

Wednesday, August 13, 2025

Honorable City Council  
1300 Perdido Street  
New Orleans, LA 70112

Re: 327 Bourbon Street

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Attached, please find a report regarding an appeal of the Vieux Carré Commission's denial of the retention of an unpermitted installation of inappropriate synthetic siding in deviation of approved plans for a Blue rated building.

Should you have any questions or require any additional information, please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bryan D. Block". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bryan D. Block

**Appeal of the June 18, 2025, Vieux Carré Commission's denial of the retention of an unpermitted installation of inappropriate synthetic siding in deviation of approved plans for a Blue rated building.**

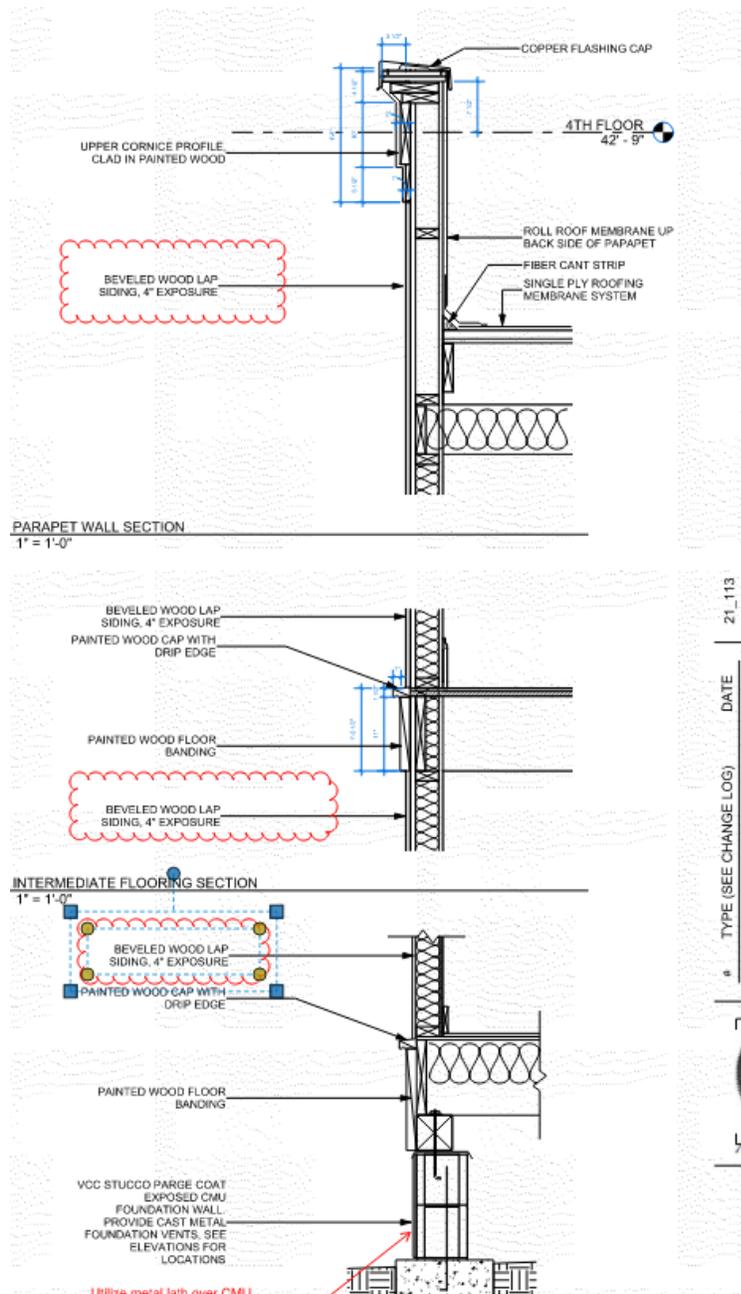
This Blue rated, c. 1835 Greek Revival townhouse is noted for its historical associations as the home of Judah P. Benjamin, as well as for its elegantly detailed features such as the carriageway entrance, main entrance, and "bow and arrow" wrought ironwork. The components of the original complex (house, kitchen, stable) remain intact. The mansard roof is a late 19th century addition.

As a quick summary, as part of the current complete renovation project, staff discovered that the materials used at the cornice and at the rear reconstructed addition deviated severely from the approved plans. The approved plans called for the pressed-metal cornice to be repaired or replaced to match existing including material, profile, dimensions, etc. Instead, based solely on the contractor's opinion and without any consultation with VCC staff, the original 19<sup>th</sup> century ornate pressed metal cornice was completely removed, and an entirely new fiberglass cornice was installed although that material is not approvable in the Vieux Carré. Due to the financial hardship of replacing such a large element the VCC Architectural Committee granted retention of this new cornice despite grave disagreement as to its appropriateness on such an important building.



*Portion of damaged original cornice after removal. This was to be replicated in metal.*

At the rear, a large three-story, anachronistic enclosure of what had been historically an open wood gallery which had been constructed decades ago without review or permits, allegedly collapsed during Hurricane Ida. No photographs were provided to VCC staff showing the damage and the debris was removed from the site without photo documentation or an opportunity for VCC inspection. VCC Architectural Committee allowed reconstruction of the addition provided it completely replicate the previous addition and be constructed out of wood siding.



**Notes on approved drawings requiring "Beveled wood lap siding, 4" exposure"**

Instead, synthetic siding was used on the addition. Once again, this contractor made the unilateral decision to use an anachronistic material without consulting VCC staff despite the fact that VCC design guidelines and the stamped approved drawings explicitly called for wood. He states that he made the decision due to the materials fire resistance and product longevity and because contemporary wood products lack the density of historic materials and do not have adequate longevity without proper maintenance. However, if the contractor was of this opinion, he should have once again reached out to the staff for a potential change order instead of just making the unilateral decision to disregard stamped plans and the expertise of the professional staff, a pattern of behavior also demonstrated with the cornice replacement described above.

Traditional wood siding has a tapered profile:



Synthetic siding is not tapered and is completely flat:



When this material is installed it does not accurately replicate historic conditions and has a very synthetic appearance that is not appropriate within the historic context especially on a Blue rated building.

The entire Vieux Carré is designated as a National Historic Landmark due to its integrity and authenticity as a unique, mostly intact district of urban design and invaluable inventory of historic resources. In fact, this is also why the Vieux Carré Commission was established by the Louisiana State Constitution. City Council approved the VCC design guidelines, which are based on national preservation best practices, so that the VCC staff and the public have a predictable and transparent road map as to what is appropriate and what is not when it comes to contemporary maintenance and modifications to French Quarter buildings. City Code established and codified the permitting process which provides for enforcement of items such as these that deviate from approvals and permits. This contractor has demonstrated a pattern of disregard for the authority of the VCC and the national standards upon which their decisions are based. Instead, he relied solely on his own opinion as to what would be best for this Blue rated building, the French Quarter and the City of New Orleans.

As the synthetic materials installed at the rear building were explicitly prohibited by the design guidelines and as wood siding was called out on approved drawings, VCC respectfully requests that you deny this appeal.