

Le Meitour fights City Hall for permits to reopen his boutique mall

THE COUNTRY STORE

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

The city of Portland has prevented the Multnomah Village French Quarter from fully operating for almost a year now. At stake is the future of an eclectic, international market complete with an old New Orleans street feel.

Several ethnic food carts, gift shops, a fresh farm stand, a wood-fired pizzeria, and an estate sale gallery make up the boutique mall created by Yves Le Meitour.

But delay after delay has confronted the local entrepreneur from taking his dream to reality.

According to Le Meitour, the city has denied him permits due to change of use requirements and will not let business proceed inside the building until demands are met.

"We have followed the city's instructions," said Le Meitour in his cluttered office of old paintings, masks, and religious objects. "I have paid the fees and satisfied their requirements. Each time the city has come back with entirely new objections."

The latest issue is a claim that the building will have an impact on parking and traffic flow. At the same time, many new businesses in the area have been allowed to open without providing any additional parking, and in some instances, without providing any parking at all.

"It appears we are being held to a different standard by the city than the rest of the business community in the Village and even Portland," he remarked.

For now, a petition has surfaced on social media. So far almost 700 people have signed it to support Le Meitour. He has also hired a lawyer and says he will go all the way to the Supreme Court if he has to.

When Keith's Automotive Center closed three years ago, at the intersection of Southwest 35th Avenue and Multnomah Boulevard, Le Meitour decided to buy the building.

While he organized his ideas about a place where people could gather and eat, he rented it out to Lounge Lizard,

a retro furniture gallery, who needed a temporary warehouse for its location on Hawthorne Boulevard.

When the furniture store vacated a year later, Le Meitour moved his antique art gallery out of the Capitol Highway location, added several food carts, and a fresh fish truck. Parsons Farm had a produce stand on the corner for several years and welcomed the additional business.

Le Meitour invited several tenants to open up boutiques inside the old building with high ceilings, large windows, and bay doors. He also recruited a wood fired pizza chef to join them. Interstate Pizza was supposed to open last Labor Day weekend.

But then, on an anonymous complaint about noise, the city came to inspect and that was the beginning of Le Meitour's troubles.

The city insisted he install landscaping, get rid of the drive-thru for the coffee cart, and fined him for not having the correct permits for a weekend Mardi Gras festival.

He headed back to the Bureau of Development Services for a change of occupancy permit and then had to respond to work that was never completed 10 years ago when Keith's Automotive was operating.

"The inspections were never completed," the Frenchman said. "Part of the building would have had to have been demolished so I had the rebar tested and showed that it was sound."

Le Meitour, who has been a local fixture for years in his jeans, cowboy boots, and his espresso in hand, has been a regular attendee of the Multnomah Neighborhood Association meetings where he has garnished support for his intentions.

Le Meitour hired an architect to draw up plans of his vision of the French Quarter. He paid his fines and then had more trips to the city. He had all bureaus on board including electrical and plumbing, but not transportation.

The Portland Bureau of Transportation wants him to cede eight feet of his property along Multnomah Boulevard, six feet on 35th Avenue, and a foot on Evans right behind his building for road improvements and parking.

When *The Post* spoke to Dylan Rivera, PBOT information officer, he explained that certain developments call for increased improvements due to the location and a multi-functional area.

"We want Mr. Le Meitour to make improvements with sidewalks and roads surrounding his property," Rivera said.

When *The Post* said that there indeed were sidewalks, at least along Multnomah Boulevard, Mr. Rivera hesitated with his paperwork and said he had to look into it even after mapping it.

"Some of the changes would alter what's already in place. When larger projects are developed it triggers [transportation] improvements."

"My biggest question," Le Meitour asked, "is why are they treating me different than everyone else? I've now lost my tenants. And the pizza owner, which delivered its large oven almost



Yves Le Meitour, with daughter Sara, is fighting to reopen his boutique mall in Multnomah Village.

six months ago, is getting inpatient."

"I'm determined," Le Meitour exclaimed. "I have appreciated the support of the neighborhood association. Our aim is to create a fun place where people can gather and socialize and be safe."

Garden Home History

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around longer," added Miner. "But this is nice to be able to acknowledge a house as well as a farm."

On a drizzly Saturday in December, members of the historical society brought the brass plaque to Miner and Kaplan's house and with applause and cheers, watched as committee member Stan Houseman affixed it next to the front door. He also helped design the plaque.

The century designation doesn't mean the homeowners can't remodel or update the home, unlike when a house is placed on the Historic Register. But Houseman says it is still a significant designation.

"To me, it's an added value to a home, that we have put this plaque as a recognition of this home," Houseman said. "And it's for future homeowners—to see that this home was recognized, so

they don't turn around and sell it to the next developer."

The Garden Home History Project is a volunteer organization that seeks to research the stories of the Garden Home area, preserve memories and educate newcomers to the neighborhood's wealth of history.

Elaine Shreve has been the guiding force behind the historical society. She's excited about the century home project, and has big plans for the future, too.

"Our project for next year is to get a large sign at the intersection [of Garden Home and Oleson roads] that says: 'Historic Garden Home,' or something like that," she said.

Shreve and Vanture believe there is much to celebrate in Garden Home. Some of it is hidden, or off the main road, but just give them enough time and Garden Home will soon be much more than a wide spot in the road people pass through.

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