

ATTACHMENT A

March 24, 2022

Variance Justification Letter for 725 University Avenue Garage Remodel

Project Address: 725 University Avenue, Los Altos (detached garage only)

Homeowners: Lauren and Eric Albert

Architectural Designer: Danielle DiVittorio

To the Members of the Los Altos Design Review Commission,

In late 2019 we purchased this home, a Los Altos Historic Resource, intending to do a significant remodel of the interior while preserving the historic exterior. That remodel is nearly complete and we are looking forward to moving in this spring.

Recently we came to realize that the house's garage, a detached unit facing Lee St., is not wide enough to fit two cars, though it had been described as a two-car garage when we purchased the house. We hope to receive your approval for a minor modification to allow us to park two cars in the garage.

The modification in question is:

Remodel the old garage, which was originally built within the modern day setback, to functionally fit two cars. Do this by removing non-historic storage space at the rear of the garage and reusing that square footage at the side to widen the garage, maintaining the garage's physical character in accordance with the historic nature of the property.

The majority of the garage footprint and square footage remains, and the proposed remodel would reduce the total square footage of the garage. However, the garage currently sits within the setback, so we are proposing work in a nonconforming location.

We request a variance to remodel the garage as noted above, within the front setback, for your consideration in accordance with Section 14.76.070 of the Los Altos Zoning Code. Section 14.76.070 specifies that the Design Review Commission must make three findings to approve an application for a variance:

1. The granting of the variance(s) will be consistent with the objectives of the zoning plan set forth in Article 1 of Chapter 14.02 of the Los Altos Municipal Code.

In accordance with the objectives of Los Altos's zoning plan, a variance for this modification would "conserve the city's natural beauty, to improve its appearance, and to preserve and enhance its distinctive physical character". The proposed modification preserves the physical character of this garage while creating the necessary square footage for improved functionality of the space. We are respecting the natural beauty of the yard and decreasing the size of the garage's footprint. The remodel to the garage will "enhance real property values within the city" by allowing two cars to sit inside the garage, rather than park on the street, and by allowing EV chargers to be installed inside the garage to slightly reduce Los Altos' use of gasoline and help the city move to a more environmentally friendly future.

2. The granting of the variance(s) will not be detrimental to the health, safety, or welfare of persons living or working in the vicinity or injurious to property or improvements in the vicinity.

The minor remodel to the garage would enhance the welfare, health, and safety of the persons living and working in the vicinity. By making this a true two-car garage, we eliminate street parking and allow for two electric vehicle charging stations within the garage. This is one step towards eliminating gas. There would be no harm to health, safety, or welfare by remodeling this garage. Also, the garage's orientation and location faces a small side street, Lee St. This remodel will mostly go unnoticed for persons who do not use the garage.

3. The variance(s) shall be granted only when, because of special circumstances applicable to the property, including size, shape, topography, location, or surroundings, the strict application of the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance deprive the subject property of privileges enjoyed by other properties in the vicinity and under identical zoning classifications.

The location of the home, combined with its designation as a historic resource, create special circumstances which deprive this property of privileges which other properties in the vicinity under identical zoning classifications enjoy. Many other homes within the same zoning which have a 3-bedroom home or more get to enjoy and utilize a 2- or even 3-car garage. By allowing this small remodel within the setback we can preserve the existing physical character of the garage and use the existing square footage, but also make it a functional two-car garage. As the house is a historic resource, we do not have the option to demolish the garage and rebuild outside of the setbacks. The garage was built before any zoning codes were put into place. A variance is therefore the only option for us to modify the garage to be able to fit two cars while preserving the historic character of the property.

We hope we have provided sufficient justification for this variance. We look forward to working with your commission and city staff to arrive at the best solution here.

Sincerely,



Eric Albert
Homeowner



Lauren Albert
Homeowner