

McAlister Begins to Grow Green

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In the life of every university, the end of the spring semester typically signals the start of campus improvement projects. This year, the confetti from the previous weekend's commencement ceremony had barely time to settle when construction began on a major project that will change the way the center part of the Tulane uptown campus looks and functions.



Work is under way on a landscaped pedestrian mall that will begin with a new threshold plaza at McAlister Drive and Freret Street. (Renderings from the Office of the University Architect)

On May 18, McAlister Drive was closed as crews began the initial work on a project to convert a portion of the street into [McAlister Place](#), a landscaped pedestrian mall with additional lighting, two pedestrian plazas and restricted traffic and parking.

The project, which targets the area along McAlister Drive from Freret Street to McAlister Auditorium (at Drill Road), is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year.

“I really do think McAlister Place will change the feeling of that part of campus and create a community space, a place for people to gather,” says Yvette Jones, chief operating officer and senior vice president for external affairs.

McAlister Drive, which has served as a thoroughfare connecting Freret and Willow streets, has been something of a safety concern, says Jones. “Most private universities don't have a drive through the middle of campus,” she says. “You had cars and service carts along with pedestrians and bikes all going in a variety of directions along this major artery of campus ? and that will be minimized.”

Turning the drive into a pedestrian mall is a project that has been part of university's master plan for about 20 years, says Jones. The \$1.5 million project is becoming a reality through a donation from the Benenson family, who also underwrote the limestone monuments in Gibson Circle in 2004.

Before work on the conversion could begin, however, there were a number of steps that needed to be taken.

Planning for the project began nearly three years ago, with the initial round of concept approvals coming in late 2006 by the Campus Planning Executive Committee, the University Senate Committee on Physical Facilities and committees of the Board of Tulane.



The mall will include an extended plaza in front of McAlister Auditorium, projecting into the quad. The overall project will create more pedestrian- and bike-friendly

spaces on the uptown campus.

Then there were the [logistics](#).

“Part of getting to this stage was creating parking at Rosen in order to supplement the loss of spaces on McAlister,” says Jones. The new Rosen parking lot, space made available when Rosen House was demolished after Hurricane Katrina, is located at the corner of Ben Weiner Drive and South Claiborne Avenue. University shuttles bring parkers at Rosen to various campus locations and back.

There also were the tasks of conducting a traffic study, figuring how to supply services to buildings along McAlister and rerouting shuttle schedules to accommodate faculty and staff.

“It's a huge planning exercise,” says Jones.

And that's only the beginning. The McAlister Place Project is part of long-term planning to create more pedestrian- and bike-friendly spaces while uniting the quads between McAlister Auditorium and Newcomb Hall.

But don't expect a next phase of campus development to begin on the heels of the completion of McAlister Place. Having plans is one thing, says Jones. Having the funding to implement them is something else.

Nevertheless, Jones says this first step will be transformative.

“This will be a magnificent change for the campus,” she says.