



6-12-17 FMIA comments on the May 2, 2017 CPC Riverfront Overlay Study

In 1971, Mayor Moon Landrieu commissioned a study to examine the potential of historic zoning as an economic development tool. Because of this study, the FMIA was founded in 1972, protecting and cultivating this neighborhood, which was then placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 and designated a local Historic District in 1978. The City Planning Commission (CPC) was a partner in all of these endeavors, which culminated in Historic Marigny Zoning. Through these dogged efforts, we have gone from a neighborhood in which no one could get a bank loan or homeowners insurance, to a historic jewel. It is from this history that we come to you today to advocate for protection of our neighborhood's history.

The New Orleans City Council has directed the City Planning Commission to study "whether the contemplated bonuses and design requirements are appropriate to incentivize development in a manner consistent with the Master Plan." We are at issue with this, because:

- All special design requirements have been removed.
- No consideration has been given to the possible impact of the physical weight of larger buildings on the seven (7) squares in Marigny, close to the levee wall. In Post-Katrina New Orleans, assuming it's safe because it is on the high ground of the "sliver by the river" could put the city's safety at risk.
- We would like to require U.S. Army Corps of Engineers core sample reports before final approval is given to this study.
- We would like the CPC to require a traffic study before this is enacted. The findings could significantly alter the parameters.
- The study claims (p. 6) to "respond to the unique historic character of Marigny and Bywater neighborhoods," yet we believe it is in direct conflict with several tenets of the Master Plan, including:

VISION STATEMENT: New Orleans 2030 A master plan for the 21st century | 5.3 "New buildings and public spaces benefit from the lessons learned from the city's historic neighborhoods – buildings that embody qualities of human scale, sustainability, façades that frame and enliven public



streets, and a sense of responsibility for the civic quality of the neighborhoods and districts they help build."

Chapter 7 | historic preservation Community Issues: Preserve neighborhood character.

Overwhelmingly, the post-Katrina UNOP and Lambert Neighborhood plans identify the preservation of the overall "character" of neighborhoods as a top priority.

- This plan further disconnects Marigny from the Master Plan (p. 3 and 25) by stating in Article 14 of the Land Use Plan chapter deems RIV to be "Appropriate and consistent " by specifying:

"Create neighborhood centers with a mixture of higher density housing, retail and other uses at neighborhood edges on underutilized industrial/commercial land..." and "Take advantage of vacant land on higher ground for higher density uses."

- The statement (p. 36), "In the Marigny Rectangle, it is not as clear which street frontages would be most appropriate for active ground floor uses. With four street frontages, the [7] squares in Marigny may not be able to support ground floor commercial on all sides," conflicts with the suggestion to " Create neighborhood centers..."

The FMIA does not advocate vacant and underused land, but we do we promote sensitive development that compliments and enhances the established community. Building an out-of-scale environment does not accomplish the goals of the Master Plan "top priority" of protecting Historic Character.

- While the history of separation of this area from the actual center of the neighborhood is true: "building a commercial barrier between the residential city and the Mississippi (P. 18)," *AND* "The Riverfront Overlay is separated from surrounding residential areas by street rights-of-way." (P. 26), this problem is not corrected by building out-of-scale structures that will make this separation permanent.

In the Historical Overview section of the study, Sanborn maps are included with the explanation, "while they do not indicate heights, (P. 9), they do reveal the number of stories within a given structure." The tallest structures were all residential. There are no photographs of 4-story historic Marigny buildings in the report, but here's two that used to be a row of ten. There are dormers not seen in this photo, and the height at the peak is about 48 feet, which is historically accurate and desired for this stretch of property:



This photo is also shown in the FMIA comments of 4-30-17.

- The study asserts the "City Planning Commission previously recommended seventy-five (feet) in height and a floor area ratio of 3.7 to 4 for the Riverfront Overlay as being *compatible with the surrounding area.*" (P. 26). We believe this decision was made in consideration of the designated bonuses, no longer present, as a type of compromise with residents. This is also in conflict to the earlier statement, (continuing on p. 26), concerning **Development Character:**

"The density, height, and mass of new development will be consistent with the character and tout ensemble of the surrounding historic neighborhood."

- The study misleadingly emphasizes (p.33), that like the Rice Mill, the highest parts of NOCCA are approximately 75 feet in height. (Photos, 34,35.) While the theater fly does ascend to 75 feet, it is the smallest, and lightest part of the building, as it does not consist of stories, because it *is not residential*. It is not visible from the neighborhood. It was negotiated with the neighborhood and placed in a part of the riverbank, nearest the trains, that juts out, necessitating the turn from North Peters to St. Ferdinand, a one block transition to where Chartres becomes two-way.



- The study incorrectly states the building at 511 Marigny at Decatur is approximately 60 feet, when it is 48 feet. (P. 39)
- While the study claims that eliminating "Conditional Use" is a negative for the *Development* Community, this is inconsistent with the Master Plan, whereas we believe it is essential for compliance with the Master Plan.
- The study includes "Key Findings" in a nationwide Best Practices section, however, none of these neighborhoods are located next to a Historic District. However, in "Lessons Learned from Case Studies," (P. 59), some items repeat similar protections for residents and Historic Districts portend a more positive outlook for neighbors, would they be heeded, such as:
 - The public sector should implement waterfront plans in partnership with the private sector, and *meaningful community involvement is essential*.
 - One size does not fit all. Redevelopment projects should reflect the nature and spirit of each site.
 - Waterfront projects should *enhance the character and history of a site*.
- The study discounts the review of 98% of the public comments made against height over 50 feet from Marigny and Bywater for any Riverfront Overlay, but listed only under Neighbors First for Bywater, (P. 62).
- The citizens of this community are completely attuned to the needs and character of their neighborhood. The study severely limits further community input by eliminating Public Review through Conditional Use to only HDLC, which is made up of people from neighborhoods all over the city, who are unfamiliar with the particular tout ensemble of Marigny.
- The study only incorporates suggestions (p. 61) "from economic, business and real estate groups [who] report that there is a disconnect between the market and current zoning regulations in that the market is not strong enough, development incentives are too weak, and mandated design standards are too costly to enable developers to develop land profitably." We believe that the actual neighbors' investment is given the short shrift by this report, and we urge you to consider the time and energy we have devoted to our neighborhood and this process.
- The concept of setbacks (p.69) is used to try to eliminate the height of the building on the street face. However, just the opposite will occur along the riverfront, As one would drive along N. Peters, which is the main artery through this area, the skyline would be a stair-step effect. Six blocks of this is incongruous to our neighborhood, and would further separate us from our riverfront.



CONCLUSION

The CPC report recognized Best Practices in cities such as Portland, Seattle, Pittsburgh, etc. We feel that the Best Practice that should be most emulated is the neighboring French Quarter. The preservation mechanisms in place there have created our city's greatest economic engine. Across the country, people are moving back to cities, and their historic neighborhoods with their unique cultures. Inserting "warehouse" size buildings, in a row along the river, will violate our tout ensemble. Also, as people continue to visit our city (repeatedly) our city, they are constantly looking to explore different parts of our unique city. Adding an Overlay, inspired by other cities is not the experience people desire. We feel expanding the height of these buildings is a short-sighted approach and is detrimental to the unique character of the neighborhood, which is crucial to its long term future, as a major economic generator for our city.

RESOLUTION

In the spirit of compromise, the FMIA requests the City Planning Commission add these elements to their final suggestions, besides the additional Army Corps report and Traffic Study, for a Riverfront Overlay:

1. Negotiate a compromise of Fifty-five (55) feet on height, and a maximum FAR of 2.5 with residents.
2. All new buildings 35,000 square feet, maximum.
3. Parking for a minimum of one car per unit, on the river side.
4. Eliminate Short Term Rentals from the area to promote a stable rental market and to insure affordable housing.
5. Require repaving of all streets surrounding new construction activity, once completed.