

Letter of Justification

Property: 310 Johnson Avenue, Los Gatos, CA

To: Town of Los Gatos Historic Preservation Committee

From: Sumit Ahluwalia & Swathi Jayaramaiah, Owners

Subject: Request for Approval — Entryway and Façade Improvements at 310 Johnson Avenue

Dear Members of the Historic Preservation Committee,

We are writing to respectfully request approval for proposed exterior improvements to our home at 310 Johnson Avenue. Our goal is to preserve the home's historic charm, address damage from essential foundation work, and improve the balance and street presence of the front façade in a manner consistent with the architectural rhythm of Johnson Avenue.

1. Background and Structural Context

When we purchased this home, it exhibited severe structural deterioration — more than ten inches of differential settlement and a cracked, failing foundation. Walking through the house, one could feel the slope beneath one's feet.

Multiple licensed contractors and foundation specialists confirmed the extent of the damage, noting that the foundation and framing were in such poor condition that **demolition and rebuilding were recommended**. Instead, we made the deliberate choice to invest in a complete foundation replacement to **save the original structure**.

Excerpts from the inspection report included:

- “A total of 27 vertical fractures were found along the foundation and basement retaining wall.”
- “A majority of the posts have rotted and/or are sitting directly on soil or a thin slab; pier blocks are damaged, misaligned, and in some cases undermined.”
- “Several existing girders are heavily notched and undersized.”

Given these findings, a full foundation replacement was the only viable path to structural stability. The work has been extremely costly — roughly three times our initial estimate — and has required us to draw on personal and retirement savings to complete it.

During the foundation work, the **non-original brick wainscoting** on the front and sides of the house collapsed. Beneath it, we discovered sections of **original wood siding**, confirming that the brick was a later alteration and helping to guide the design decisions in this proposal.

2. Historic Context and Design Rationale

Research conducted at the Los Gatos Library and Museum uncovered archival references to 310 Johnson Avenue, including the **1928 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map** and a **1941 Tax Assessor's record**. These sources show that the house existed by the late 1920s and had a **symmetrical interior layout**. The **right-hand side** featured a **covered porch with a street-facing entrance**, while the **left-hand side**, where the later brick wall stood, **did not yet project forward**.

Over the years, the right porch was enclosed and the brick addition appeared on the left, creating the current visual imbalance. Our proposal takes cues from that early configuration as a **reference point**, using its proportions and balance to inform the revised façade rather than to replicate it precisely.

By **bringing the left side of the façade forward** to align more closely with the right and **reintroducing a modest, street-facing entry beneath the main gable**, the design restores a more natural balance to the front elevation. This helps **offset the heavy visual mass of the right-hand side** while keeping all changes within the existing footprint and roof forms. The approach respects the home's evolution while subtly improving its coherence and presence on the street.

3. Proposed Design

The proposed work includes:

- **Wood siding restoration** where the brick fell, using period-appropriate lap siding that matches neighboring historic cottages.
- **A modest, centered front entry** under the main gable, consistent with early Los Gatos proportions and scale.
- **Extension of the left façade** to balance the enclosed right-hand mass and reestablish architectural symmetry.
- **A small porch landing and steps**, designed for safe entry with simple, cottage-scale posts and railings.
- **Relocation of an existing window** to maintain rhythm and proportion along the front elevation.

These adjustments do not increase the home's overall mass, height, or roof profile. They simply refine the existing form to achieve better balance and visual continuity.

4. Materials and Detailing

We plan to:

- Use **wood lap siding and trim** in restored areas, matching original profiles where possible.
- Install a **wood Craftsman-style entry door** (likely a 4-lite over 1-panel design) with clear divided-lite glass.
- Retain existing stucco elsewhere to preserve continuity and manage cost.
- Match window and trim detailing to existing profiles for consistency across the façade.

This combination keeps the project historically sensitive but practical, improving the home's appearance without prompting unnecessary replacement of intact materials.

5. Neighborhood Compatibility and Intent

Johnson Avenue is a street of well-kept early cottages that share modest scale, gabled roofs, and simple detailing. The proposed design maintains that rhythm by:

- Preserving the single-story scale and roof forms.
- Using traditional materials and restrained detailing.
- Re-establishing a symmetrical, street-facing façade that feels consistent with neighboring homes.

Our intent is not to modernize or reinvent the house, but to allow it to **sit comfortably and proudly among its historic neighbors** by improving balance and curb presence while retaining its existing character. Our hope is that this home will continue to sit proudly on Johnson Avenue for the next hundred years.

6. Closing Remarks

This project reflects our commitment to preserving a piece of Los Gatos's architectural history and ensuring its continued contribution to the neighborhood's charm. The improvements proposed here are modest but meaningful: they repair damage from unavoidable foundation work, use historically compatible materials, and restore visual harmony to the façade.

We respectfully request the Committee's approval of our proposed entryway and façade improvements and deeply appreciate your time, attention, and continued stewardship of Los Gatos's historic neighborhoods.

Warm regards,

Sumit Ahluwalia & Swathi Jayaramaiah

Owners, 310 Johnson Avenue, Los Gatos, CA

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