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'Ultramodern' meters roil the French Quarter Residents sue New Orleans over pay stations for parking

By Mary Foster
The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Stuart Smith can put up with bars and shops selling sex toys in the 19th-century buildings neighboring his carefully restored townhouse in the French Quarter.

But he and other residents of the city's historic neighborhoods cannot abide the “garish” new parking meters — tall green monoliths in the middle of each block — that have replaced the traditional meters marking individual spaces.

“We don't think we should have these devices installed in a historic district without any input from the residents,” says Smith, who is part of a group that filed a lawsuit against the city.

The original suit was filed in May, claiming the new meters were installed without notice to the public or proper review by city agencies.

On Wednesday, the lawsuit was amended to say that the new meters violate a law that says tickets may be issued when time has expired and a yellow or red flag is visible on the meter.

The new system does not display a flag when time has expired.

“All tickets issued on these new meters are illegal,” Smith says. “Criminal law is very exact.”

The lawsuit asks for an injunction that would remove the meters as well as refund all fines collected for parking violations under the system.

The new parking system replaces individual meters with a pay station, about 6 feet tall and 18 inches wide. There are from one to three to a block.

Planned for more than 10 years by three successive mayoral administrations, the meters, which cost about \$7,500 each, are designed to accept credit cards, debit cards and coins. They do not take bills.

A parker must walk to the pay station, select a method of payment, take a printed parking slip and put it in the car on the passenger side dashboard.

“Our main concern is they are incompatible with a historic district,” says David Speights, a member of the

board of the Vieux Carré Property Owners, Residents and Associates. "They are ultramodern and they don't fit in with the surroundings."

Speights says the group has written city councilwoman Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson asking that the new system be removed from the French Quarter, also known as the Vieux Carré.

"Some people have called them ugly," Speights says. "I've called them ugly myself. They are. Ugly and inappropriate."

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