

Tulane helps city develop its 'vision for downtown'

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Nick Jenisch, left, project manager for the Tulane Regional Urban Design Center, leads a small-group session with residents of the city of Gretna, Louisiana, as the city looks to improve and develop its downtown area. (Photos by Frank Aymami)

A colorful logo of “Gretna Downtown 2020” set the stage for a recent planning meeting in the city of Gretna, Louisiana, where residents joined leaders of the [Tulane Regional Urban Design Center](#) to discuss “a vision for downtown.”

Some citizens in the New Orleans area may not know much about [Gretna](#), with a

population of nearly 18,000 across the Mississippi River from New Orleans. That's one reason why the city, led by mayor Belinda C. Constant, called in TRUDC, part of the Tulane University [School of Architecture](#), to listen to citizens and start work on a 10-year development plan.

"For a little city, a small government or even a big government, you've got to have a roadmap to define the future," Constant said.

With roots dating back to 1836 and a thriving historic district, Gretna believes it is primed for growth, being the Jefferson Parish seat and holding events such as the annual music-filled Gretna Heritage Festival, a weekly farmers market, and outdoor concerts and family-friendly movies.

The TRUDC team ? architecture faculty member [Grover Mouton](#) and project manager [Nick Jenisch](#), along with architecture students ? has worked on similar planning projects for cities such as Mandeville, Louisiana, and Biloxi, Mississippi. They began work in Gretna this summer, meeting with key organizations, interviewing leaders and holding meetings about ways to invigorate public spaces and draw both visitors and more development.

Their final report is expected early next year and will include goals for downtown improvements. Citizens have added ideas for painted murals and artwork, water features and more outside dining for restaurants, and TRUDC suggested adding trees and landscaping, clearly marked crosswalks and signage at "gateways" to the city for "a consistent look and feel."

An environment that attracts pedestrians, Jenisch said, may also attract more retail establishments and restaurants.

The work by Tulane "will show us some real possibilities of what can work in our downtown," Constant said.



Matthew Martinec, at right, project development coordinator for the Gretna mayor's office, points to a street layout as a group of Gretna citizens discusses gateways into the city, located on the West Bank of the Mississippi River across from New Orleans.