

DeKalb County Historic Preservation Commission

Monday, October 19, 2026- 6:00 P.M.

Staff Report

Regular Agenda

G. 1380 Emory Road, Jennifer Witherspoon. Construct an accessory structure and install fencing on a historic property. **1248335.**

Built in 1928 (18 054 11 014)

This property is in the Druid Hills Character Area #2 and the Druid Hills National Register Historic District.

- 03-09 1380 Emory Road (DH), Richard Stevens. Widen driveway. 15673. **Approved with Modifications**
05-25 1380 Emory Road. William Witherspoon. Replace windows on a historic house. 1247564. **Approved with Modifications.**
08-26 1380 Emory Road, Jennifer Witherspoon. Constructing a new garage with an accessory dwelling unit and repairing the landscaping in the back yard. 1248208. **Denied.**

Summary

The applicant is resubmitting a new application for a previously denied scope of work to construct an accessory structure and install fencing on the rear of a historic property.

The proposed accessory structure will be located in the backyard of the property, near the Western property line, and connecting to the end of the existing driveway. The structure will be composed of two stories, with a garage on the lower level and an accessory structure on the second level. The structure will be constructed with an asphalt shingle, gable roof, lap siding on the second level and brick siding on the lower level, and wood windows. A pair of separate garage doors will be installed under a metal awning on the front façade of the structure. The structure will measure approximately 24' in height from grade to roof ridge; this is revised from the previously submitted design for the structure, which measured roughly 33' in height.

Recommendation

Approved with Modification. Staff recommends that the proposed accessory structure and landscaping of the rear yard be approved with the requirement that documentation be provided to record that the previously recorded external AC unit has been removed and that vegetation be installed to mitigate the appearance of the unit from the Right of Way in accordance with Guideline 6.2. The installed vegetation should include plantings from the recommended vegetation list found in Guideline 9.3 of the Druid Hills Design Manual.

Due to the proposed height of the accessory structure on the property, a variance will need to be acquired from the Zoning Board of Appeals before a building permit can be issued, as the structure appears to exceed height requirements for accessory structures on single family detached dwelling properties⁷.

⁷ **Section 27-4.2.2.1.** – "Except as expressly provided elsewhere in this chapter, an accessory structure shall be limited to the lesser of twenty-four (24) feet in height or the height of the principal structure, whichever is less."

Relevant Guidelines

- 5.0 *Design Review Objective* (p45) - When making a material change to a structure that is in view from a public right-of-way, a higher standard is required to ensure that design changes are compatible with the architectural style of the structure and retain character-defining features. When a proposed material change to a structure is not in view from the public-right-of-way, the Preservation Commission may review the project with a less strict standard so as to allow the owner more flexibility. Such changes, however, shall not have a substantial adverse effect on the overall architectural character of the structure.
- 6.2 *Mechanical Services* (p58) Guideline – The installation of exterior mechanical services, such as HVAC units and solar panels, shall be done in a manner that does not detract from the historic integrity of the building. It is best to install exterior mechanical elements on the side or rear of a property, in order to avoid disrupting the front elevation of the building and keeping it out of sight from the right-of-way. In the event, however, that the installation of a mechanical service on the front of the property cannot be avoided, it should be done so in a manner that decreases its visible impact; this may be accomplished through landscaping with appropriate plantings and vegetation.
- 7.0 *Additions & New Construction - Preserving Form & Layout* The Druid Hills Local Historic District continues to change and evolve over time. For this area to meet contemporary needs, additions are built, uses change, and new buildings are constructed. The challenge is not to prevent change but to ensure that, when it does inevitably happen, it is compatible with the historic character of the area.
- A new building is compatible with its historic setting when it borrows design characteristics and materials from adjacent buildings and integrates them into a modern expression. Before undertaking new development, be it a new building or changes or additions to existing buildings, take time to evaluate what makes the property and the neighborhood distinctive. Evaluate what type of impact the new development will have on the property and neighborhood. Decide how the development can best be designed to complement the property and area.
- The underlying guideline for new construction and additions is to consider one's neighbors and nearby structures and reinforce the existing historic character through sensitive, compatible design.
- Note that many of these guidelines refer to new development or new construction but are equally applicable to additions to existing buildings.
- 7.1 *Defining the Area of Influence* (p64) Guideline - In considering the appropriateness of a design for a new building or addition in a historic district, it is important to determine the area of influence. This area should be that which will be visually influenced by the building, i.e. the area in which visual relationships will occur between historic and new construction.
- 7.2.3 *Shape: Roof Pitch* (p68) Guideline - The roof pitch of a new building should be consistent with those of existing buildings within the area of influence, if dominant patterns are present.
- 7.3.2 *New Construction and Subdivision Development* (p75) Guideline - To be compatible with its environment, new construction should follow established design patterns of its historic neighbors, including building orientation, setback, height, scale, and massing.
- 7.3.2 *New Construction and Subdivision Development* (p75) Guideline - New construction should respect the historic character that makes the area distinctive, but it should not be a mere imitation of historic design.
- 9.4 *Enclosures and Walls* (p90) Guideline - Fences and walls should not be built in front yard spaces and are strongly discouraged from corner lot side yard spaces. Retaining walls should only be used in situations where topography requires their use. In the review of the installation of fencing, the front yard shall be defined as the portion of land between the front entrance of the main structure on the property and the Right of Way of which the property is addressed.

- 9.4 *Enclosures and Walls* (p90) Guideline – The plantings of shrubbery to create a hedge is considered fencing and will require review by the preservation commission.
- 9.4 *Enclosures and Walls* (p90) Recommendation - Fences are appropriate in rear yard spaces. Rear yard fences should be coordinated with existing county codes. Suggested materials include wood and chain link. Vinyl- covered chain link fencing, typically in bronze, brown, or black, assist in making fences less obtrusive. Vines are suggested to “soften” the appearance of metal chain link fencing. If wood fencing is used, the paint color and design should be compatible with the architecture of the adjacent residence. Fence heights can range from 4' to 6' depending on the reason for the enclosure.
- 9.6 *Accessory Buildings* (p91) Guideline - New accessory buildings, such as garages and storage houses, are to be located in rear yard spaces and visually buffered from adjacent property owners and the public right-of-way. Accessory buildings that complement the architecture of the adjacent residence do not require the same level of buffering and may remain more visible within the local district. If the new building will be visible from the street, it should respect the established setbacks and orientations of the historic buildings in the area.
- 9.3 *Vegetation* (p83) Recommendation – The plant list is intended to assist in the selection of appropriate plant materials. Olmsted’s list and the list from the Georgia Landscapes Project provide guidance in selecting materials appropriate for historic landscape projects. There are other sources that can be consulted to identify additional plants used by Olmsted in Druid Hills, such as historic planting plans and particularly the archival record at the Olmsted National Historic Site in Brookline, Massachusetts. The Olmsted list presented in this document should be considered a beginning. Residents of Druid Hills are encouraged to add to this list with historic plants that can be documented as having been used by Olmsted. The native list should be used for natural areas within the district, such as creek corridors and drainage ways. Places within the district where the retention of healthy ecological environments is critical are best landscaped with native varieties. Since native plants have been available since the colony of Georgia was established in 1733, native plants are also appropriate for historic landscapes.
- 9.7 *Residential Landscape Design* (p92) Guideline – The plantings of individual trees, shrubs, annuals, perennials, and ground covers that are not a part of a landscaping project will not require review by the preservation commission.