

## Tulane talent helps drive new era at City Hall

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(From top left) Sayde Finkel, Dr. Jenny Mains, Dr. Jennifer Avegno, Adam J. Swensek and Mara Baumgarten Force are bringing commitment to public service and an investment in New Orleans' future to the administration of New Orleans Mayor Helena Moreno.

With New Orleans Mayor Helena Moreno now two months into her term, several Tulanians are playing pivotal roles in the city's new administration, bringing with them a shared commitment to public service and a belief in ethical, effective government.

From City Hall to public health offices, they exemplify the university's longstanding role as both an anchor institution and a training ground for civic leadership. Their work reflects a broader partnership between Tulane and the city it calls home — one rooted in service, collaboration and investment in New Orleans' future.

For **Adam J. Swensek**, executive counsel to the mayor, the decision to enter public service was both professional and personal. After several years in private legal practice, Swensek found himself drawn to work with broader public impact.

"Government work provides more opportunity for younger lawyers to do substantive, meaningful work sooner," he said, noting that city government exposes attorneys to issues ranging from high-stakes contracts to constitutional questions rarely encountered in private practice.

A New Orleans native and a graduate of Tulane Law School, Swensek credits his education with preparing him to navigate the complex legal landscape of local government. He said Tulane's comparative approach — grounded in both Louisiana civil law and federal legal frameworks — has proven essential in his role.

"That I got to serve the people of my hometown made it a no-brainer," he said.

Serving in the Moreno administration, Swensek sees a city ready for renewed trust in its institutions. "I see a city hungry for hope and for a sense that rules and norms still matter," he said. "I'm humbled to have a role in helping to ensure that better days are ahead while honoring our laws and obligations."

**Sayde Finkel**, a Tulane Law alumna and former chief of staff to Moreno during her time on the City Council, brings deep institutional knowledge and a values-driven approach to her role as senior director of public policy and special projects.

"For me, the most meaningful work is done in service of others," Finkel said. "With integrity and care, government can be a powerful force for good."

She credits Tulane with sharpening her analytical skills while grounding her legal education in the lived realities of New Orleans. "Being educated in New Orleans reinforced the idea that policy and law are most effective when they are responsive and accountable to the communities they serve," she said.

Finkel described the work as both humbling and energizing. "It means showing up every day with purpose, listening closely to our citizens, and working to ensure that

government delivers on its promises,” she said.

Public health is another area where Tulane expertise plays a central role. **Dr. Jennifer Avegno**, the city’s health director and a deputy mayor, is a second-generation Tulanian who earned her master’s degree in sociology at the School of Liberal Arts and serves on the faculty of the School of Medicine.

Avegno credits her Tulane education with giving her a foundation to address the complex social factors that shape health outcomes. Public health, she said, is “a wonderful field for critical thinking and understanding deep societal problems,” an approach she draws on daily in city government.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Avegno worked closely with leadership at Tulane, including the Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine and the School of Medicine, on initiatives such as testing and data-informed public health response. She said the partnership demonstrated how academic research can translate quickly into action.

For Avegno, serving New Orleans is deeply personal. “It’s the honor of a lifetime,” she said. “My family has been in New Orleans for 300 years. I love this city — I’m not fit to live anywhere else.”

As deputy mayor for economic development, **Dr. Jenny Mains** brings a purpose-driven approach shaped by a nontraditional path to public service.

A physician by training who later worked in business and logistics, Mains said she felt a responsibility to step into public service rather than remain on the sidelines. Moreno’s vision for economic growth and long-term opportunity, she said, aligned deeply with her own values.

A current student in the Tulane School of Professional Advancement’s Business & Leadership Studies program, Mains credits the university with helping her connect purpose with practice. “Tulane reinforces the idea that education isn’t just about personal advancement, but about equipping yourself to contribute to the broader community,” she said.

She sees the relationship between Tulane and the city continuing to grow through collaboration on economic development, workforce pipelines and community resilience.

**Mara Baumgarten Force**, a professor in Tulane’s A. B. Freeman School of Business and director of the Schwartz Family Center for Experiential Business Learning, serves on the city’s revenue estimating committee, which projects how much revenue the city expects to collect each year — figures that form the foundation of the city’s budget.

“We know what the millages are,” Force said. “The question is a percent of what. What are we expecting our sales tax revenue to be?”

A volunteer member of the committee, Force was originally appointed during a previous administration and remains in the role to ensure continuity and institutional knowledge. Her service reflects a longer tradition: “There has been a Tulane professor in this position for about 25 years,” she said.

While not a Tulane alumna, Force described the university’s relationship with the city as deeply symbiotic. “Tulane is the brain and engine,” she said. “Music and Mardi Gras are here — but Tulane is the thinking engine. The folks at Tulane very much want to contribute to the city.”