

PROJECT DESCRIPTION & LETTER OF JUSTIFICATION

193 Howes Drive, Los Gatos, CA 95032

Architecture and Site Application S-26-007

Property Owners: Neeraj Goel and Tulika Garg | Applicant: Seigo Designs | APN: 527-43-021 | Zoning: R-1:8

July 27, 2026

Los Gatos Planning Division
110 E. Main Street, Los Gatos, CA 95030
408.354.6872

RE: Response to Planning Commission Direction of June 10, 2026 — Revised Plans and Letter of Justification for the Continued Hearing of August 26, 2026

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Planning Commission:

This letter accompanies the revised plan set for 193 Howes Drive, submitted in response to the direction the Commission provided at its meeting of June 10, 2026, when this item was continued to a date certain of August 26, 2026. It supplements and updates the Project Description and Letter of Justification submitted on December 23, 2025, and it addresses each of the two directions issued by the Commission as well as each of the four recommendations made by the Town's Consulting Architect.

We are grateful for the time and care the Commission gave this project in June. The discussion was constructive, and the direction we received was specific enough to act on. We have acted on it.

1. About Our Family and Why This Project Matters

We purchased 193 Howes Drive in 2018, and it has been our family home ever since. Our daughter Ada is a sixth grader at Union Middle School and our son Amay is a kindergartner at Alta Vista Elementary School. Both attend public school here, and both have their closest friends within walking distance. Over eight years we have built real relationships with our neighbors, and we have come to think of this street, and this town, as home in a way we could have just hoped for when we first moved in.

Service to the community matters to our family. Tulika is Director of Products at Autodesk and has served on the boards of Rebuilding Together Silicon Valley and AchieveKids. Neeraj, formerly a Senior Computer Scientist at Adobe, serves on the board of Breakthrough Silicon Valley. We mention this not to press any advantage, but because the same values that draw us to that work — living peacefully alongside our neighbors and contributing to the place we live — are the values we have tried to bring to this application.

What has changed since 2018 is our family. We now have two children, and they are growing quickly and need separate bedrooms. Tulika works from home. Neeraj is currently taking a break from his career to raise the children and is home full time. Since Neeraj's father passed away, his mother visits far more often and for longer stays. The existing 1,088-square-foot, two-bedroom, one-and-a-half-bath house simply no longer accommodates the family living in it. Our choice is between adding the space we need or leaving the neighborhood our children have grown up in. We would very much prefer to stay.

The design before you reflects that preference. We have not sought to maximize what the lot will permit. We have kept the existing footprint, built upward rather than outward, and — most recently — removed the interior volume we would have liked to keep, in order to meet the Commission where it asked us to be.

2. Summary of Revisions Since the June 10, 2026 Hearing

The Commission continued this item with two directions. Both have been addressed in the revised plans, and both were addressed through a single substantial design change: the removal of the double-height open volume above the Great Room.

Commission Direction	Response in the Revised Plans
Neighborhood Context — Scale down the overall building massing to better match the surrounding neighborhood.	The second-story mass has been reduced by 22 percent . The double-height open volume above the Great Room has been eliminated, removing the tallest and most prominent portion of the addition.
Wall Relief — Set back the second-floor "Great Room" wall to break up the two-story vertical plane at the rear, per RDG Section 3.3.3.	The setback was to be made into the double-height open space above the Great Room. That open space has been removed , and with it the tall unbroken volume the setback was intended to relieve. Where a two-story condition remains along the rear elevation, the extended first-floor eave and intersecting roof provide the required relief.

3. Response to the Planning Commission's Directions

3.1 Neighborhood Context — Overall Building Massing

The single largest contributor to the perceived mass of the earlier design was the double-height Great Room. That volume carried the roof to its full height across a wide portion of the building and produced the tall, unbroken form that several Commissioners remarked on after visiting the site and viewing the story poles.

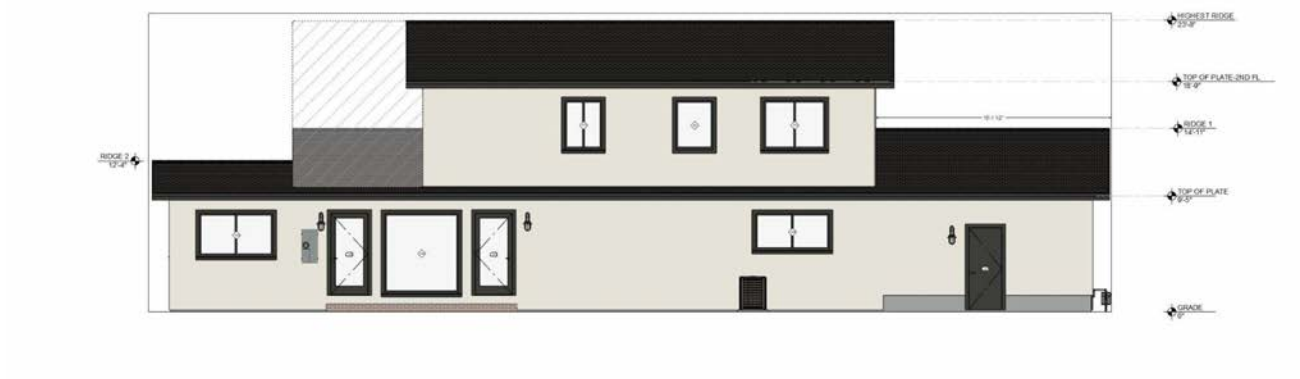
In the revised design, that open volume is gone. Removing it eliminated the tallest and most prominent portion of the addition and reduced the second-story mass by 22 percent.

Following pictures demonstrate the changes:

Mass From Back (Before)



Mass From Back (Now)



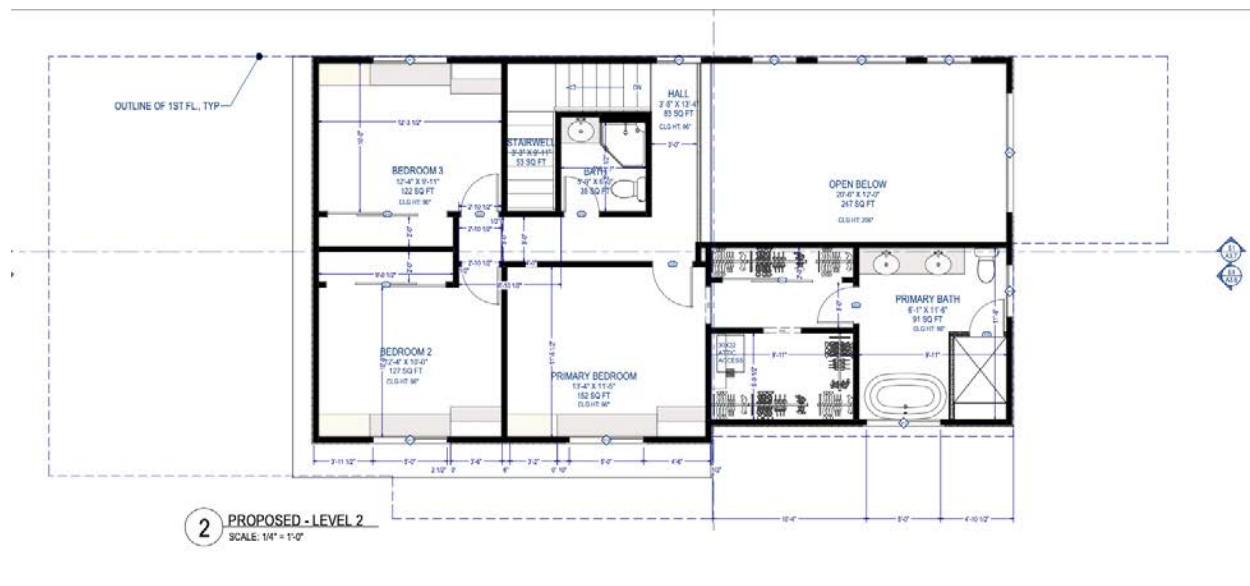
Mass From Front (Before)



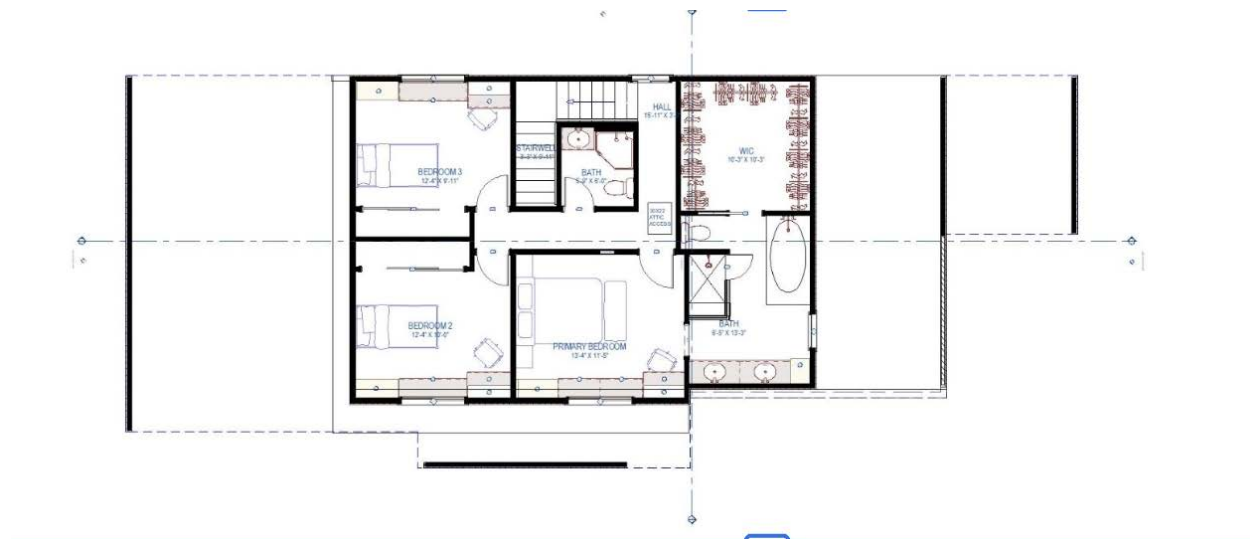
Mass From Front (Now)



Proposed Level 2 (Before)



Proposed Level 2 (Now)



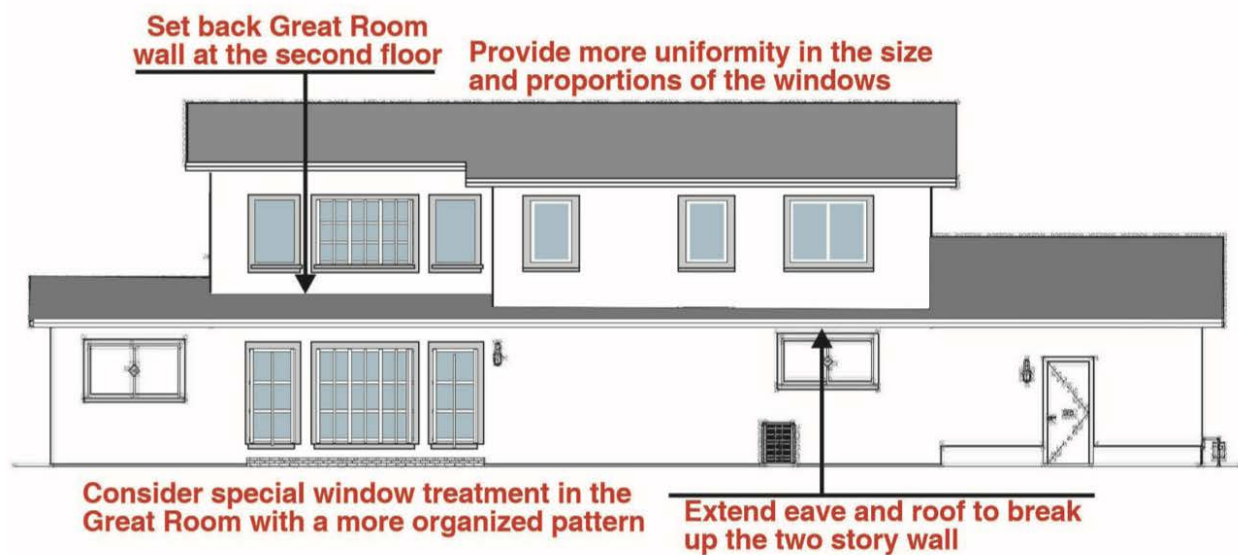
This was not a costless change for us. The open Great Room was a feature of the house we had hoped to build and something our family had looked forward to. We have given it up because the Commission was clear that mass was the issue, and because we would rather have a home in this neighborhood than the house we originally drew.

3.2 Wall Relief — Residential Design Guidelines Section 3.3.3

The Consulting Architect's recommendation on this point contained two distinct elements, and it is worth separating them, because the revised design responds to each in a different way:

- **(a) Extend the first-floor eave and roof across the two-story wall.** This element has been incorporated into the design. Along the portion of the rear elevation where a genuine two-story condition exists — where bedrooms sit above the first floor — the first-floor eave and roof are carried across the wall, producing an intersecting roof plane that breaks the vertical face and establishes a clear horizontal division between the two stories.
- **(b) Set the second-floor Great Room wall back from the first-floor wall line.** The setback contemplated by this element was to be made into the double-height open space above the Great Room. That open space no longer exists in the revised design. It has been removed, and with it the tall unbroken volume that the setback was intended to relieve. There is no longer any open volume into which the wall could be set back, and no longer any condition requiring that it be.

The following diagram was shared by the consulting architect with different sections of the rear of the house.



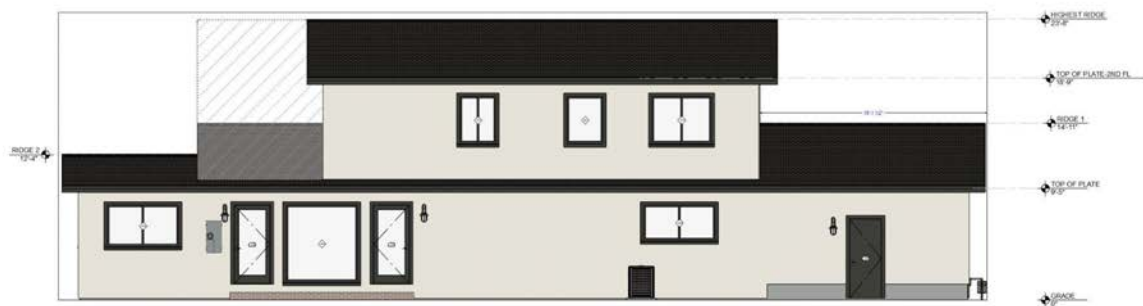
This distinction matters, and we want to state it plainly rather than let it be inferred. At the June hearing, our designer explained that setting the second-floor Great Room wall back was structurally achievable but would encroach upon — and effectively destroy — the open space above the Great Room. That was an accurate description of the trade-off at the time, and the Commission was right to press on it. Faced with the choice between preserving that space and answering the Commission's concern, we chose to give up the space. Rather than carving a setback into the open volume, we have removed the open volume itself.

We believe this responds to the substance of what was asked, and to the concern that produced RDG 3.3.3, more completely than a setback would have. A set-back wall would have preserved the double-height volume and relieved its face by stepping part of it. Removing the volume addresses the height and bulk of that element at its source rather than articulating it. The tall unbroken plane the Commission and the Consulting Architect were responding to is not present in the revised rear elevation, and where a two-story condition does remain along that elevation, the extended first-floor eave and intersecting roof under element (a) provide the relief the Consulting Architect asked for.

Rear elevation on which the recommendation was made (Before)



Rear elevation with the extended eave and roof to break up the wall (Now)



4. Response to the Consulting Architect's Recommendations

The Town's Consulting Architect made four recommendations in his review of September 22, 2025. Each is addressed below, together with the change made in the current plan set.

Recommendation 1 — Extend the first-floor eave and roof across the two-story wall and set the second-floor Great Room wall back from the first-floor wall line.

This recommendation contained two separate elements, and the revised design responds to each differently. Both are now satisfied.

- **Element (a) — extend the first-floor eave and roof across the two-story wall.** Incorporated. The first-floor eave and roof were extended across the two-story wall in the December 2025 resubmittal, providing visual relief through an intersecting roof plane, and staff confirmed in its report that this

element had been met. It applies along the portion of the rear elevation where a two-story condition genuinely exists — where bedrooms sit above the first floor — and it remains in the current plan set.

- **Element (b) — set the second-floor Great Room wall back from the first-floor wall line.** Staff correctly identified that this element was not met in the December 2025 resubmittal. It is resolved in the current plan set, though not by setting a wall back. The setback was to be made into the double-height open space above the Great Room; that open space has been removed from the design, and with it the tall unbroken volume the setback was intended to relieve. The condition the recommendation was written to address has been eliminated at its source rather than articulated.

We recognize this is a different answer from the one the recommendation literally called for, which is why we have set it out at length in Section 3.2 above rather than simply reporting the recommendation as met. In substance we believe it responds more completely than a setback would have: a set-back wall would have preserved the double-height volume and stepped its face, whereas the revised plans remove that volume altogether.

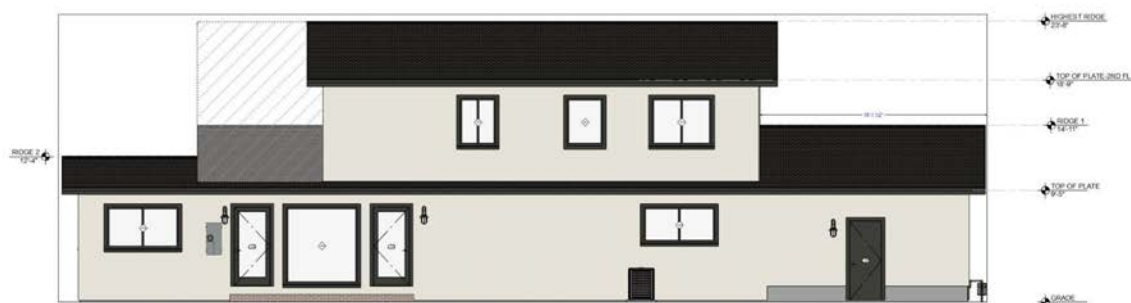
Recommendation 2 — Provide more uniformity in the size and proportions of all windows in the house.

Window sizes and configurations were revised to create consistent grouping and proportion across both the front and rear elevations. Staff's report noted that this recommendation had been met with one exception: the window serving the proposed stairway, which the Consulting Architect suggested be modified to match the style and alignment of the other rear windows. We have now addressed that exception. The stairway window has been brought into alignment with the surrounding rear windows in style and proportion, while retaining sufficient glazing to daylight the stair. All windows on the house now read as a single, coherent family.

Rear elevation on which the recommendation was made (Before)



Rear elevation with the windows properly aligned(Now)



Recommendation 3 — Consider a special window treatment in the Great Room within a more organized pattern.

The materials were revised and clarified. Staff's report confirmed that the applicant incorporated the recommendations provided by the Consulting Architect on this point.

Recommendation 4 — Wall materials: the proposed change from horizontal siding to smooth stucco.

The Consulting Architect observed that for a house of this scale a change of material would not likely be objectionable, but suggested staff may wish to discuss it.

This matter was discussed at length at the June 10, 2026 hearing, including a review of the elevations identifying where stucco and where lap siding occurs. At the close of deliberations the Commission considered whether to make the material palette part of its direction and declined to do so. A mixed treatment of stucco and horizontal lap siding was explicitly excluded from the continuance, and no material condition forms part of the direction the Commission adopted.

5. Neighborhood Context

At the June hearing, several Commissioners observed that this parcel sits in an unusual position — on a corner, adjacent to a public play lot, and without an immediately adjacent neighbor on one side — and that the appropriate frame of reference may extend beyond the small group of parcels ordinarily treated as the immediate neighborhood. One Commissioner noted having driven the full length of Howes Drive and found a two-story house bracketing the other end of the block. Following the June hearing, staff encouraged us to survey the broader neighborhood. We have done so, and the results are set out below and documented photographically in the materials accompanying this submission.

The proposed second story would not be an anomaly in this neighborhood. Two-story homes of comparable configuration exist on our own street and immediately behind our property:

- **127 Anne Way** — directly behind our home, sharing our rear fence. This is a two-story house, and the minimum distance between a two-story home and our own is therefore zero.



- **123 Anne Way** — immediately adjacent to 127 Anne Way and also two stories, so that the two-story pattern along our rear property line is established rather than isolated.



123 ANNE WAY

- **211 Howes Drive** — the fourth house to the left on our own street.



- **219 Howes Drive** — the sixth house to the left.



- **169 Howes Drive** — the sixth house to the right.



Additional two-story homes within the same development are identified below. Taken together, these establish that the neighborhood is not uniformly single-story, and that a second story at 193 Howes Drive continues an existing pattern rather than introducing a new one. We recognize and appreciate that most Commissioners indicated they had no objection to the two-story form as such.



253 HOWES CT



255 HOWES CT



259 HOWES CT

6. Site Conditions That Reduce Visual Impact

Three characteristics of this particular parcel materially reduce the impact of the addition, and each was noted by Commissioners during the June hearing.

- **Park adjacency.** The property is partially adjacent to a public play lot rather than to another residence. This provides greater separation than a typical interior residential parcel, and the majority of the second-story mass is oriented toward that open space. A Commissioner observed at the hearing that the bulk of the second story is pushed generally toward the park, where no private residence is affected.
- **Mature tree canopy.** Substantial existing trees screen both the front of the house and the park-facing elevation. A Commissioner noted at the site visit that the story-pole netting was difficult to see through the existing vegetation. That vegetation between the addition and the park-side property line will remain. One tree at the front of the property will be removed as part of the work and will be replaced with an approved species.
- **Limited visibility from the public right-of-way.** Because of the tree canopy, the corner siting, and the setback of the addition behind the existing front form, the new construction is only partially visible from Howes Drive and from within the park. Photographs illustrating these conditions are as follows.

Side View from the park (Covered by lots of trees)



Notice the orange section.
This represents the visible
section of the house from
the park

Front View (Covered by a big tree in front of the house)



Notice the orange section.
This represents the visible
section of the house

Front View (Covered by a big tree in front of the house)



Notice the orange section.
This represents the visible
section of the house

7. Conformance with Development Standards and Design Guidelines

7.1 Development Standards

The project meets all applicable objective zoning standards for the R-1:8 district, including height, setbacks, floor area, lot coverage, and parking. Staff confirmed this in its report to the Commission.

7.2 Consistency with the Residential Design Guidelines

The project is consistent with the Residential Design Guidelines in the following respects:

- It retains the existing building footprint and avoids outward expansion, accommodating all additional floor area vertically.
- It preserves established setback patterns and the rhythm of the street.
- It limits bulk through compact second-story massing, now further reduced by 22 percent.
- It provides articulation and relief at the rear elevation in accordance with Section 3.3.3, through both an extended first-floor eave and a setback second-floor wall.
- It employs simple residential forms and proportions appropriate to the neighborhood, with a consistent and organized fenestration pattern.

The design prioritizes compatibility and restraint over maximization of development potential, which we understand to be the intent of the Guidelines: to respect neighborhood character while allowing reasonable improvement of an existing home.

7.3 Compatibility with the Immediate Neighborhood

Compatibility is achieved through siting, massing, and context-sensitive design. The property's partial adjacency to the public play lot provides greater separation than a typical interior residential parcel and reduces potential impacts relating to scale, privacy, and visibility. The project maintains existing setbacks, introduces no new encroachments, and remains consistent with the prevailing pattern of single-family

residential development in the area. Outreach to neighboring property owners produced no objections to the proposed design.

7.4 Privacy and Second-Story Window Design

Privacy was a governing consideration in the placement and sizing of the second-story windows. Windows have been oriented and located to minimize direct views into adjacent residences and private outdoor areas. Where windows face neighboring properties, they are limited in size, set back from property lines, or serve secondary spaces rather than primary living areas. The adjacency to the public play lot further reduces privacy impacts, since the primary outlook from the second story is toward open space rather than toward neighboring yards. We have discussed privacy directly with our immediate neighbor and walked her through how the design protects it.

8. Conclusion and Request

The Commission asked for two things in June: less mass, and relief in the rear wall. We have delivered both, through a single change that removed a feature we wanted in order to answer the concern that was actually raised. The second-story mass is 22 percent smaller. The flat two-story rear plane is gone — not stepped back, but gone, because the double-height volume that created it no longer exists. Every one of the Consulting Architect's four recommendations is now addressed, including the two matters that remained outstanding when this application came before the Commission: the two-story wall at the Great Room and the stairway window.

The result is a home that stays within every objective standard the Town applies, that continues a two-story pattern already present on our street and immediately behind our property, that sits largely screened by mature trees and turns its bulk toward a public play lot rather than toward a neighbor, and that will allow our family to remain in the neighborhood our children are growing up in.

We respectfully request approval of Architecture and Site Application S-26-007. We are grateful for the Commission's consideration and for the care it has given this application, and we look forward to answering any questions on August 26.

Respectfully submitted,

Neeraj Goel, Tulika Garg

Property Owner

James Woodard, CID, NCIDQ

Principal Designer, Seigo Designs

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