

VCPORA's Weekly Vieux Saturday, August 1, 2020

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Pedestrianization Analysis

In June, the Advocate [reported](#) on the pedestrianization concepts being developed by City officials. This week, the City's "Reimagining the French Quarter" [press release](#) provided links to the [conceptual presentation](#), [website](#), and recent [survey results](#).

News of these proposals ignited widespread concern in the French Quarter. Residents and business owners expressed alarm that they had not been consulted on potential major changes that would directly affect their day-to-day quality of life. **The absolute next step is for the City to engage with all stakeholders of this remarkable neighborhood.** Councilmember Kristin Palmer has promised to host a public meeting in the next two weeks to discuss these pedestrianization proposals with residents. We will provide the details on that meeting once we receive them.

VCPORA has had the opportunity to review these ideas and provide feedback to the City's Tiger Team. We have provided much of [that analysis on our website](#). Our lens has been one of intent and impact. No other city has such a rich a blend of architecture, commerce, private homes, and vibrant street life densely packed into a neighborhood of less than one square mile. Few cities, arguably none, host 20 million visitors in an area that is home to an estimated 3,200 residents. In our review of these concepts, we have continuously asked 1) what is the real problem? 2) who does the real problem affect? and 3) who are these solutions designed for?

As previously stated, VCPORA will not endorse any effort that contributes to the further commercialization of the neighborhood by prioritizing visitors over residents. We will not support any concept that prohibits or limits a resident's access to their own home. We will, however, support concepts that will help maintain the diversity and authenticity of this remarkable neighborhood by providing tools for local businesses. We support efforts to reduce the impact of vehicles in the French Quarter and the associated issues of congestion, damage to historic buildings, pedestrian safety, and air quality. We support improvements to our aging infrastructure so that the Vieux Carré remains an enjoyable place to live, work, and visit.

We remain committed to working with you, our members, and the City to explore creative improvements to the French Quarter that will prioritize and enhance the livability and enjoyment of this neighborhood by all.

Read our comments [here](#) and share your comments with the City [here](#).



Willie's Chicken Shack Update

We are continuing with our appeal. See how [you can help here](#).

Last weekend, the Mayor's COVID Enforcement Task Force [shut down](#) all Willie's Chicken Shack locations after social media erupted with images and of visitors carrying around to-go drinks in the signature branded Willie's containers. In spite of the ban on to-go drinks implemented to prevent social gathering in the streets around the City, the Willie's Chicken Shack on Decatur was found selling ready-to-go frozen cocktails to groups. Currently, a restaurant can sell alcoholic beverages, but it must be to diners on premises. It was clear, this establishment was not operating as the standard restaurant it claims to be.

In November 2019, VCPORA filed an appeal with the Board of Zoning Adjustments (BZA) challenging the Department of Safety & Permit's designation of Willie's Chicken Shack as a "Standard Restaurant". We asserted that it actually met the criteria for a fast food restaurant and therefore would not be allowed in the Vieux Carré per the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance (CZO). Its operations also closely mimic a bar, which is not a permitted use at the appealed location.

We received over 150 letters of support and boasted nearly one dozen in-person speakers. Several BZA commissioners even admitted that Willie's probably met the defining criteria for a fast food restaurant. Despite the overwhelming evidence, we lost the appeal on the basis of murky CZO language. Now, we are challenging *that* decision with the Civil District Court. We believe our argument still stands: Willie's Chicken Shack is a fast food chain, now with 8 locations in and around the French Quarter. Its proliferation threatens the neighborhood's unique character and encourages regulation-bending.

We cannot do this alone. If you want to help stop the spread of fast food chains, [donate to our appeal today](#). We must send a message to the City: uphold existing, community-crafted land use regulation, and maintain the integrity of the French Quarter. Locals deserve to enjoy the heart of our city.



Hermann-Grima House Limited Open

[The Hermann-Grima House](#) is currently open for self-guided courtyard tours. Both the courtyard and museum store [The Exchange Shop](#) are open 7 days a week, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. (with a closure from noon - 1:00 p.m. for cleaning). Shopping is also available by phone with contactless pick up. The interiors of Hermann-Grima and Gallier Houses are [closed until further notice](#).



Evacuees Needed

New Orleans residents are encouraged to become [NOLA Ready Evacuation Volunteers](#) during the 2020 hurricane season. The [next volunteer training](#) will be held online at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, August, July 15. An estimated 35,000 New Orleanians are unable to evacuate on their own ahead of a major storm. City-Assisted Evacuation, run by NOHSEP and the New Orleans Fire Department, provides transportation assistance as an option of last resort for these residents during a mandatory evacuation order.

Due to the unique nature of this hurricane season occurring simultaneously with the COVID-19 pandemic, organizing volunteers in 2020 will involve key medical and health considerations best informed by the strategic leadership of NOHSEP and NOMRC. NOLA Ready Evacuation Volunteers will be trained online, will undergo a background check, and will also be called upon for other public safety volunteer opportunities year-round. Due to COVID-19, all staff, volunteers, and evacuees will be provided with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and will be required to socially distance if a mandatory evacuation is necessary. See Eventbrite for [more information and registration](#).



Eviction Resources

As eviction courts attempt to reopen, this is a reminder that [Jane Place Neighborhood Sustainability Initiative](#) has released a guide to renter's rights in the eviction process. [Southeast Louisiana Legal Services](#) has also information on the legal rights of tenants during the COVID-19 crisis.

Meanwhile, the [City's Office of Community Development](#) is financially assisting tenants in Orleans Parish who are in imminent danger of being evicted. Applicants must have experienced a loss of income related to COVID-19 and will likely become homeless within the next 30 days without financial assistance. Illegal evictions can be reported to 311. If the eviction is in progress, the Orleans Parish Communication District will dispatch the Orleans Parish Constable, which has jurisdiction over that part of the city.

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