

John Sowienski
236 South Main Street
Pennington, NJ 08534
April 13, 2026

Pennington Historic Preservation Commission
Borough of Pennington
30 North Main Street
Pennington, NJ 08534

Dear Members of the Historic Preservation Commission,

I am writing to request approval to install vinyl siding on my home due to urgent health, safety, and financial concerns affecting my family.

Our current exterior has deteriorated to the point where insects and rodents are entering through gaps in the siding. We have experienced odors inside the home that indicate animals may have died within the walls. This creates a serious health risk, especially given my own medical condition, which makes exposure to contaminants and poor air quality particularly dangerous. Protecting the interior environment of the home is essential for my well-being and for the safety of my family.

We understand that the Commission often recommends James Hardie fiber-cement siding for historic properties. However, HardiePlank presents additional health and safety concerns for us. Cutting or drilling fiber-cement siding produces silica dust, which is hazardous when inhaled. Workers must wear ventilated respirators to avoid exposure, and even with precautions, the dust can spread. This is not a risk we can take given my illness and the need to avoid airborne irritants or toxins around the home.

HardiePlank also requires ongoing maintenance, including periodic painting and extensive caulking over the years to prevent moisture intrusion. These long-term maintenance demands add significant cost that our family cannot absorb. Vinyl siding, by contrast, does not require painting, does not generate toxic dust during installation, and provides a durable, low-maintenance solution that will allow us to address the health and safety issues immediately.

There is also a significant cost difference between fiber-cement siding and vinyl siding. The savings from choosing vinyl would allow us to restore the original front porch that once existed on this home. According to Beverly Mills, the porch was part of the home's historic appearance. Restoring it would actually bring the house closer to its original design, enhancing its historic character rather than detracting from it. This restoration would not be financially possible if we were required to use HardiePlank.

We are not proposing any changes to the architectural character of the house beyond restoring what was originally there. We are not adding dormers, additions, or altering the façade in any way. Our only goal is to seal and protect the home so it is safe, healthy, and structurally sound.

We are committed to selecting a vinyl siding style and profile that is visually consistent with the historic appearance of the neighborhood.

Given the combination of my medical condition, the health risks posed by the current state of the home, the hazards associated with fiber-cement installation, the long-term maintenance burden, the financial hardship, and the opportunity to restore an original historic feature, we respectfully request that the Commission approve the use of vinyl siding as a reasonable and necessary alternative.

Thank you for your time, understanding, and consideration. We appreciate the Commission's role in preserving the character of Pennington, and we hope you will allow us to make these essential improvements to protect our family's well-being and to restore an important historic element of the home.

Sincerely,
Sowienski Family

Sent from my iPad