



VCPOA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

New Orleans City Council
1300 Perdido St.
New Orleans, La 70130

PRESIDENT

Via email

Nathan Chapman

Re: 440 Bourbon St. VCC Appeal

VICE PRESIDENTS

October 27, 2022

Andy Gallagher

Mark Masor

Dear Councilmember King,

SECRETARY

Elizabeth Simpson

I write on behalf of the VCPORA Board of Directors to express our opposition to the requested second-floor gallery addition for 440 Bourbon Street. The Vieux Carré Commission unanimously denied the application on August 17, 2022, and we hope you will uphold that decision. While the rendered design may be eye-catching, we feel this would be a devastating blow to both the building and the authority of the VCC to effectively regulate the world-famous architecture of the French Quarter.

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Unique Building Type

440 Bourbon Street, built in 1819, is a rare example of a Spanish-Creole Entresol building, named after its “entresol/entre suelo” (translation: mezzanine) middle floor, which was designed as a low-height storage level. Typically, these buildings were commercial on the ground floor, with the business’s products and inventory stored in the 6’-8’ entresol, and their living accommodations on the top floor. The building type is not found outside of our region, and there are only 18 Entresol buildings in the French Quarter, and likely the country.

Upholding the authority of the VCC

Per the VCC Design Guidelines for new galleries, “adding a new balcony, gallery, porch, or overhang will greatly alter the appearance of a building. In select cases, the VCC might approve the installation of a new [gallery] provided that:

- There is documentary evidence supporting that one previously existed,
- The installation is appropriate for the building type,
- The installation does not destroy or conceal an important architectural feature or detail,
- The proposed design is compatible in size, scale and design to the building and surrounding streetscape.” (VCC DG: 08-09)

EXECUTIVE

DIRECTOR

Erin Holmes

EXECUTIVE

ASSISTANT

Dare Rose-Havens

In evaluating this proposal, the VCC determined that there was no documentation to suggest a gallery ever existed on the second floor and that it would be nearly unheard of for this property to have a second-floor gallery given that the building has an entresol level, which fits the industrial use of the building. They denied the application, citing that “a new gallery in this location would be inappropriate for the building type, and would obscure the important architectural feature that is the entresol itself.”

Additionally, the applicant has not submitted any actual plans for this addition, only a rendered drawing. Overturning the VCC decision at this time would be premature, as there is still much consideration needed for the project to be completed, including but not limited to a lease for air rights and the underground conditions which would need to be vetted through the Department of Public Works and the Sewerage and Water Board. If the Fire Marshal would even allow a mid-level balcony, it is unlikely that there would be enough clearance for patrons to stand upright on the gallery deck, much less access it safely through the small window openings.

Chipping away at Integrity

The French Quarter is known for the intricate galleries and balconies dotting the streetscape. Many commercial property owners seek to add these to provide additional space for their patrons to enjoy their businesses. Though the rendering may look appealing on paper, if constructed, a gallery at the entresol would appear stunted. This treatment essentially creates an unusable faux feature as seen in movie sets and theme parks and detracts from the world-renown authenticity of this National Historic District, so recognized because of its carefully preserved features.

Granting this appeal will only open the door wider to additional applications in the future.

We hope you will agree that these various changes to the *tout ensemble* threaten to erode the significance of the whole and will deny this appeal. I would be happy to discuss this further with you or your staff.

Sincerely,



Erin Holmes
Executive Director, Vieux Carré Property Owners, Residents and Associates
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