

# Vieux Carré Commission—Economic Development Offer

## BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

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The current system for the review of occupational licenses and alcoholic beverage permits in the Vieux Carré is inefficient, disorganized, and technologically antiquated. Proprietors initiate their applications at the Bureau of Revenue, which are then routed to the Department of Safety and Permits' Zoning Administration. Zoning then sends the applications to the VCC via fax, where VCC staff investigates the legality of the proposed uses and the exterior changes contemplated to accommodate the use. With this faulty system of faxing documents back and forth, applications and review forms have been lost/not received, causing further delays. In addition, delays are often exacerbated by the fact that the VCC has no access to whatever database is used to verify existing and/or prior legal uses and/or licenses, and must rely on secondary sources to obtain this information.

When it is determined that the application involves a change in use and a change in the exterior appearance of the building, Article 8, Section 8.1 of the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance mandates that the Commission hold a public hearing to consider those changes. Because the Commission meets monthly, and materials are required in advance of the hearing, it is not uncommon for proprietors to have to wait up to eight weeks after initiating their applications at Revenue for license/permit issuance. This creates a hardship for applicants, who are often already leasing the spaces, but cannot conduct business on the premises.

## PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

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The improvements to the existing system are two-fold. First, application processing must be streamlined and make use of current technology to facilitate better communication between departments. We propose to use the Accela application as inter-department storage for the following information:

- Existing and/or prior legal uses and/or licenses
- Date application was received and by which department
- Status of the workflow (i.e., staff review, requires Commission review, approved, denied, etc)
- Staff reports

This system should function the same way that permits for architectural modifications that require the review of multiple agencies do in Accela. This portion of the offer will increase efficiency for the VCC, Safety & Permits, and the Bureau of Revenue by creating a centralized application from which all departments obtain information regarding the status of applications/workflows (and can in turn communicate this status to applicants) and access historic data about prior uses and licensing (which will speed up the review process).

Second, applicants should be apprised of the additional investigation required by the Vieux Carré Commission and the submission requirements for 8.1 Change of Use hearings at the time the initial application is made at the Finance Department. Constituents have suggested that the VCC print and distribute informational packets summarizing what is required of business owners in the French Quarter. The VCC would like to furnish applicants and other departments with such information as part of an educational outreach endeavor. The VCC will partner with the Friends of the Vieux Carre Commission (a 501 (c) 3 which supports the work of the Commission) to host bi-annual workshops that inform and engage potential and existing business owners about procedures and requirements related to signage and permitted uses. When the new Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance is adopted, the VCC would also like to partner with the City Planning Commission to educate French Quarter property owners and associates about its impacts and opportunities.

If this offer is not funded, the difficulties outlined above will be exacerbated. Fewer license reviews will be conducted (meaning that business activities which erode the historic ambience of the Quarter will proliferate), the time frame per review will increase significantly (meaning that many proprietors may simply choose to do business elsewhere), and fewer change of use hearings will be held (meaning that incompatible uses that compromise the architectural integrity of the Quarter will propagate).