, a person with a ponytail person with no hair person with a ponytail. And so even there I can add that to the policy. When you're creating markings when you're creating roadway markings for bike lanes, they have to have this or I don't even need to be that prescriptive because now that I have created a creative director, I can say all signage needs to be approved by the creative director.

[00:14:38] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And then Jared will do it....

[00:14:38] **Tim Souza:** I think that's a great segue. Jared you had mentioned before that you, you really hold this like UX role really focused on that user's experience in whether or not they, their ponytail is represented in a bike lane as an example. What has that been like?

[00:14:55] **Tim Souza:** For you building that you X and how do you have those conversations in [00:15:00] planning with the transit authority.

[00:15:01] **Tim Souza:** Like how do you build that? How do you have those conversations? I'm very curious.

[00:15:05] **Jared Horman:** Totally. So I think the first thing is important that Melissa gets me in the room. So that I'm there to have the conversation. So once that happens it's reminding everyone to ask the question.

[00:15:14] **Jared Horman:** Cool. How is a resident going to experience this? Is that sign going in the right place? Is that too much information and they're just going to move over this? Are they? How is this going to continue to build folks affinity to their joy in living in Kansas City? So they want to live here, they want to raise their families here, they want to invite their friends here.

[00:15:31] **Jared Horman:** It's asking all of those questions from the tiny little notice that your sidewalk is going to get redone this week to bigger things like wayfinding, murals and bigger infrastructure projects. It's just asking the question, are we thinking about how A large group of people are going to experience this.

[00:15:45] **Jared Horman:** How an individual how a mom pushing a stroller. Are we considering all of these people? And pushing folks to keep doing that is, is across the board starting to be a question that more people are thinking about.

[00:15:55] **Emily Craven:** And I think I, I remember when I was in to name tag New York City, like I was always [00:16:00] impressed by the little details that I saw in different places.

[00:16:03] **Emily Craven:** And so it sounds like you are, You are actively looking to do that in Kansas city. You're wanting to make sure that not only is there a cohesive visual brand across everything from infrastructure to communications, but you're also making sure that those tiny little details. And I think as you guys said at the very start, bring joy, this creation and this creativity and this communication needs to bring joy and identity.

[00:16:28] **Jared Horman:** 100%. I think that's so I have about six designers that work on my team with me and that's a thing that we talk about all the time of cool. Okay, you were sending out this magnet. We're rolling out recycling carts and we're including this in it. How can we make sure that this is like a piece, even though it's a small detail that like, People are excited to put on their fridge that they're like, Hey, this is cool.

[00:16:48] **Jared Horman:** This looks good. This fits with the rest of the aesthetic. And this makes me maybe want to recycle or at least think about it. And it's actually been a fun, that was about a year ago. And the number of times that people have been like, Oh yeah, I have this recycling magnet. [00:17:00] I liked it.

[00:17:00] **Jared Horman:** Who designed it? I'm like, Hey, I did that. But it's just a little thing that As a part of a bigger package, a bigger rollout with it that really continues to help build affinity for the things that we're doing.

[00:17:11] **Tim Souza:** And change is very difficult. People like to do things that they've done before, they like to be comfortable.

[00:17:16] **Tim Souza:** How do you address that, Jared, as you go through the space and you have a resistant, Director. I know you've been here for about a year and a half now. So you probably have. And we've heard from other people in the city that you are an amazing diplomat and can connect with just about anybody, which is awesome.

[00:17:32] **Tim Souza:** So how, but how do you do it? How do you convince? The, it. Let's go with the buses that you mentioned in that experience. How do you go to the transit authority and say, we're doing this it needs to be pretty. We want people to see our buses and think fun and not, oh, so how does that, how do you get from

[00:17:47] **Tim Souza:** the way things are done to the way that you're envisioning this kind of from

[00:17:51] **Emily Craven:** the no to the yes. Yes.

[00:17:53] **Tim Souza:** Yes. To this aesthetic that you're building. Like, how do you have you done that

[00:17:57] **Emily Craven:** dragging screaming? Maybe? I don't know. [00:18:00]

[00:18:00] **Jared Horman:** Yes, definitely. Kicking screaming a little bit. So a big 1st step was.

[00:18:03] **Jared Horman:** establishing a really comprehensive brand guidelines. When I started, we were, there had been the start of the conversation about a brand refresh and finishing that process and then creating a very comprehensive document that we can share to be like, Hey here's the standard. Here's what it is.

[00:18:17] **Jared Horman:** There isn't room for debate around this, these concrete things. And then it is going to streetcar authority or whoever I'm working with and trying to understand what their actual goal is here. What is their need? What, and what is the goal that they're trying to accomplish? Or what is our goal?

[00:18:33] **Jared Horman:** And then showing them the best way to do that using the brand. A lot of folks, once you, Get them to understand why their thing doesn't work. We'll come on board as well. It is, there is a diplomatic push and pull and there also is sometimes that I do need to call in the muscle to go ahead and say, hey this is what it's going to be.

[00:18:49] **Jared Horman:** One particular thing that was was a fun kind of journey on that was Iris. We launched our own local municipal ride share make it easier for folks to get around as we're [00:19:00] navigating things with the buses. And there was a whole bunch of different ideas that folks had and we were able to come in and be like, okay, so this needs to be cool.

[00:19:08] **Jared Horman:** It needs to be accessible. It needs to be a lot, feel like something that folks are comfortable with. Would think about in the same vein of Uber and Lyft, but also knowing that it functions a little bit differently and also needs to feel like Kansas City. And we put our heads together and we're able to come up with, hey, the Kansas City flag is called Iris.

[00:19:24] **Jared Horman:** It has RS, which is ride share. What if we were to go ahead and. Celebrate this or the Kansas City flower. Sorry is the iris. And it isn't necessarily super well known. So let's bring that back to the forefront. Do some beautiful purple wraps, build a whole brand around that.

[00:19:40] **Tim Souza:** And you mentioned bringing in the muscle.

[00:19:42] **Tim Souza:** Melissa, can you maybe lean into a little bit of what that's like for you leveraging your role to make sure that you're creating the space for Jared to do these beautiful purple wraps? And.

[00:19:54] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Thank you for asking. I said to Jared two nights ago, I don't care, Jared. I don't care if they [00:20:00] don't like you, Jared, because they don't like me either.

[00:20:06] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And it's not it's not really true that they don't like me or him. Everybody likes him. But I will say that I do, there is a part of me that has to say, I don't care if you like me. I don't, I'm not, you can't do that insane thing. So if you don't like it, I'm so sorry. I hired a person who's in whose job is to do the creative work.

[00:20:32] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** You are in the finance department. You cannot create a fountain out of money. No it's a terrible aesthetic. It doesn't take our finance department seriously. It doesn't take our understanding of taxpayer dollars. Seriously. No, you guys are wrong. I'm sorry. If you don't like it, I can't, I have to be, I feel a deep responsibility to the taxpayer all the time.

[00:20:59] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And I feel [00:21:00] it is our responsibility to use the dollars because nobody wants to pay taxes. I hate paying taxes. I hate how many taxes I have to pay in the city of Kansas City. But if I got to pay them, then I want to know that they're being used in a way that makes sense. And so if that means that I have to be the bad guy that says, No, you are not doing that thing because you are using taxpayer dollars to pay for it.

[00:21:26] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And it's ridiculous. Then, okay, I'll take it. My neighbors like it when I don't waste their money. It's one of those things that, I have to be okay with people not liking the decisions that I make as long as I'm doing the right thing and always thinking about the taxpayer who's helping me.

[00:21:47] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** To do the right thing. It

[00:21:49] **Emily Craven:** sounds the reason why this is. Slowly working and slowly and bringing that change in because as with city governments, all things are slow. I know that it's probably slower than you, you ever [00:22:00] want it to be. But it sounds like, you're basically like, I will kill a project.

[00:22:04] **Emily Craven:** I will kill this project. If you do not let Jared in the door. And I think a hundred

[00:22:08] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** percent. Yeah.

[00:22:09] **Emily Craven:** And so I think that Being able to do that change you need the muscle at the top to be able to make sure that happens, right? But then you also need to structure things in a way that change then becomes systemic and it lasts beyond when Melissa moves on beyond when Jared moves on.

[00:22:26] **Emily Craven:** And I think that this is the first time I've ever seen a creative director role in a city. Yeah. And you said that innovation happened by accident, but it feels very strategic, Melissa.

[00:22:39] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Look, it's almost it's almost like when people say that they're successful because they've worked hard, you're successful because you worked hard and because you were lucky.

[00:22:47] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And so being able to be flexible. If I didn't meet Jared, would we have a creative director? I don't know. I created that role because I knew that I really feel like, especially in government, but in everywhere and [00:23:00] every, major entity, And there's a job for everybody there. Everybody has a place.

[00:23:05] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Think of the person at Walmart who's greeting you on the way in. There's a job for everybody. And so I really try to find the person's wheelhouse and then create the role around them. HR loves me for that. They love that. But So Jared, I don't know if other cities have a creative director, but I knew that Jared's skill set and his creative skill set and his ability to communicate with people and the ability, my ability to support everything he does every time, would allow him to really create a unified aesthetic for the entire city.

[00:23:41] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And I knew that he was going to be able to sell it too. So like I can codify it, I can create it, I can make the job, but also like people need to look at the work when it's done and be like, Oh, Jared's amazing. And they did, they do, they always do. So he never lets down his end of the bargain either.

[00:23:58] **Emily Craven:** You've

[00:23:58] **Emily Craven:** transferred the [00:24:00] authority in a way there. Yeah.

[00:24:02] **Emily Craven:** But it couldn't work if Jared was not excellent. And Melissa was not the muscle. And I think that it's beautiful that you acknowledge that, but I also want to acknowledge the fact that you have also then built something that I feel will last beyond when you guys finally determine that you do want to move on and another city snakes the both of you.

[00:24:22] **Emily Craven:** And

[00:24:22] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** yeah we set a standard, right? So anytime you raise the bar is not raised.

[00:24:27] **Tim Souza:** Exactly. And I think that, it sounds like Jared, you are the true innovation in Kansas City. It's great to have you on today. And I think that as a part of that you'd mentioned previously, you were talked a little bit about getting these brand guidelines.

[00:24:39] **Tim Souza:** Set up for the city. I would like to dive maybe a little bit deeper into that because we may not all be able to clone a Jared, but we might be able to replicate a little bit of what you've been able to do through those brand guidelines. And so can you help us understand? What, why you identified that you needed them in the 1st place?

[00:24:57] **Tim Souza:** You had mentioned that you came in and people were doing all kinds of [00:25:00] crazy things that weren't associated with, local history or local iconography that is valuable to Kansas city. And did you identify what you needed? How did you take what you have and then basically hone in and take this complex environment of multiple departments doing crazy money fountains and pointing them all in a singular direction.

[00:25:20] **Tim Souza:** Like how did that process work from beginning to end? If you don't mind like letting us see inside your brilliant

[00:25:27] **Jared Horman:** For sure. So first off, I'm going to say that I am not the point person on innovation. That is absolutely Melissa. I want to make sure that is very clear

[00:25:35] **Emily Craven:** discomfort in your face there.

[00:25:36] **Emily Craven:** Let us praise you. He's amazing.

[00:25:40] **Jared Horman:** And our relationship is why this is able to happen because we're lock and step. And I know that Melissa has given me what her perspective is. And I know when I'm acting on her behalf, and so I have the capacity to move forward specifically with brand guidelines.

[00:25:55] **Jared Horman:** I came in and there wasn't a consistent font. I looked at about [00:26:00] 10 different materials across departments, and I couldn't tell that any of them were the city of Kansas City. I was out in the city and was learning what the city does and realized most of the projects we were working on I had no idea that was the city.

[00:26:12] **Jared Horman:** Really across the board, the cool things the city were doing, was doing and is doing, I didn't know as a resident that's lived here for a very long time and a person that loves the city. And so it really was showing that two departments Hey, here's what yours looks like. Here's what this looks like.

[00:26:27] **Jared Horman:** Here's what this looks like. This all has to come together. And then for me having experience building brand guidelines in the past that were a little bit more loosey goosey cause they were for smaller nonprofits and they weren't as comprehensive, weren't, they didn't have as big of a scope for those brands.

[00:26:41] **Jared Horman:** So I had some experience of kind of diving into how to craft these details and then looking at the city, seeing just how big of a scope of work that they do. And realizing just how many projects are going on. Is why we just had to start going through. Okay, cool apparel. Great. Here's what our standard is for apparel.

[00:26:59] **Jared Horman:** Direct [00:27:00] mail here's our baseline standard and it's just really going through And then checking having folks on my team that are in every department so I can say cool Can you all bring me your brochures this week? What exists out there in the ecosystem right now? Cool So here's the breadth of kind of the content that we're putting out there Here's what the information generally looks like.

[00:27:18] **Jared Horman:** Now let's tighten that and figure out some baseline templates that we can start with, knowing that there still is going to be a creativity that designers bring to showcase whatever that specific thing is, that it brings joy, and that also our logo looks consistent across the board, and people look at this and they know, this is a document from Kansas City.

[00:27:34] **Emily Craven:** And it's being such a large beast that a city is like and you have, I believe it's 35 people under you, but even those 35 people couldn't touch every single project. So you, you need some way of being able to handle just the mass in general. And I suppose that's what those brand guidelines really help with.

[00:27:54] **Jared Horman:** A hundred percent. And also it's definitely an ongoing and living process. There's always going to be new things that come [00:28:00] up and we're like, great. Okay. We have a brand guideline. We have a. A base of what's happening before this is a new problem. How do we apply that to the brand guidelines? And then how do we update the brand guidelines?

[00:28:09] **Jared Horman:** So this is happening consistently in the future.

[00:28:11] **Tim Souza:** I think that's awesome. And so then can I ask, what are some of the projects that you've been able to complete leveraging, this innovative model of the two of you and this, new, guideline bias towards, beautification user experience.

[00:28:25] **Tim Souza:** What have you been able to do? What have been the results so far? I know that you mentioned a couple things in our last conversation. I'd love to hear a little bit more.

[00:28:30] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Maybe we can both pick a favorite. Okay. Okay. I think right now what we're working on, and I've done this in another city also was composting.

[00:28:40] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** So this is both of Jared's wheelhouse, right? Because composting isn't just about waste diversion, right? Although it is, right? But what it really, if you think about the user experience and how do people live their lives, and this is also, I think, maybe we're always trying to make it easy.

[00:28:58] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Think about how people live. [00:29:00] How do your parents live? How do your grandparents live? How do you live? Are you going to do that thing? You're not going to, if you don't have a place to put your kitchen scraps, you're not going to compost, right? Or if you have, if the place where you have to put it isn't an aesthetically what you want on your countertop, then you're not going to put it on your countertop.

[00:29:20] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** So like it has, so thinking about composting and how do we build, how do we think about it through the lens of sorting? , right? Just like we, we sort our recyclables. If we don't live in a single stream community, which thank God we don't here in Kansas City, but that makes it even harder when you do. But if you already have a culture of sorting, recycling out, then you just have to create another space or place physically in your house.

[00:29:44] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** How do you create that sorting environment and then taking it, making it bigger? What about when you go to the Kansas City Current game? Do they have a place where things can be composted? What about when you are in our parks? What about all of the things? Like what, how do we add that user and [00:30:00] human behavior element to the aesthetic?

[00:30:03] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Then I also do not want, I want all of the branding around the composting work on the bucket. At the drop off spots, like whatever it all has to look the same so that people know what to do every time they go there. It has to be easy. It can't be like in this place. I got to put my compost in a bag. But if I go to this place, I don't need to put it in a bag.

[00:30:25] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And this place, there's a number that I got to punch in. No, it has to be easy. It has to be beautiful. It has to be streamlined. And it has to be the way you would do it, too. If it's not a thing that you would do, then no one's gonna do it. It has to be easy to fit into your life and it's our job to make it easy.

[00:30:42] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** So if in my mind, composting is the thing we're working on right now, having great success with, we can send over some of the stuff that you want to show it. We're having a lot of fun with it.

[00:30:51] **Jared Horman:** Yeah. And even in that one, so there's different folks, different vendors that are handling different elements of our composting program that even is in different departments.

[00:30:58] **Jared Horman:** And so it's been a big part of our [00:31:00] creative role to ensure that to the residents, that's all one program. It doesn't to them, they don't care who is handling that. They just know that the city is doing composting and figuring out what our brand for composting is and then ensuring that's consistent across the board, regardless of who who we're working with to ensure that is a big part of my creative responsibility and building our own visual ecosystem, iconography, et cetera, that doesn't feel widely inconsistent.

[00:31:25] **Jared Horman:** Also, with how folks experience composting in the rest of the world.

[00:31:28] **Emily Craven:** It feels like compost franchising in a way. They're making that, consistent bread, different people, but they're happy

[00:31:34] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** to be service composting consultants. If you guys are looking,

[00:31:38] **Tim Souza:** And that makes sense because, in people, when they look at the city they think it's just the city.

[00:31:44] **Tim Souza:** They don't see all the departments. They don't see the divisions. They see a single entity. And so what you guys are doing is you're just, Wrapping as those compost consultants the same brand around the whole city saying we compost not it doesn't matter who it is. We are doing it And I think that's brilliant.

[00:31:57] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Say it louder for the people in the back. [00:32:00]

[00:32:00] **Tim Souza:** We do it. Yeah.

[00:32:01] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** That you, and then this is such a big part of your job. It has to be,

[00:32:07] **Jared Horman:** it is

[00:32:08] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** initiatives if there, if Public Works is doing it, and also Office of Sustainability is doing it, but they have two different sustainability is doing it over here and Public Works is doing it over here.

[00:32:20] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** They believe that there are two different programs. They do not have two different programs. So that's Jared often has to tell people, look, you're sitting at this composting table. It's one initiative. It's not the public works part or the sustainability part. It's all one table. And

[00:32:42] **Tim Souza:** I think going back to your comment on cost savings, that's a huge cost savings for the taxpayer as well.

[00:32:47] **Tim Souza:** Because then both parties are contributing to a singular piece rather than running two separate campaigns, two separate marketing, materials and copy and all of the effort that goes into it and time that gets wasted. It's a singular push.

[00:32:58] **Jared Horman:** And I think it intersects. [00:33:00] Yeah, with so much with my role is helping our departments and our folks just understand that this is just a Kansas City initiative.

[00:33:06] **Jared Horman:** Yes, I know that you're in this department. And Internally, we have departments, but as we present stuff to residents, they're not super concerned with which department is handling this. They just need to know that it's Kansas city. And from a user experience, the less information we make them process, the better and the faster and the easier that I'll be able to work with the thing that we're creating.

[00:33:26] **Tim Souza:** I think that's a great segue into that. You guys have been doing work to help your. Departments understand this. And I loved what you were telling me about how you were able to get employees on the bandwagon of this innovative change, leveraging the solar eclipse. Could you talk a little bit about how initiatives like that are inside the city departments are helping create that advocacy?

[00:33:47] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** You want? Do you wanna start?

[00:33:48] **Jared Horman:** I think you got it.

[00:33:49] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** The solar eclipse. Was so fun. We knew there was a solar eclipse because somebody said, Hey, is the city doing anything for it? And we thought, okay, [00:34:00] yeah, sure. So we made glasses. For the every employee. We have 4500 employees.

[00:34:06] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** They're not that expensive, right? The total what if they were a dollar a pair, it's less than five grand. And it created such a beautiful moment for everybody. And also a wonderful branding opportunity for us so that they we could create this on brand. Piece of merchandise, not merchandise, but this on brand piece of giveaway swag that was relevant to the moment.

[00:34:28] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And it just reinforces this is what the aesthetic is. We did the same thing with the corporate challenge. There was like a they'd do t shirts for all the employees who are participating. And we intervened there too. Like we move we find a way to make something that's already, Happening or existing in the world and make it on brand fun and really cool.

[00:34:50] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** I

[00:34:50] **Emily Craven:** love that so much. And I think that it really shows how, again, you create that change for the longterm. Yes. You have someone who is [00:35:00] throwing somebody into rooms and strong arming them. And then you have other people who are very diplomatically explaining how this is the better way. But then you also have these moments that just get everyone on board and they get everyone on board with.

[00:35:12] **Emily Craven:** joy. Which I don't think a lot of cities a lot of people feel that within their departments that things are joyful and creative, and it just makes everybody more interested to come to work and I will occasionally say to Tim, I was like, Oh, so and so is wasted on city government.

[00:35:28] **Emily Craven:** I, I want to steal them for XYZ startup thing. But we need that. We need that within our cities. We need those people within our cities to be able to make that change and to be the doers. And so I think that what I'm. I am most excited to see is how you're taking this systemization and this bringing of joy and creativity into all of the different departments and how you're planning to use this new kind of creative capacity via Jared's role in his team.

[00:35:54] **Emily Craven:** To support or showcase the city in the lead up and during, the big events of [00:36:00] 2026. world cup, the 250th anniversary of the States, like how are you planning to utilize this new creative capacity to really show off the city?

[00:36:10] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** I think it's important for here for Jared to share with you his the reason why he believes that the external aesthetic in the world is important.

[00:36:20] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** So why does the brand matter? Like, why does it matter people's experience with the brand?

[00:36:26] **Jared Horman:** Yeah, I mean from just from a general branding standpoint a consistent brand builds trust. And builds affinity. And for example, you can say Nike if you like Nike, you see the swoosh, you like it, you're going to like this, the way that this thing works.

[00:36:41] **Jared Horman:** Similarly, when we're Using the brand consistently, it starts to build that affinity. And when you have that affinity, then you can start to leverage that in a direction that really opens up more creative storytelling because folks are already bought into what the brand is, what it looks like. And they're like, great.

[00:36:54] **Jared Horman:** So these are the colors. These are the fonts. And Kansas City is a place that's fun. It's got great food. It's [00:37:00] got art. It's got sports. It's got so many things. And how are we using those to continue to tell what the fun story of Kansas City is. And so really getting departments on board, continuing to build up our team.

[00:37:12] **Jared Horman:** is ramping us up to be able to capitalize when everyone is here so that we're able to be seen on even a larger scale. So part of our brand has been tightening us to just being Kansas City and calling ourselves Kansas City because that's what we want the world to know us as opposed to necessarily like, calling Kansas City, Missouri, Kansas City, Kansas.

[00:37:31] **Jared Horman:** The region is Kansas City. And that's the story that we're telling and that we want folks to remember when they come to Kansas City. And so getting us on board and getting us ready and having all of those fun, beautiful little moments that we've built out in the few years that I've worked for the city is prepping us for those folks and even beyond.

[00:37:48] **Jared Horman:** As Kansas City continues to explode after the world sees how incredible we are

[00:37:54] **Emily Craven:** and other areas that you have identified in the city where you're like, I want to make sure that we [00:38:00] revamp this area, bring more vibrancy to blank X, Y, Z areas so that you over the next 18 months, do you have like goals of different places in different, whether it's city department areas, whether it's physical areas within the city that you really want to focus on making them, Or either to bring them up to a standard or making them shine on

[00:38:19] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** yes, I'm going to build a bridge here because we keep saying city departments, but really what we mean is when we say public works, we mean, when you are walking down the street, that's public work.

[00:38:28] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** The sidewalks are public works. The streets are public works. The street signs are public works. When you, when there's any, and parks are us, right? So like you, when you're walking around in the world, you want, and you want your experience to be pleasant. You want, and so when we're talking about. Building these things up between city departments, what we really mean is our way.

[00:38:49] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Finding signs are all gonna look the same and they're all gonna look beautiful. I'm not gonna have a different one in this neighborhood to this neighborhood. Like way finding signage is public works and public works is [00:39:00] gonna do it the way that Jared wants him to do it, and he is gonna hire some other designers because some of it right is ex external beyond all of the people that are already doing the day to day.

[00:39:10] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** If we're changing over all the wayfinding, we need somebody to do that and we are. By the time FIFA gets here, we imagine the visitor experience, right? They get off the airport, which is ours. The airport, that department has to make sure that their aesthetic people know how to move through the airport, that the airport is clean, that the airport is fun and surprising in some ways, right?

[00:39:28] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And then they drive down the road and they go now they're on, now they're on our streets and they're, our streets need to be clean. Our streets, our signage needs to be uniform. It needs to be, it needs to be what you would expect. spect, if you are gonna create it like in your head, right? If you're on the Sims, you're not gonna start making all these chaotic decisions.

[00:39:46] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** You're gonna make it in a way that makes sense. And I think that's what we're really trying to do all the time. Make it make sense. It should all, everything we touch should make sense and it should be beautiful. And I think when we, as we lead up to the World Cup. We [00:40:00] don't have uniform wayfinding signage right now.

[00:40:02] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** We don't. We have some wayfinding in some parts of the city and Jared had somebody take pictures of all of them so that we could look at all the differences at one point. And it's so crazy. There's no uniformity at all to it. And even though they're all coming from the city. So I think our touch is just a blanket of make it better before people get here so that when they get here, And this is why, we're doing it now because we got some time and we had to build the brand first.

[00:40:31] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And then we had to showcase what the brand can do. And then we had to interrupt projects and make sure that people understood if you don't do what Jared's doing, it wants you to do, or the way that Jared wants you to do it, we won't do it at all. And they're okay. Okay. But we had to do that first in order to get to the place where we are now, where like people ask Jared, Hey, how do I get banner?

[00:40:52] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** How do I get banners for my council district? How do I get Who do I have to talk to get whatever? Because now they know if you want to make it better and you want to make it [00:41:00] beautiful or if you're already making it better, right? A particular parks project we're working on right now, Barney Ellis Plaza, very big, incredible project.

[00:41:08] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** They went to Jared and they go, we have to block this off. How do you want us to do it? And then I was walking over there the other day and I called Jared, I'm going to FaceTime you. And I showed him these blockades, which have this wood panel over the top of it. I go, Jared, look what they did.

[00:41:21] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Look what they did. Jared, look what they did to your blockades. And he was like, you need to relax. They're coming. They know they, this is temporary. Don't worry. And it's amazing to me that he said that, of course, always he's got it. But. But the fact that they did it right from the beginning without me even knowing about it means that we've made this impact and this is something I saw out in the world and I didn't have to say, please make sure that Jared knows how are you going to wrap this block so that it looks nice instead of just being terrible and they did it.

[00:41:51] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And he already they, it's happening. And so I think when we say, when we're leading up to the world cup, how do we want it to be, what do we expect? We just expect that these two [00:42:00] years of every time we build a road, every time we make a project, every time we do anything, we are thinking about it in a way that's deliberate and intentional and looks better and more beautiful and is easier than it was before.

[00:42:12] **Tim Souza:** I think that is a super brilliant because what it does is as all those people come in for FIFA, when they come back to the city, they know what to expect, right? Because most likely what's going to be happening during FIFA is people will be popping around cities. And I believe Kansas City in, in talking with the sports commission is hosting one of the semifinals, right?

[00:42:33] **Tim Souza:** Of the events. That means people will be coming to see the city coming back and having that multiple touch point experience. And then they'll hopefully you guys have done such an amazing job. They want to come back and re experience the city in a non event time, right? Which is thinking about that future of placemaking.

[00:42:50] **Tim Souza:** Melissa, I am really curious. You've kicked up a lot of dirt since moving into Kansas City. It sounds and. In the past, five years, I'm gonna extend it a little [00:43:00] bit what new belief behavior habit do you believe is most improved life in Kansas City that has empowered, both you and the people that you work with outside of Jared every day?

[00:43:11] **Tim Souza:** To make this change happen.

[00:43:13] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Oh, this is such a silly story. Garbage cans.

[00:43:17] **Tim Souza:** Go for

[00:43:18] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** it. Kansas City did not have, when I pulled into Kansas City with my sister. We drove from the East Coast, pulled into, this is my new house. The neighbor comes over immediately, freaked me out. I'm from New York. We don't do that there.

[00:43:31] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** But anyway, the neighbor came over with this black box. And I looked at it and I ran in the house and my sister said to her, Oh, sorry, she's not from here. She doesn't know how to behave appropriately. But anyway, so she, the neighbor told my sister that it was the recycling bin and it didn't have a top or anything.

[00:43:52] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** And my sister said, Oh, thank you. We'll put it in the garage. So you just put your recycling in here. Yep. Okay. And then how do you do [00:44:00] trash? And the lady said, Oh you have two bags and you just put them on the, out just the two bags. And I, when my sister told me that I was like, she has to be wrong.

[00:44:09] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** That can't be how they do trash in this city. There's no way the raccoons are going to get in it. They're, there's going to be recycling all over the neighborhood. This, that can't be the way they do it here. My sister has to be wrong. So I got my, brave friendly face together. And I went over to the neighbors.

[00:44:27] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** I said, thank you. Can you help me understand this? And they, my sister was right. That was how they did it. And so now how many years later, three years later, every resident of the city of Kansas City has a recycling bin with a top and a garbage bin with a top, and the recycling doesn't blow down your street, and the garbage isn't getting torn apart by raccoons.

[00:44:50] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** There's an economic benefit, obviously we had to pay. money out up front. But t is I don't have to clean all over the neighborhood my new street sweeper [00:45:00] tha whatever the case is, rig So that has been an incredible project to work on. Obviously worked on that design piece with Jared. But yeah, we, that's been a really great project that I feel has made an incredible impact on Kansas City.

[00:45:15] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** I'm sorry that the example is about garbage, but

[00:45:17] **Tim Souza:** It's okay, You're coming to Kansas City taking out the trash. I love it. It's fantastic. It's perfect.

[00:45:24] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** My neighbors have all thanked me for the trash cans, by the way.

[00:45:27] **Tim Souza:** I'm sure the rest of the city will now thank you after this podcast.

[00:45:30] **Tim Souza:** You'll get letters in the mail being like, thank you so much. No more raccoon mess. We love it. So Jared, looking forward, because we've been talking a lot about moving forward, what Are you looking forward to building as you lead Kansas City into this new future of creativity?

[00:45:47] **Jared Horman:** I think it's a couple of things.

[00:45:48] **Jared Horman:** I think the direction of creative placemaking is absolutely one and a project that Melissa and I are working heavily on already right now is how can we do some bigger murals? How can we do some bigger [00:46:00] visual splashes, particularly in some areas that aren't heavily muraled already but are where we have a lot of a lot of folks coming, a lot of folks working every day.

[00:46:08] **Jared Horman:** How can we start to embed even more creativity in that as with my background as a muralist, I'm super excited to bring some peers that I've made throughout the country, world, as well as celebrate the local work of folks. I think that's a project that we're both excited about.

[00:46:21] **Jared Horman:** Super excited about in this moment, but I think also the other one that we keep talking about is that the way finding we've started rolling out and as we continue to do that it's a project that I'm partnering with an artist to do way finding for each neighborhood district, whatever the like breakdown ends up being for that area.

[00:46:39] **Jared Horman:** that allows there to be some sort of flavor that speaks to that neighborhood and start finding artists, creatives that have a connection to that area specifically so that there's something consistent there as well as something specific that they can all feel ownership over.

[00:46:55] **Emily Craven:** I think I, I love that a lot because that that's a beautiful thing to end on, because a lot [00:47:00] of what we've spoken about today has been, that in city change that top down approach that kind of, forcing change on people, but that really speaks to how you were very intentional about involving the community in, Placemaking and how important that is to involve the community and those neighborhoods and the actual flavor because yes, uniformity is important.

[00:47:21] **Emily Craven:** But what is also important is celebrating the diversity in that city and that you're able to make those components work together is amazing. We have come to the end of our interview. Sadly, I could talk to you guys for hours and hours, but Can we rock the

[00:47:34] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** boat real quick? Can I rock the boat?

[00:47:37] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Okay. One thing I want to say that you said earlier and I wrote down and I wanted to address it before, before we left you guys. Cities do not need a Melissa and a Jared in order to do the things that we're doing. All they need to do is to look or have somebody look around and say, I want to make this thing better.

[00:47:57] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Just whatever it is, however, it works in [00:48:00] wherever you are. People just have to use the tools that they already have. and then make that thing better. And as soon as they start doing that, it's contagious and it's fun and people start getting excited about it. And they don't have to do it the way that we do it.

[00:48:13] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** People can do it however they want to do it. Just be empowered to to make things better. That's it.

[00:48:20] **Tim Souza:** I think that's a beautiful note to end on. So thank you so much, both of you, for joining us today. And I can't wait to see what Kansas City does as you build better into the future. And I want to come visit.

[00:48:34] **Tim Souza:** So Jared, let me know when this wayfinding project is done. I'll come be one of your first people to go through that user experience and give you some feedback. I think it'd be great. Very happy. Yeah. So thank you guys for joining us today.

[00:48:45] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** It's been a delight and a pleasure. Amazing talking to you guys.

[00:48:49] **Melissa Kozakiewicz:** Thanks for having us. So much

[00:48:50] **Tim Souza:** fun.