

Dear Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals,

We, Rachelle and Christina Jimenez, “The Sisters”, are writing to formally request a variance from Section 27-2.2.1 of the DeKalb County Zoning Ordinance. Our request pertains to the reduction of the rear yard setback requirement from 7.5’ to 5’ feet for our properties located at 1081 and 1085 Ralph Road NE, aka “The Compound”. The purpose of this variance is to allow the continued existence of our “bridge” that connects our two back decks to allow safe access between our houses for our families and pets. Due to the aging and physical disabilities of our parents and our dogs, “the bridge” allows safe, rail assisted, walking access from one house to the other through our back and side doors.

Christina Jimenez bought her property many years ago. Rachelle purchased the house next to Christina’s house in 2023. Since then, our family celebrates holidays and significant events in Atlanta since the two houses have room for our entire family: consisting of parents, siblings, children and all of our animals. Unfortunately, we are aging just like our parents are. Our mother has stage four colon cancer and her chemo treatments cause severe pain in her feet, along with weakness in her whole body. Our stepfather has difficulty walking, and the bridge allows him to be able to shuffle between houses using the rails for stability. We also have “ramps”, no variance needed, down to the backyard so that our aging dogs can move around the compound freely. Our backyards are fenced in as one entire yard so there is no separation between our properties. Our bridge is over open space.

We built the bridge in 2024. It is 4ft wide and 21 feet long and it connects the existing backyard decks. It is built on 10-foot-tall 6-by-6-inch wooden poles that are bolted onto 14-by-14-inch square 5-inch-deep concrete blocks. The railings are 38 inches tall. All regular building codes were met during construction. The bridge is safe and sturdy. We replaced all existing decking at both properties with no increase in square footage. We also added a covered front porch to Rachelle’s house, dog ramps to the side of Rachelle’s decking that go down into the shared “dog park” between our houses and turned Christina’s existing open back deck into our outdoor screened-in living room. This new covered space has enough room for our immediate family of 14 to comfortably sit and watch tv together in any type of weather. Our family loves to be together and now we have created a space that everyone, regardless of age or physical ability, can easily and safely access from either property.

#### 1. Physical Condition of the Site:

Due to the topography of Dekalb County, our houses are not on even land. Both properties sit on descending hills. Rachelle’s house is situated 5 feet above Christina's, and a

retaining wall runs between the front yards, from the street down and slightly past the front of the houses. To get to the front doors of each house from the front yard, one must step up and over a two and a half foot retaining wall or walk uphill to the street and walk back down the driveways. Both houses have walk-in basements so there are no doors into either house from the backyard. One must walk up Christina's back deck stairs or up the dog ramps to Rachelle's side door to get into the living spaces. Before the addition of the dog ramps, there was no access from Rachelle's backyard into her home. The bridge was the safest, and least intrusive, option to connect the homes.

## 2. Minimum Variance Necessary:

We assure you that our request is solely for the minimum variance necessary to allow the bridge, and the bridge alone, to cross our properties. The bridge is in the backyard and is constructed to cause as minimal a presence as possible. Without the variance of 2.5 feet, our properties will not have a safe passage for our parents and animals. The bridge was built over a year ago and it has made a huge difference to our family.

## 3. Public Welfare:

The bridge and upgraded decks, porch, and outdoor living room bring value to our aging neighborhood. Our neighbors stop on their walks and tell us how much they love the idea of families living together in harmony with one another. Watching our animals run around the decks brings them joy and smiles. We have a signed petition with our neighbors from beside, in front of, and behind our houses to show there is acceptance and support from our community.

## 4. Ordinance Hardship:

A strict interpretation of the zoning laws, in this case, would cause undue hardship for us. The impracticality of adhering to the 7.5' setback would limit our ability to use our properties efficiently. Our aging parents and animals would not be able to access both properties without endangering their welfare. Our stepfather fell off Christina's front porch last summer and it scared us very badly. We want our parents to have the independence to access both properties at will. We also want our aging animals to be able to cuddle with anyone at any time no matter which house they reside. We also added a doggy door on the outdoor living room so they have full access. The variance is, therefore, essential to prevent unnecessary hardship and allow unique access to properties held by two sisters. We understand we have a unique situation and formally request that a variance be granted.

#### 5. Alignment with the Spirit of the Law:

We firmly believe that our variance request aligns with the intent of the Suburban Character Area, as outlined in the Dekalb County Comprehensive Plan. The bridge, porch, ramps, and upgraded decking are in line with the goals of recognizing traditional suburban land use patterns while encouraging increased connectivity and accessibility. The development enhances community connectivity, preserves and improves existing greenspace and aligns with the spirit of “aging in place”. Now our families can stay in Dekalb County regardless of health or physical status due to structures that allow accessibility to both properties. The construction supports infill development with minimal interference.

In conclusion, we appreciate your time and consideration of our variance request. We are committed to working collaboratively to ensure that our additions align with the broader goals and policies of Dekalb County. We love Atlanta and our homes are the perfect space for our large family. We intend to continue to support our local community for the foreseeable future.

Thank you,

*Christina and Rachelle Jimenez*

“The Sisters”