March 5, 2007

The Honorable Connie Stokes, Commissioner
DeKalb County Commission
1300 Commerce Drive, 6th Floor
Decatur, Georgia 30030

RE: Emory Village, Druid Hills Historic District

Dear Commissioner Stokes:

On behalf of the National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP), we are writing to urge the DeKalb County Commission to file the proposed zoning overlay for Emory Village in the Druid Hills DeKalb Historic District in order to reconsider the approach to the plan for revitalization of this small commercial center.

While we have admiration for the effort to strengthen the vitality of Emory Village, we have serious concerns about the impact that the scale of the development permitted by the proposed zoning overlay would have on Frederick Law Olmsted’s last suburb. Any zoning created for Emory Village should respect the scale and look of the surrounding late nineteenth century-planned and early twentieth century-developed neighborhood. The proposed zoning overlay appears to impose an early twenty first century development scheme in the center of the Historic District, presumably protected by the County because of its immense value as an historic resource. As the National Register nomination for Druid Hills indicates, “Druid Hills is the finest example of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century comprehensive suburban planning and development in the Atlanta metropolitan area, and one of the finest turn-of-the-century suburbs in the southeastern United States.”

We are currently seeking to assist Riverside (Illinois), Olmsted’s first suburb, in their effort to maintain their sense of place in the face of a transportation-related proposed development in their center. Perhaps we might offer similar assistance to Druid Hills.

NAOP, established in 1980, is a coalition of design and preservation professionals, historic property and park managers, scholars, municipal officials, citizen activists and representatives of numerous Olmsted organizations around the United States and Canada. Its primary concern is the legacy of work designed and inspired by Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. and his firm that continued to practice landscape architecture for almost a century through the involvement of his sons John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. NAOP advances the use of Olmstedian design principles and advocates for
the protection of irreplaceable historic parks and landscapes that revitalize communities and enrich people’s lives.

It is essential that future generations of resident in Emory Village and the Druid Hills Historic District continue to enjoy the quality of place that Olmsted envisioned for its citizens.

Sincerely,

Catherine Nagel
Executive Director

cc: Vernor Jones, DeKalb County CEO
    President James Wagner, Emory University
    Bruce MacGregor, Druid Hills Civic Association
    David Cullison, Preservation Planner, DeKalb County Planning Dept.
    John Harrington, Chairman, DeKalb County Historic Preservation Commission