

# THE CATOR WOOLFORD ESTATE

1815 S. Ponce de Leon, Ave, NE, Atlanta, GA 30307

## **Determination and Scope for Fence Permit**

### **PROPERTY HISTORY:**

The CRC, Inc., (Children’s Rehabilitation Center, Inc.), a private foundation chartered in 1949, has owned 39.6 acres at 1815 S. Ponce de Leon Ave, NE, Atlanta, GA 30309 since 1951. This 39.6-acres of old-growth forest in the heart of Atlanta was the former estate of Cator Woolford. The property contains old-growth trees and native plant species that indicate it is a remnant of the original hardwood forest that, prior to the late 1700’s when settlers began to move into Georgia, once covered the hillsides and streambanks that have become greater Atlanta. The Cator Woolford/Frazer Forest along with Briarlake Forest, Fernbank Forest, Osborne Park, Hidden Acres Nature Preserve, Lullwater Conservation Garden, and Deepdene Park are part of a group of forests in Dekalb County that were protected from commercial logging. They are all fragments of the original forest and are registered in the Old-Growth Forest Network.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the property became part of the original Druid Hills residential development created by Joel Hurt and the Candler family, with the help of landscape architect and planner, Frederick Law Olmstead. In 1922, the 1815 S. Ponce de Leon parcel was bought by Cator Woolford, the founder of the Retail Credit Company – which later became Equifax. This was one of the last parcels in Druid Hills to be purchased, ostensibly because so much of it was considered undesirable for homesite development: 4 creeks and nearly 8 acres of floodplain, 15 acres of old growth piedmont climax forest, along with steep ravines and limited buildable areas are its attributes. However, it was Mr. Woolford’s desire that “Jacqueland” as he named the estate, be a place of enjoyment, beauty, recreation and entertainment for his family, friends, and employees. Beginning in 1923, with the help of architect Owen Southwell and landscape architect Robert Cridland, he built a large English Regency-style home for his family and installed gardens, lawns, tennis courts, an Italianate garden pavilion, a dancing terrace, water features, pathways and all manner of exceptional plants throughout the property. In the 1920’s and 30’s, Mr. Woolford even opened the grounds to the public during 2 – 3 weeks in the spring when his renowned collection of hybrid azaleas bloomed. His was one of the first estates in Atlanta to use the newly introduced hybrids in mass plantings.

### **CURRENT USE AND SITUATION:**

Today, the historic property is still a place of enjoyment, recreation, and solitude – as well as education. It is home to Frazer Center, a pre-school and learning center for children and adults with disabilities, alongside typically developing children, housed in its own facility – two buildings that date from 1959 and 1985. Formerly known as the Atlanta Cerebral Palsy Center, Frazer Center has operated for over 70 years on this site. Frazer Center is a beneficiary of the CRC, Inc. foundation. Since the 1990’s Frazer Center has also used the restored formal gardens for special events, renting the “Cator Woolford Gardens” for weddings, dinners, and celebrations, generating event proceeds to fund programs for the school. Atlanta Hospital Hospitality House is also a tenant on the property, utilizing the 1924 mansion home owned by the CRC as a respite lodge for out-of-town families, caregivers, and patients receiving treatment at area hospitals. The 1.25-mile

property perimeter is not fenced; therefore, the surrounding community and the public at large have accessed the Forest and Garden grounds at will.

In 2020, the CRC, Inc. determined that the property should be more actively stewarded and enhanced in pursuit of the foundation's mission: "Assist vulnerable children, adults, and families to build their capacity through education, rehabilitation, and exposure to our unique natural environment." The specific how and what of this utilization will continue focus on this mission, however, the Trustees' priority is to mitigate the risk presented by the public's unmanaged access to the property. Not only are the Trustees keenly aware of ensuring a safe and secure environment for the children and adults who attend Frazer Center and Atlanta Hospital Hospitality House, but equally focused on protecting and preserving this incredible natural environment of piedmont climax forest, manicured gardens, historic buildings, and outdoor features like the 1923 Jacqueland Rock Garden, recognized by the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation with an Award of Excellence in 2017.

### NEED FOR ENHANCED SECURITY:

In recent years, thefts of equipment, car break-ins, damage to property infrastructure, confrontation of legitimate visitors by clearly impaired and unorthodox individuals, interruption of scheduled events in the Gardens by wandering people and their pets, and evidence of undesirable behaviors in the Forest have caused increasing concern about the safety of children, families and others who have legitimate reasons for being on the property, as well as the historic buildings and surroundings. The community will continue to be welcomed in ways that align with the foundation's mission and Mr. Woolford's original vision for this remarkable place, but will be directed to use the front and back paved entries where better visitor monitoring and appropriately scheduled times for community access can be handled in a routine way.

In August 2020, **Trees Atlanta** assessed the health of the forest and woodlands on the property. The site has been divided into 18 distinct management zones based on existing site conditions and for clarity when working to prioritize particular areas within a given zone. Nine of the 18 zones are external edge habitat sharing a border with ~70 parcels. Through the years, detrimental invasive plants have migrated from adjoining properties and have populated the forest with large stands of bamboo, English ivy, Japanese chaff flower, privet and Elaeagnus, just to name a few. Soil compaction on unauthorized trails has caused damaging erosion to this sensitive site. The Trees Atlanta Forest Restoration program completed a vegetation survey of the 39-acre site for the purpose of developing a five-year management plan aimed at the successful suppression of the most pressing invasive plant infestations, and recommending better stewardship, continued maintenance, and replanting procedures to ensure the future health, functionality, and resiliency of the site. Eliminating random access points to the parcel, creating appropriate trails, and halting erosion throughout the site is key to doing so.

Led by Trees Atlanta, Frazer Center, Eco-Addendum, Lake Claire Neighborhood Association, and the CRC, Inc. have applied as a partnership to the National Fish and Wildlife Federation for a Forest Restoration Grant. This grant will provide funding for appropriate trail installation, removal of invasive plants and community engagement in the work of forest restoration. CRC, Inc.'s contribution to the project includes approximately \$150,000+ of estimated cost to install fencing and educational signage throughout the forest and gardens. The community will continue to have access to enjoy the property.

## MANAGEMENT ZONES & ACREAGES



<b>Zone 1:</b>	4.1 acres
<b>Zone 2:</b>	1.6 acres
<b>Zone 3:</b>	2.4 acres
<b>Zone 4:</b>	0.6 acres
<b>Zone 5:</b>	0.4 acres
<b>Zone 6:</b>	1.0 acres
<b>Zone 7:</b>	2.8 acres
<b>Zone 8:</b>	2.3 acres
<b>Zone 9:</b>	0.6 acres
<b>Zone 10:</b>	1.2 acres
<b>Zone 11:</b>	0.5 acres
<b>Zone 12:</b>	0.4 acres
<b>Zone 13:</b>	1.2 acres
<b>Zone 14:</b>	0.5 acres
<b>Zone 15:</b>	2.0 acres
<b>Zone 16:</b>	1.7 acres
<b>Zone 17:</b>	6.4 acres
<b>Zone 18:</b>	2.2 acres
<b>Total:</b>	31.9 acres

*Figure 1: Management zones determined by*

*trails, hydrology, and size*

### DESCRIPTION OF WORK – Intent: Improve security throughout the property for the Frazer Center school, historic estate buildings and landscape, and special events. Ensure the Forest is preserved and restored.

1. **Direct all pedestrian to access the property is through the S. Ponce main entrance or the Ridgewood Dr. back entrance:** With 1.25 miles of perimeter and 58 adjoining property owners, the forest and gardens are susceptible to at will access by any and all. The CRC seeks to limit unfettered access by fencing key stretches of their property that have the most egregious unauthorized pathways – notably along Marlbrook and Harold Avenues, and at the corner of Lakeshore and Ponce, and directing pedestrians to use only the paved entrances. We want visitors to use our “front door” rather than random access points. Fencing will be unobtrusive, using 6’ black commercial steel chain link fence erected in wooded areas
2. **Protect the natural Forest environment and give those areas degraded by unauthorized pathways, compacted soil, erosion, and invasive plant species a chance to be restored and heal.** Led by Trees Atlanta, Frazer Center, Eco-Addendum, Lake Claire Neighborhood Association, and the CRC, Inc. have applied as a partnership to the National Fish and Wildlife Federation for a Forest Restoration Grant. This grant will provide funding for appropriate trail installation, removal of invasive plants and community engagement in the work of forest restoration. CRC, Inc.’s contribution to the project includes approximately \$150,000+ of estimated

cost to install fencing throughout the forest and gardens. The community will continue to have access to enjoy the property.

3. **Fencing design and placement will be unobtrusive and camouflaged.** (6' tall commercial grade black vinyl chain link fence with bottom tension wire. Fabric – 8 GA KK. Terminal posts- 2 3/8" Sch. 40; Line posts- 1 7/8" Sch. 40; Top rail- 1 5/8" tubing). The CRC intends to make the fence disappear as much as possible within the heavily wooded environment, and to preserve the natural appearance of the forest and woodlands.

The fence paralleling Marlbrook and Harold Avenues will meander around trees, avoid critical root zones, and utilize topographical features such as streams and ravines to provide natural barriers. The fence will not cross those features, enabling wildlife to have access across the property, but limiting human foot traffic. A 4-ft wide path will be cleared of underbrush to enable fence installation. No trenching will be done to install the fence.

The placement of the fence at the Lakeshore Dr. and Ponce de Leon Ave. corner will be well off the property line where there is a natural steep grade, enabling the fence to be installed at or below the grade of the sidewalk and behind several large specimen tulip poplars and pines. The access gate will also be placed down in the property, approximately 50 feet from the sidewalk and 5 feet below the sidewalk grade.

4. **The area outside of the fence on the corner of Lakeshore and Ponce will be returned to its former naturalized state.** This will include planting a combination of evergreen and deciduous native species that will require little pruning or care and will screen the fence from view. Existing hybrid ornamental shrubs will be relocated to more suitable locations. Plant selections will draw from species already present on the property, including Eastern Hemlock to echo the large notable specimens Mr. Woolford installed in the 1920's. Plants such as American Beech, Red cedar, dwarf magnolias, American Holly, Oakleaf hydrangea, Bottle brush buckeye, Paisley Hawthorn and Washington hawthorn, Loblolly Bay, Possumhaw, and Piedmont and Oconee native azaleas are the kinds of plants we will utilize. This approach is in keeping with Mr. Woolford's original vision for the property, using all native plants in the woods, with the best hybrids alongside rare and unusual specimens of Southern varieties inside the Gardens.