



**TOWN OF LOS GATOS  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
COMMITTEE REPORT**

MEETING DATE: 10/22/2025

ITEM NO: 4

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DATE: October 17, 2025  
TO: Historic Preservation Committee  
FROM: Joel Paulson, Community Development Director  
SUBJECT: Consider Providing Staff with Direction on Window Materials. **Project Location: Town Wide.** Project Planner: Sean Mullin.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Consider providing staff with direction on window materials.

**DISCUSSION:**

Window replacement is a common request discussed with property owners of historic homes. When replacement is necessary, staff works with property owners to encourage like-for-like replacement with either wood windows or metal-clad wood windows. When details are provided ensuring that the window replacement will match the existing windows or be historically appropriate for the residence, the work is completed through the Building Permit process and is not referred to the Committee for review. Staff reviews proposals for window replacements using the Residential Design Guidelines, which provides the following recommendations related to window materials:

**3.7.3 Match window materials to the architectural style and to the surrounding neighborhood**

- Wood windows are common in Los Gatos. Wood is still the desired choice for styles that traditionally used wood. However, today there are some window materials, such as vinyl clad wood windows that are not noticeably different from wood at a short distance.

**4.8.2 Building Materials**

- Composite, synthetic, metal, vinyl, plastic or fabricated/ imitation wood products, painted brick or imitation used brick will generally not be approved. However, some exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis when the decision-making body determines that the replacement is consistent with the appearance of the original material, and that a lay person would be unlikely to discern the difference. The burden of proof will reside with the applicant. Material samples, photographs, and specific

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locations where the material may be seen in use will all assist in the evaluation of alternative materials.

#### **4.8.4 Windows and Glass in doors**

- Windows should be constructed of real glass, and window frames should be constructed of real wood - not vinyl, metal, or plastic. Wood sashes may be vinyl or metal clad if the window frame and dressing is designed consistent with the historic context of the building.

The Guidelines emphasize the use of wood windows but allows exceptions for alternative materials when they are not noticeably different from wood at a short distance, found to be consistent with the historic context, and consistent with the appearance of the original material where it would be unlikely to discern the difference.

Property owners are often looking to replace windows with alternative materials that are more durable than wood, often wood-clad products with a metal or vinyl exterior. These materials are more resilient to weather and require less maintenance than wood. The potential drawback of these alternate materials is a less-than-authentic appearance.

Fiberglass-wood composite windows have been presented to the Committee many times over the last five years. While there were initial concerns with the product, evidence has been presented showing the benefits of the material, such as its genuine wood-like appearance, paintable surface, historic profiles, and easy maintenance. Because the Residential Design Guidelines predates this material and is therefore silent on its use, staff has referred projects involving the composite to the Committee for review. The Committee generally confirms that the profile, detailing, and look of the window will match the existing window or the historically correct window and recommends approval.

In staff's review of like-for-like window replacements on historic homes, the same evaluation criteria are used, albeit for wood or metal-clad wood products. Given the frequency of the request and the merits of the product, staff recommends that the Committee consider providing direction to staff to utilize the same evaluation criteria for window replacements and include consideration of fiberglass-wood composite materials without referral to the Committee. As is the current practice, window replacements that would result in a change in exterior appearance that does not align with the evaluation criteria would continue to be referred to the Committee for review.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Staff recommends that the Committee consider providing direction to staff to utilize the evaluation criteria consistent with the Guidelines for window replacements and include

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consideration of fiberglass-wood composite materials without referral to the Committee. Staff-level approval of fiberglass-composite wood windows would reduce the Committee's and staff's workload, free up agendas, and allow residents to proceed through the permit process more efficiently.

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