

# The \$55m project to remodel the Warwick Hotel as Tulane U residence hall: See project details and timeline

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Tulane University President Michael Fitts leads the crowd in a Roll Green Wave cheer at the Wednesday, September conversion of the old Warwick Hotel into new apartments for Tulane students and faculty in downtown New Orleans

PHOTO BY CHRIS GRANGER

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The \$55 million project to convert the long-derelict Warwick Hotel on Duncan Plaza into a 154-unit apartment complex for Tulane University's medical students and faculty got underway on Wednesday, after City Hall gave its final approval for the plan.

In February, Tulane University and the property's owner, a privately-owned developer called the New Orleans Redevelopment Fund, agreed to a long-term lease deal after NORF's original plan to revive the property as a hotel had stalled, even before the coronavirus pandemic decimated the city's hospitality industry.

The university's president, Michael Fitts, said the new residential complex is a key part of Tulane's plans to expand its downtown campus significantly as its biomedical operations thrive, especially during the pandemic which has helped to turbocharge the funds available to develop a vaccine as well as for other biomedical priorities.

"We've had the best year in our history in garnering research grants, especially for COVID-19 but also for other research," said Fitts, speaking at a "groundbreaking" ceremony at the site on Gravier Street on Wednesday to mark the start of construction. "This type of research explosion is going to benefit the city, with greater innovation, start-ups, and the expanding the tax base as a result of what goes on down at this campus."

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Tulane University has joined NORF, an private investment fund, in a plan to convert the old Warwick Hotel into 154 apartments for medical staff, faculty and students.

Albert Architects rendering, courtesy, Tulane University and NORF

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Fitts added that the residential expansion project "symbolizes not only the future of Tulane but also the future of New Orleans in so many different ways."

As well as the Gravier Street apartments, Tulane also will be the anchor tenant of the refurbished Charity Hospital around the corner, another property that has been unoccupied since Hurricane Katrina 15 years ago and which is slated for a \$300 million rehabilitation. Tulane will be leasing 350,000 square feet of space, 100,000 square feet of which will be converted into laboratory facilities, with the rest given over to teaching space, offices and study areas, to serve approximately 1,000 staff and students.

Mayor LaToya Cantrell, who made the trip across Duncan Square for the ceremony on Wednesday, said that it will be good to see one of the city's long-standing eyesores finally get a makeover. "As I'm sitting over in City Hall and looking over here saying, 'wow, this building sure is one of those

armpits I talked about when I was a councilwoman," she said. "But you know it always feels good to get a shave."

The Mayor noted plans to move City Hall from the other side of Duncan Plaza on Perdido Street, possibly to the Municipal Auditorium in Armstrong Park, freeing up more space to develop that area of the city as part of the fledgling "Spirit of Charity Innovation District".

"This is part of the growth and transformation that will be in the heart of the city of New Orleans," she said.



The old Warwick Hotel, right, is located near the Tulane University School of Medicine in downtown New Orleans. The building will be converted into an apartment for students and faculty.

PHOTO BY CHRIS GRANGER

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At the Warwick conversion, which is expected to be completed in 12 months, the ground floor will have retail, including a restaurant, a café, and a "grab-and-go" convenience store, which Tulane is also leasing and will rent back to vendors.

Fitts has forecast that the university's research spending will increase by 50% over the next five years, from about \$200 million in 2019, driving the expansion of the downtown campus further.

"Five years from now, I'm seeing this as an incredibly vibrant district," he said.

*The article has been revised to make it clear that Tulane University is the leasing partner in the project, which is owned by NORF and its investors.*