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February 17, 2000

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OFFICE OF ZONING
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Jerrily Kress
Zoning Secretariat
441 4th Street, N.W.
Suite 210
Washington, D.C. 20001

Re: BZA Application No. 16555, Dumbarton Oaks

Dear Ms. Kress:

The purpose of this letter is to request a postponement of the above-referenced hearing presently scheduled for the March 15th agenda of the Board until either a May or June public hearing date.

The purpose of the postponement is to allow the applicant time to further evaluate the proposed below-grade construction north of the existing main structure.

ANC 2E has voted to support the application and, by copy of this correspondence and by telephone communication, is aware of this postponement request (see attached ANC 2E Resolution).

Very truly yours,

Norman M. Glasgow, Jr.

CC: Peter Pulsifer, Chair, ANC 2E
Ellen McCarthy, Office of Planning

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BZA
Case No. 16555
Exhibit No. 24

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16555
EXHIBIT NO.24

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2E
Dumbarton Oaks Background and Motion

Background:

Rarely does an ANC's role as steward of great places carry as much meaning as it does in the case of Dumbarton Oaks. The significance of this very special property, its history, its beauty, the many elements that make it a world-renown treasure – all are factors that we have been mindful of in assessing the proposal before us.

But Dumbarton Oaks is more than a product of its history: it is a living, working library and museum of scholarship in important fields. It was with the intent that the property fulfill its library functions that the property was deeded to the Trustees of Harvard University.

The plan's proposed changes to the Dumbarton Oaks environmental systems and the cooling tower removal all seem fundamentally unassailable, as do the general plans for handicapped accessibility improvements to the buildings themselves.

Clearly, a strong body of support exists in the community – and elsewhere – for retaining the gardens of the North Vista *exactly* as they are. On the other hand, a case has been made that landscape changes are required to create a healthier Copse and Vista, to link it visually to Rock Creek, and to bring it into truer fulfillment of the Beatrix Farrand designs - entirely independent of the expansion plans. Gardens are not static things, and some changes are on-going inevitabilities.

What remains is a question of whether the need for increased secure, environmentally protected space for the fellows, the research materials, and the artifacts is outweighed by the potential for lasting harm to the North Vista.

Some opponents of the proposed site argue that other locations, particularly the rear of the fellows house, would present preferable locations. The feasibility studies done for Dumbarton Oaks, however, indicate that this alternative site is at least as problematic for the totality of the Dumbarton gardens, and offers none of the programmatic benefits of the North Vista location.

Yet the issue of alternate building sites is almost a diversion from this central question. **If there were no alternative site, the question before us would still be: Can this plan be achieved without great harm to a great treasure?**

In weighing the answer, we are helped by the quality and dedication of the individuals who are guiding the effort. This begins with the Dumbarton Oaks Director, Ned Keenan, who demonstrates remarkable openness and transparency with regard to all the factors that are at play in developing the plans for the property; his stewardship is already resulting in improvements in the public places of Dumbarton Oaks, particularly in the coordination with the National Park Service for better integration of the gardens and park.

The exquisite care with with landscape architect Jim Urban has approached this project again is a source of reassurance that only the finest and best approaches will be taken, and that with great regard for the plans of Farrand, the Blisses, and the others who have had such an important hand in bringing Dumbarton to where it is today.

Richard Williams' architectural approach seems very sensitive to the need to make the additions as invisible as possible, with as many protections as science and engineering allow to avoid mechanical weaknesses that constitute the most serious concern about this project.

And the role of Mary Oehrlein (who has recused herself from all discussion or decision about this project before the Old Georgetown Board) can only be reassuring. The known steadfastness of her commitment to the preservation of historic properties sets a standard that should serve this project well.

A project manager has already been hired who will have the responsibility of responding to neighbors' concerns about the impact of the lengthy construction period; the ANC's "Cooper Rules" have already been adopted as a *minimum* standard for operation of excavation and construction vehicles.

Moreover, the extensive planning process at Harvard that began in 1977 provides a platform on which to assess the current plan and the alternatives offered by those uneasy with the chosen site. The extensive outreach to all segments of the community similarly sets a standard for involved participation by all those who feel involved with outcome at Dumbarton Oaks.

For all these reasons, the answer seems to be that – with great care – it is possible to accomplish the undergrounding of facilities without doing permanent harm to the North Vista and Copse. The potential for bringing Dumbarton Oaks to the forefront of research museums, which will be possible with these changes, is a further benefit that should not be overlooked.

Having said these things, however, cautionary steps must still be adopted in approving the project.

- The project should receive the review of all relevant public bodies to assure that the very best practices and most advanced techniques are being planned for each and every element of the project, but with great weight being given the endorsement of the fundamental elements of the plan as presented to the ANC.

- The involvement of relevant professional societies and groups should be welcomed in the further development of plans for the landscapes and for the exacting execution of the many elements of those plans, on an on-going basis. This will be especially important during the process of dismantling, marking, storing, and reassembling the affected portion of the North Vista.

- Because the site is located in the tight quarters of a residential community, regularly scheduled briefings and/or walking tours should be planned to assure that relevant concerns of neighbors are heard and solutions promptly adopted.

To implement these conclusions, the following motion is proposed:

ANC 2E greatly values the gardens, the antiquities collection and the scholarship at Dumbarton Oaks, which fully deserve their worldwide reputation for excellence. We applaud the goals of modernizing the facilities to better serve the public, of enhancing the value of the collections, and of broadening scholarship and fellowship within the institution. In the program of expanding facilities (though not the number of scholars), it is essential that the North Vista and other gardens be returned to both the local and international community in at least as fine a condition as they currently enjoy, with assurances that their future viability has been preserved or enhanced.

ANC 2E supports the approach embodied in the plans presented for underground library and archival facilities at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, for replacement of cooling-tower facilities, for handicapped-accessibility changes within the existing buildings. This support is conditional, so long as it can reasonably be judged that the previously stated goals will be met.

ANC 2E requests review of the plans for the underground library by the Historic Preservation Review Board to assure sensitive assessment of the treatment of historic elements of the property, giving great weight to the ANC's approval of the siting of the proposed additions. This review would be in addition to the approvals of the visible alterations needed from the Old Georgetown Board and the Commission of Fine Arts, whose careful oversight can only enhance the potential for the best project possible.

That ANC 2E supports the granting of a special exception by the Board of Zoning Adjustment to accommodate the new facilities and asks that the BZA incorporate in its order the concerns expressed by the ANC about continuing involvement of both professional societies and community members, as well as the ANC. We ask the BZA to treat our resolution with great weight.

Because of neighborhood concern for truck traffic and disruption from excavations and other potential neighborhood impacts, ANC 2E recommends that the BZA require that the Cooper Rules be followed with regard to truck traffic and that the BZA require meetings with the community as represented by the ANC to gather community input and to inform the community as to developments in the project.

Proposed by Commissioner Zartman, seconded by Commissioner Goldstein; adopted unanimously December 4, 1999.

- The Cooper Rules -
Safety Standards for Construction Vehicles

1. Before a trucking company starts a project, the excavation company must require documentation of:

   - All necessary licenses and permits
   - Any accidents or citations involving trucks or on-duty drivers for the prior year
   - The last required federal inspection
   - Adequate liability insurance
   - Current federal safety report
   - A pledge not to pay speeding tickets for drivers.

2. If any of the above information changes or expires during the project, the trucking firm must update its records.

3. Before work starts, the excavation company shall certify that the trucking company has complied. The certification shall be placed on the truck's windshield, with a list of each driver authorized to drive the truck.

4. Before any driver starts work on a project, the excavation company must inspect the driver's commercial license to make sure it is current and appropriate for the job.

5. The excavation company must identify routes for drivers that minimize the use of streets through residential areas.

6. The excavation company must not require or recommend that drivers take any other routes.

7. If the excavation company uses how long a trip takes to measure a trucker's performance, the standard shall be the "reasonable" time it takes to drive the recommended route.

8. The excavation company must not load any truck with more weight than the maximum allowed in any jurisdiction in which the truck is driven.

Adopted by ANC 2E on October 6, 1999.