



Lorraine Cochran-Johnson

Chief Executive Officer

**DeKalb County Zoning Board of Appeals**  
Department of Planning & Sustainability  
178 Sams Street,  
Decatur, GA 30030

**Wednesday, August 13, 2025**

**Planning Department Staff Analysis**



Juliana A. Njoku

Director

**N9. Case No: A-25-247702**

**Parcel ID(s): 18 107 07 013**

**Commission District 02 Super District 06**

**Applicant:** **Rachelle Jiminez**  
1085 Ralph Road  
Atlanta, GA, 30324

**Owner:** **Rachelle Jiminez**  
1085 Ralph Road  
Atlanta, GA 30324

**Project Name: 1085 and 1081 Ralph Road – Bridge Between Homes**

**Location:** 1081 & 1085 Ralph Road, Atlanta, GA, 30324

**Request:** Variance from Section 27-2.2.1 of the DeKalb County Zoning Ordinance to reduce the side-yard setback from 7.5' to 0' to permit the construction of an elevated bridge between two adjacent properties within the R-75 (Residential Medium Lot) zoning district.

**Staff Recommendation:** Approval with conditions.

**Conditions:**

1. The following information about this variance shall be noted on any site plan prepared for the subject property: case number, approval date, type of variance and condition(s) of approval.

## **STAFF FINDINGS:**

The applicant applicants request a reduction of the rear yard setback to allow an existing elevated bridge structure between two adjacent single-family residences. The bridge was constructed in 2024 without permits and flagged through code enforcement. The structure is four feet wide and twenty-one feet long, built with 6x6 poles and full railings to code. The request is supported by neighboring property owners through signed petitions. Pursuant to Section 27-2.2.1 of the Zoning Ordinance, primary structures and additions within the R-75 zoning district are subject to a side-yard setback of 7.5'.

**1. There is an extraordinary or exceptional physical condition(s) pertaining to the particular piece of property (such as, but not limited to, lot size, lot shape, specimen tree(s), steep slope(s), or preservation of historic characteristics of the property), which was not created by the current owner, previous owner, or applicant; by reason of a clearly demonstrable condition(s), the strict application of the requirements of this chapter would deprive the property owner of rights and privileges enjoyed by other property owners in the same zoning district, as distinguished from a special privilege or convenience sought by the property owner.**

The subject properties are located on descending topography, with 1085 Ralph Road situated approximately five feet higher than 1081 Ralph Road. A retaining wall runs between the front yards, creating physical barriers to circulation. These conditions limit mobility and access between the two homes, particularly for elderly residents and those with physical disabilities. These topographic constraints were not created by the current owners and justify consideration of relief.

**2. The requested variance does not go beyond the minimum necessary to afford relief, and does not constitute a grant of special privilege inconsistent with the limitations upon other properties in the zoning district in which the subject property is located:**

The requested 7.5-foot reduction represents the minimum relief necessary. The bridge was designed to connect the existing decks with no additional square footage or expansion beyond the setback intrusion. Without the variance, the existing structure cannot legally remain, and no alternative solution provides equivalent accessibility.

**3. The grant of the variance will not be materially detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to the property or improvements in the zoning district in which the subject property is located:**

The applicants have secured letters of support from neighbors immediately adjacent to the site. The bridge and accompanying improvements do not adversely impact neighboring properties and, according to testimony, have been well-received for their functionality and aesthetics. The structure enhances safety for family members and pets, thereby not being materially detrimental to public welfare.

**4. The literal interpretation and strict application of the applicable provisions or requirements of this chapter would cause undue and unnecessary hardship:**

Strict application of the 7.5-foot setback would result in removal of the bridge, creating a hardship for the applicants by limiting accessibility for their elderly parents, who rely on the bridge's railings for mobility, and for their aging pets. This hardship is unique to the applicants' circumstances and would not reasonably allow full use of the property.

**5. The requested variance would be consistent with the spirit and purpose of this Chapter and the DeKalb County Comprehensive Plan Text:**

The variance request aligns with the spirit and purpose of the DeKalb County Comprehensive Plan, by supporting accessibility, aging-in-place, and neighborhood stability. The development encourages infill connectivity while preserving suburban character. The improvement demonstrates responsible adaptation of existing structures to meet accessibility needs within the Suburban Character Area.

**FINAL STAFF ANALYSIS:**

The application meets all the criteria for a setback variance as outlined in the DeKalb County Zoning Ordinance Section 27.2.2.1. While the proposed improvement in the addition constitutes the minimum relief necessary and would not significantly alter the physical infrastructure or built environment. The intent to redevelop the existing structure for an addition may be a valid rationale for the side-yard setback request. Therefore, staff recommends approval with conditions for the variance request.

**Staff Recommendation:** Approval with condition.

**Condition:**

1. The following information about this variance shall be noted on any site plan prepared for the subject property: case number, approval date, type of variance and condition(s) of approval.

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”



CURVE DATA

C1 - RADIUS = 612.84'  
ARC = 65.01'  
CHORD - N38°00'00"E 64.98'

C2 - RADIUS = 612.84'  
ARC = 65.01'  
CHORD - N31°55'21"E 64.98'

LOT 35 - TMP-18-107-07-013  
RACHELLE JIMENEZ  
1085 RALPH ROAD NE  
DEED BOOK 31692 PAGE 601  
PLAT BOOK 18 PAGE 56  
TOTAL AREA = 10,801.42 SF  
0.241 ACRES

OT 34 - TMP- 18-107-07-014  
CHRISTINA JIMENEZ  
1081 RALPH ROAD NE  
DEED BOOK 19103 PAGE 614  
PLAT BOOK 18 PAGE 56  
TOTAL AREA = 9,771.32 SF  
0.224 ACRES

ALL OR A PORTION OF THIS SURVEY WAS PERFORMED BY REAL TIME KINEMATIC (RTK) GPS. 100% OF THIS SURVEY WAS PERFORMED BY GPS. THE GPS EQUIPMENT USED TO PERFORM THIS SURVEY WAS MADE BY GEOMAX RECEIVERS WITH A RELATIVE ACCURACY OF +/- 0.05 FEET.

THIS PLAT HAS BEEN CALCULATED FOR CLOSURE AND IS FOUND TO BE ACCURATE TO WITHIN ONE FOOT IN 100,000 FEET.

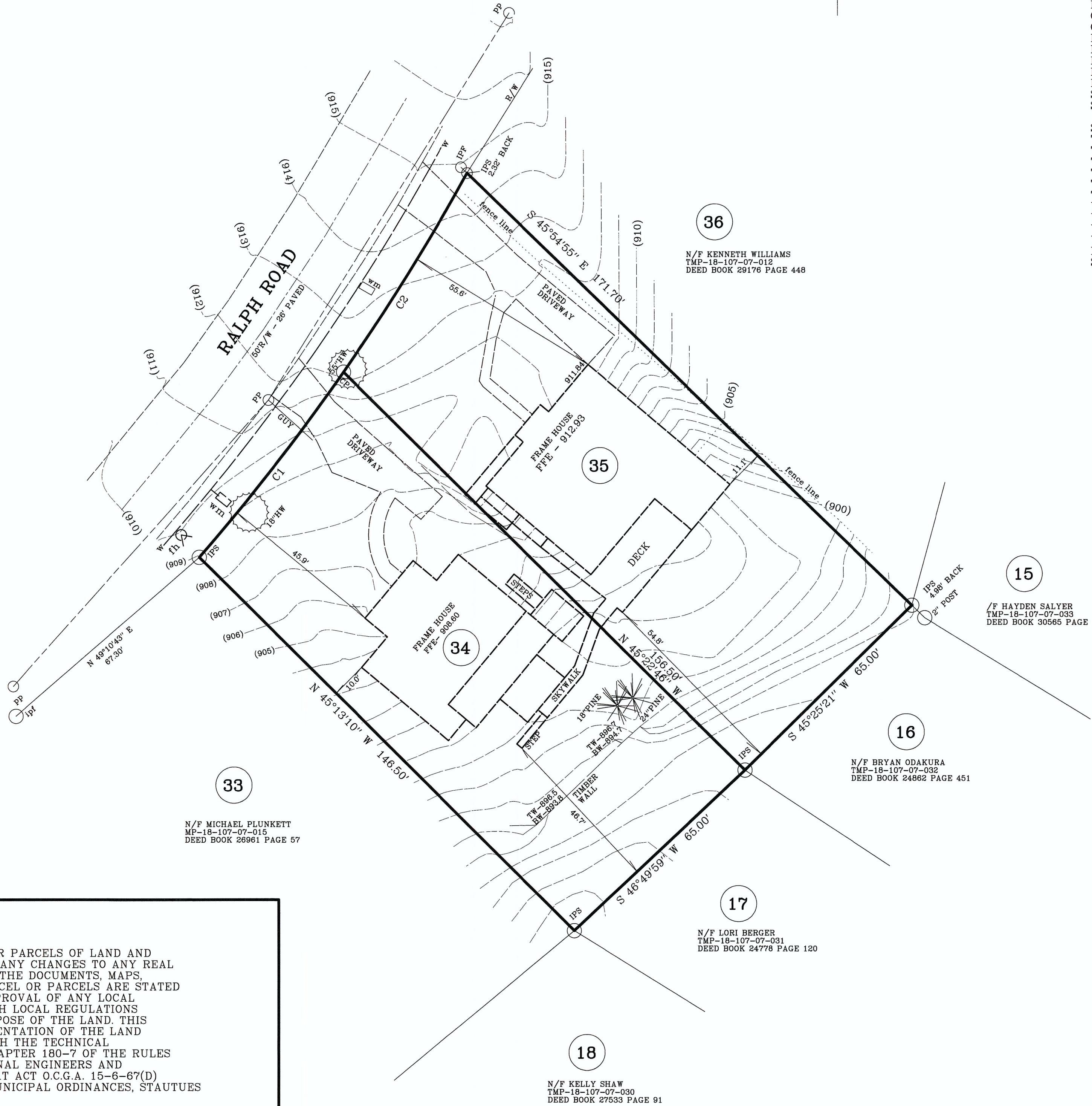
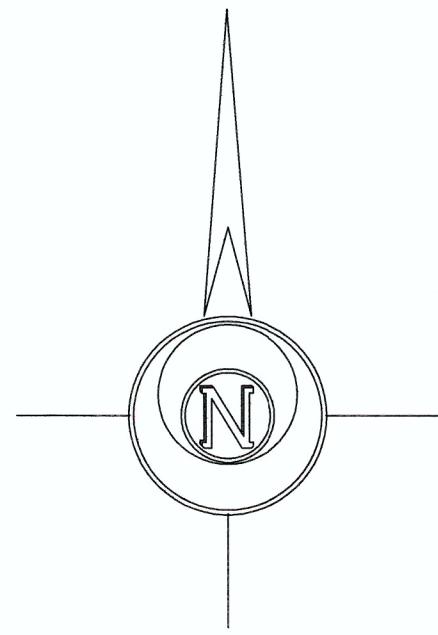
THE FIELD WORK WAS PERFORMED ON THE GROUND IN JULY 2025.

ALL PINS SET ARE 1/2" REBAR 24" LONG. NOT DESCRIBED IPF ARE 1/2" REBAR

CERTIFICATE OF SURVEYOR

"THIS PLAT IS A RETRACEMENT OF AN EXISTING PARCEL OR PARCELS OF LAND AND DOES NOT SUBDIVIDE OR CREATE A NEW PARCEL OR MAKE ANY CHANGES TO ANY REAL PROPERTY BOUNDARIES. THE RECORDING INFORMATION OF THE DOCUMENTS, MAPS, PLATS OR OTHER INSTRUMENTS WHICH CREATED THIS PARCEL OR PARCELS ARE STATED HEREON. RECORDATION OF THIS PLAT DOES NOT IMPLY APPROVAL OF ANY LOCAL JURISDICTION, AVAILABILITY OF PERMITS, COMPLIANCE WITH LOCAL REGULATIONS OR REQUIREMENTS, OR SUITABILITY FOR ANY USE OR PURPOSE OF THE LAND. THIS PLAT IS ACCURATE, CURRENT AND IS A COMPLETE REPRESENTATION OF THE LAND PLATTED HEREON AND WAS PREPARED IN CONFORMITY WITH THE TECHNICAL STANDARDS FOR PROPERTY SURVEYS AS SET FORTH IN CHAPTER 180-7 OF THE RULES OF THE GEORGIA BOARD OF REGISTRATION FOR PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS AND LAND SURVEYORS AND AS SET FORTH IN THE GEORGIA PLAT ACT O.C.G.A. 15-6-67(D) AND 15-6-7 AND ALL APPLICABLE LOCAL, COUNTY, AND MUNICIPAL ORDINANCES, STATUTES AND SPECIFICATIONS.

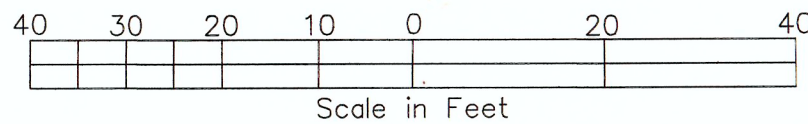
MARK D PATRICK GA RLS 2791  
1985 ELKS CLUB ROAD  
COVINGTON, GEORGIA 30014  
770-380-4766



LEGEND  
BFP- BACKFLOW PREVENTER  
BW- BOTTOM WALL  
CO- CLEAN OUT  
CP-CALCULATED POINT  
CW - CONCRETE WASHOUT  
DE - DRAINAGE EASEMENT  
DI - DROP INLET  
DWCB - DOUBLE WING CATCH BASIN  
E- UNDERGROUND ELECTRIC  
FC - FENCE CORNER  
FH - FIRE HYDRANT  
G- GAS METER  
GV- GAS VALVE  
IPF - IRON PIN FOUND  
IPS - IRON PIN SET  
JB - JUNCTION BOX  
LP - LIGHT POLE  
MH - MANHOLE  
NS - NAIL SET  
NF - NAIL FOUND  
OHP - OVERHEAD POWER  
OTP- OPEN TOP PIPE  
POB - POINT OF BEGINNING  
POC - POINT OF COMMENCEMENT  
PP - POWER POLE  
R/W - RIGHT OF WAY  
RWM- RIGHT OF WAY MARKER  
SB - SETBACK  
SSMH- SANITARY SEWER MANHOLE  
SW- SIDEWALK  
T - TRANSFORMER  
TB- TRIBUTARY BUFFER  
TG - TOP GRATE  
TP - TRAFFIC POLE  
TW-TOP WALL  
TMP- TAX MAP PARCEL  
W- WATER LINE  
WM- WATER METER  
WQ- WATER QUALITY BMP  
WV - WATER VALVE  
DASHED LINES EXISTING  
SOLID LINES PROPOSED



SURVEY FOR:  
**RACHELLE JIMENEZ &  
CHRISTINA JIMENEZ**  
LOTS 34 & 35 OF WOODLAND HILLS  
UNIT THREE AND BLOCK "H"  
LAND LOT 107 - 18th DISTRICT  
**DEKALB COUNTY , GEORGIA**  
SCALE: 1" = 20'  
DATE: AUGUST 6, 2025



THIS PROPERTY IS NOT LOCATED IN A FEDERALLY IDENTIFIED FLOOD AS PER FIRM PANEL NUMBER 13089C0061K EFFECTIVE DATE 08/15/2019