

My First Two Weeks at New Orleans City Council

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Hello! My name is Rebecca Kelly, and I am just finishing up my second week as an intern for Council-member LaToya Cantrell at New Orleans' City Hall. It has been a very informative couple of weeks, and I am excited to see what the rest of my internship has in store.

My internship site is in the District B council office in City Hall, which is right across the hall from the Mayor's office on the second floor. Besides Council-member Cantrell, the office has five other employees and one other intern. I work at a desk right next to them, which has been very valuable, as it allows me to observe first-hand how city government functions. Our office, and the City Council in general, handles the day-to-day functioning of New Orleans. The people I work with are on the front-lines of New Orleans' many issues, for they are the first ones people call when there is a problem. Furthermore, they are the ones who find the solution to whatever is the issue, whether that be directing the constituent to another department or solving the problem single-handed. I have been able to observe several people who truly care about New Orleans and its people, which has so many lessons I can take with into my future. Already I have learned that it does not matter what job I have as long as I am passionate about it. Even if their jobs are not always glorious, the fact that they are having a measurable impact on the daily lives of citizens make it worth it.

I can already see the value in my own research, even. So far, I have spent most of my time researching topics that I will be working on in order to familiarize myself with them. My main focus has been on Restorative Tax Abatement (RTA), which plays a huge role in our city. RTA essentially gives tax incentives to people who restore buildings in either historical or business districts, of which we have many. This program is used by both large companies and individual homeowners is playing a huge role in the development of our city. RTAs for historical buildings is especially important, since New Orleans' historical buildings are a major part of our tourism industry. This connects to another main concept I observed this past week: historical restoration. I never knew restoring an old house or building a new house to look old (something that actually is quite common here) could be so complicated. If a citizen lives in a historic district, they must obtain consent from the mayor's office, city council, and HDLC before they can begin work. All the architecture plans must be approved and in accordance with the many codes that New Orleans has in regards to the aesthetic of historical buildings. Everyone in City Council takes the historical character of New Orleans very seriously, and something as small as dip-caps on windows can spark a lengthy debate. The passion that surrounds these issues makes me fascinated in a topic I never even considered minutely interesting before.

My favorite part of the week, though, was the council meeting. I got to sit behind all the council-members on stage as Cantrell's chief-of-staff explained the proceeding

to me. There were three heated debates about historical restorations, which were entertaining to watch. I witnessed the council-members vote on a plethora of things, from political appointments to ordinances, and they also reaffirmed New Orleans' support of the Paris Agreement. I found this especially interesting, as the Paris Agreement has been such a massive news story recently, and sometimes one forgets that America's cities and states must decide whether or not following the president of our country is in their best interests or not. New Orleans, where one can see evidence of the very real effect of climate change from year to year, decided that following the president's decision would be detrimental to our already environmentally-fragile city.

As you can see, My first two weeks were educational in several unexpected ways. I hope that for the rest of my internship, I continue to learn surprising things, as I feel that this will help me to become more well-rounded, a valuable characteristic in an job field. I look forward to the coming weeks

Lastly, this week's tip on how to get an internship is network. I got my current internship through a speaker who came to a Women in Politics meeting, a club that I am on the eboard for. I contacted her, and she in turn put me in touch with someone in the council office. I definitely would not have found this internship without her. Hence, networking is key!