

Business leader calls Tulane's downtown expansion a 'transcendent' opportunity for New Orleans

December 05, 2025 9:00 AM Pam Radtke
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At a recent GNO, Inc. breakfast, President Michael A. Fitts shared downtown expansion plans with attendees, including GNO, Inc. CEO Michael Hecht and Jefferson Parish Councilwoman Jennifer Van Vrancken. (Photo by Kenny Lass)

Tulane University is preparing to deliver one of the most ambitious transformations New Orleans has seen in generations. And according to Tulane President Michael A.

Fitts, the university's deepening investment in downtown New Orleans, anchored by the historic redevelopment of the former Charity Hospital building, is not just a milestone for Tulane. It's a turning point for the future of the city itself.

"We are an economic engine for this region," he told a group of business leaders attending a recent GNO, Inc. breakfast at the Jill H. and Avram A. Glazer Family Club in Yulman Stadium. "Tulane's growth isn't happening behind closed doors. It's happening in ways that benefit New Orleans directly, through the jobs we create, the talent we attract, the discoveries we commercialize and the communities we help strengthen."

Michael Hecht, CEO of GNO, Inc., the regional business and economic development organization, addressed attendees, including Mayor-elect Helena Moreno. "With all respect to all our other incredible projects and facilities... I think this downtown project is the one that can transform the future of New Orleans. It marks us as a great center of academia and research in a thriving downtown," he said.

Hecht encouraged those in attendance to support the effort. "We have to have people understand the transcendent importance of it."

Fitts outlined how Tulane's growth over the past decade, across education, research and facilities, has laid the groundwork for the university's expanding downtown presence. Undergraduate applications have risen sharply, student achievement has increased exponentially and the university has nearly doubled its research funding over the past decade.

The expansion of research activity is a major driver behind Tulane's vision for downtown, where it currently occupies 17 buildings, representing three million square feet of space. The university employs approximately 2,700 people downtown, and more than 2,600 students attend class there. Within the next eight years, Tulane expects to add 2,500 employees downtown and increase its research expenditures to roughly \$400 million annually.

The redevelopment of the former Charity Hospital building is central to that plan, Fitts said. Tulane will occupy more than half of the one-million-square-foot historic structure, while the remaining space will be redeveloped for a mix of residential and other commercial uses.



Members of Tulane's marching band kicked off the GNO, Inc. quarterly investor breakfast at the Jill H. and Avram A. Glazer Family Club at Yulman Stadium. (Photo by Kenny Lass)

"We're building not just facilities, but a neighborhood," Fitts said. "A place where discovery happens every day. A place where startups grow. A place where people live, work and create together."

Fitts described the university's goal as building a consolidated downtown district for research, education and innovation, positioned among major institutions such as the University Medical Center to the north, the Caesars Superdome to the west and the French Quarter to the east. Construction and streetscape improvements are already underway.

"This is a long-term investment in both Tulane's future and the city's," Fitts said. "Our focus is on growing research, creating opportunities and contributing to the continued development of downtown New Orleans."

He noted such university-led redevelopment is a proven model in cities from Boston to Philadelphia to Austin, but one that New Orleans is primed to make uniquely its own.

“This is our moment,” Fitts said. “And it’s one we are committed to seizing, not just for Tulane, but for the city we love.”



Kim Boyle, Board of Tulane emeritus and chair elect of GNO, Inc.’s board of directors, raises her hand to ask President Fitts a question. (Photo by Kenny Lass)