

First Los Gatos Historic Survey in 28 Years Discovers Massive Loss of Historic Homes and Pervasive Decay Threatening Further Loss

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The Los Gatos Historical Society, which is an advocate for quality of life in Los Gatos historical neighborhoods, today announced the findings of its groundbreaking Historic Survey, including the discovery that 16.5% of the town's historic homes existing in 1991 are permanently gone. This disturbing finding is profound considering what makes Los Gatos most distinctive, setting it part from other places, is its rich and unique history. With so much of its history disappearing, expressed in late-1800's to early 1900's architecture, it risks eventually becoming just another bay area suburb.

This is a startling and alarming finding that comes at a time when thousands of historic towns throughout the U.S., supported by state historic preservation economic incentives (such as California's Mills Act) have achieved strong economic revitalization gains by placing historic preservation at the very core of their towns' economic vitality plans.

The troubling finding of the survey is particularly shocking because Los Gatos has a strongly written historic preservation code stating that "the public welfare requires prevention of needless destruction and impairment (of historic properties), and promotion of the economic utilization and discouragement of the decay of such structures".

But words alone, even when codified into the town's legal doctrine, don't ensure that priorities, funding, and decisions are made as legislated. In fact, discovering the disappearance of so many historic homes, in such a brief period of time, serves as a wake-up call spotlighting a crisis. The survey also shows that without immediate action taken to prevent further destruction and deterioration, that loss will climb to 37% by the year 2030.

The study found three key factors behind this disturbing trend – first, the overly subjective interpretations used in determining whether to allow the destruction of historic homes, second, the lack of adherence to the town code stipulating that historic property owners have a 'duty to keep in good repair', and third, the refusal to make adopting the California state economic incentives act, known as the Mills Act, a priority.

The survey also found that wealthy homeowners with the economic means to undertake expensive restoration and rehabilitation work gladly did so, but that the majority of homeowners lack the vast finance resources required to undertake such desired, but largely unaffordable work.

"The alarming findings of the 2019 historic survey command immediate attention and rapid action, especially with the recently accelerating loss rate", said Jeff Siegel, President of the Los Gatos Historical Society. "This crisis can best be addressed by the town council voting to adopt the Mills Act and taking seriously the town's historic preservation code, which encourages rehabilitation and maintenance over decay and demolition."

About Los Gatos Historical Society:

The Los Gatos Historical Society is driven by a single goal; to preserve and improve the quality of life for the residents of our historic neighborhoods. We celebrate and support the preservation of the historic architecture and character of historic Los Gatos neighborhoods through informed citizen involvement and education. We are an advocacy organization that gives voice to the residents of our historical neighborhoods by working to preserve a quality of life that has endured for well over a century, and by cultivating the vital link between historic preservation and economic vitality. Visit us at www.losgatoshistorical.org.

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