

Living with water in the Crescent City

November 19, 2015 2:30 AM Jamie Logan
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Like the Netherlands, New Orleans is an urbanized delta. The city needs other defenses in addition to the levee system, according to David Waggonner, who with colleagues cultivated the Dutch Dialogues. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

“New Orleans is on life support.” These startling words came from David Waggonner, president of [Waggonner and Ball Architects](#), who spoke at Dixon Hall on the Tulane University uptown campus on Tuesday (Nov. 17).

In his lecture, “Living with Water: The New Orleans Water Plan,” Waggonner explained that because of coastal erosion and subsidence caused by the current drainage infrastructure, New Orleans is threatened by the very water that was once

its lifeblood.

Seeking a solution, Waggonner began to study areas facing similar threats from Norfolk, Virginia, to the Netherlands. He and his colleagues cultivated the [Dutch Dialogues](#), an international discussion between countries that focuses on common challenges in urbanized deltas.

“We discovered some things that are fundamental to the Dutch,” Waggonner said. His team found that water removal eliminates a valuable resource and causes land to sink.

According to Waggonner, the levees must be fortified, but the city needs other defenses as well. For example, water must have a place to go if and when it surges over the walls.

These lessons and others have been incorporated into a holistic design that Waggonner hopes will continue via the Greater New Orleans Urban Water Plan.

“We envision this living water system meant to encourage all kinds of life,” Waggonner said. The plan begins with existing basins such as City Park.

Eventually, the investment will create affordable waterfront properties in the heart of the city. “It can be beautiful,” Waggonner said. More importantly, however, this process will allow New Orleans to become sustainable.

With hard work and determination, the city below sea level will thrive, he said.

Waggoner's presentation was made possible by the Longenecker Lecture Series. The series, held annually in honor of Herbert and Jane Longenecker, is sponsored by the [Tulane University Women's Association](#).

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