A Petition
from
The Concerned Citizens for Dumbarton Oaks

Friday, February 18, 2000

to: Mr.Neil L.Rudenstine, President
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF ZONING
00 MAR -9 P4:09

Dear President Rudenstine,

We the undersigned strongly disagree with Harvard's current plans to build an underground library beneath the North Vista of the garden at Dumbarton Oaks. Such construction could have a serious and damaging impact on the very heart of this significant and historic work of American landscape architecture.

While recognizing the need to expand the research facilities for scholars, the selection of the site for this new structure means a major intervention in the garden, we therefore strongly urge that other alternative sites on Dumbarton Oaks property be considered, such as the 'S' Street site, an open area behind the Fellows Building, where construction will not threaten the historic designed landscape.

Peter J. Schenk, Jr [06 Dec]:
42 Mt. Vernon Ave.
Alexandria, VA 22301

Member of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City and past employee of Dumbarton Oaks.

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Donald Partlan [07 Dec]:
4513 16th Street, North
Arlington, VA 22207
Harvard GSD 1984
donp17@bellatlantic.net

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Robin Karson [08 Dec]:
Library of American Landscape History
205 East Pleasant Street
Amherst, MA 01002
email: landhist@aol.com
The proposal seems premature, given that a thorough study of the existing conditions and alternative possibilities has not been undertaken. This is one of the country's most significant designed landscapes; certainly, caution is in order.

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Mary V. Hughes, ASLA [09 Dec]:
310 Hedge Street
Charlottesville, VA 22902

Major alterations to a significant historic structure would not be contemplated without thorough investigation of potential impacts and possible alternatives. Potential intervention in this historic garden warrant a commensurate level of scrutiny.

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Dianne Harris [10 Dec]:
Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture and Architecture
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
101 Temple Buell Hall
611 E. Lorado Taft Dr.
Champaign, IL 61820
email: harris3@uiuc.edu
Dumbarton Oaks Junior Fellow, 1994-95

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Reuben M. Rainey [10 Dec]:
Professor and Former Chair
Department of Landscape Architecture
School of Architecture
University of Virginia
Charlottesville,VA 22903
rmr@virginia.edu

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George Dodds [10 Dec]:
University of Pennsylvania
Department of Architecture
207 Meyerson Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19104
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BZA
Case No. 16555
Exhibit No. 29

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16555
EXHIBIT NO.29

alternate email: gdodds@erols.com
Dumbarton Oaks Junior Fellow, 1998-99

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Dell Upton [10 Dec]:
Professor of Architectural History
Department of Architecture
232 Wurster Hall MC 1800
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upton@socrates.berkeley.edu
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Caroline Constant [10 Dec]:
Former Associate Professor, Harvard University Graduate School of Design, now Professor of Architecture, University of Florida.

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Jacqueline Kelly [12 Dec]:
2539 Waterside Drive, NW
Washington, DC 20008
general@mgassoc.com
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Michael Goldfarb [12 Dec]:
2539 Waterside Drive, NW
Washington, DC 20008
general@mgassoc.com
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William W. Bergen [14 Dec]:
Assistant Dean for Administrative Services, School of Law, University of Virginia
University of Virginia
Charlottesville,VA 22903

As someone familiar with the dynamics of construction, I question any assertion that the garden will be "put back just as it was." Such claims ignore the human element. In every construction project, the unplanned and unanticipated, the myriad errors of omission and commission, can and do cause changes to the best-intentioned plans. Thus any unequivocal statement that the garden will be unchanged by this complex project is either naive or disingenuous.
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Clarissa Rowe [14 Dec]:
Board Chair, Historic Massachusetts Inc., daughter of Libby Rowe, City Planner of Washington DC, who stopped a similar Harvard Plan about 25 years ago.
========
Elizabeth Vizza [14 Dec]:
The Halvorson Company, Inc.
161 Massachusetts Avenue
Boston, MA 02115
liz@halvorsonco.com
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Robert Weidknecht [14 Dec]:
40 Hemlock Drive
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Marion Pressley [15 Dec]:
Marion Pressley, FASLA
Pressley Associates, Inc.
432 Columbia Street
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mpressley@pressleyinc.com
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Christopher Connelly [15 Dec]:
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Gary Forst [15 Dec]:
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Melissa MacDonald [15 Dec]:
Pressley Associates
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mmacdonald@pressleyinc.com
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Janet Bloomberg [16 Dec]:
1545 18th Street, NW
#321
Washington, D.C. 20036
bloomy99@earthlink.net

As a resident of D.C., I greatly value Dumbarton Oaks, and strongly believe that it should be preserved intact.
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Kathy Poole [20 Dec]:
Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture,
University of Virginia
Campbell Hall
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, VA 22903
kpoole@virginia.edu

The arguments for a more thorough study of Dumbarton Oaks' entire historical development are indisputable. I would like to add a note as a woman GSD graduate. Dumbarton Oaks is a tribute to an important female figure in the profession. And it is a well known work, one of the few for which women are recognized. As the Landscape Architecture Department and the ASLA celebrate our 100th year, it would be a fitting action to more seriously consider the work of one of the ASLA's founding members and first

professional women of the discipline of landscape architecture.

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Eliz. Lissa Thompson [20 Dec]:
Harvard GSD MLA'86
Ritchie Smith Associates
65 Union Ave. Suite 320
Memphis, TN 38103

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Dennis Dixon [21 Dec]:
BC Consultants, Inc.12700 Fair Lakes Circle
Suite 100
Fairfax, VA 22033
ddixon@bccon.com

A comprehensive study of alternative sites should be completed before the current proposal is given further merit.

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Calder Loth [21 Dec]:
Senior Architectural Historian Virginia
Department of Historic Resources
2801 Kensington Avenue
Richmond, VA 23221
cloth@dhr.state.va.us

It appears that Harvard's Dumbarton's library project is more and more alienating many of the leading figures in landscape architecture and garden history. Dumbarton Oaks prides itself on having one of the foremost programs and research centers on garden history. One might ask to what extent the determination to proceed with the library discredits Dumbarton's program. In other words, can the garden history and landscape architecture community put much credibility in an institution and its program when it ignores what the best minds in these fields of study regard as inappropriate treatment and questionable stewardship of a national treasure? Even though the officials of Harvard University are sincere in their conviction of the rightness of their project, might not they ask themselves whether in the long run they are doing themselves and a distinguished program more harm than good by proceeding forthwith. It seems odd for an educational institution not to welcome scholarly discourse for an action that may have irremediable impact on both a unique place and the institution's reputation.

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Richard Guy Wilson [21 Dec]:
Commonwealth Professor of Architectural History, Chair, Dept of Architectural History, University of Virginia. rgw4h@virginia.edu

There is no way that an underground library can be installed without significantly altering one of America's great gardens. Other sites must be investigated.

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Roger C. Sherry [21 Dec]:
Cultural Landscape Architect, Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, University of Virginia
rcs6y@virginia.edu Stewardship has its privileges- and its responsibilities. I pose a simple question to the stewards of Dumbarton Oaks: "Would this intervention be fait accompli if Beatrix and Mildred were with us today?" The conscionable answer is obvious.

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Peter L. Rinek [21 Dec]:
Principal of Planning & Landscape Architecture,
BC Consultants12700 Fairlakes Circle
Fairfax, VA 22033 prinek@bccon.com

All alternatives should be thoroughly investigated before impacting such a significant garden.

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Amy Ransom Arnold [21 Dec]:
843 Locust Ave.Charlottesville, Va 22902
aa@gb-la.com
Harvard University, as steward of Dumbarton Oaks, has the responsibility to proceed thoughtfully with any proposed intervention into the site. The construction proposed poses obvious and substantial risks to the gardens. The alternative location for the library expansion, already discussed in several letters, seems to be a solid and workable solution with little risk to the site. Rigorous consideration must be given to this, or other alternative approaches, if Harvard is to proceed responsibly.

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Claire R. Sherman [22 Dec]:
Radcliffe '51 Alternate sites should be explored before damage is done to a great American garden created by 2 women of distinction.

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Carol Betsch [22 Dec]:
Managing Editor University of Massachusetts Press Amherst
betsch@umpress.umass.edu

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Laura Lawson [22 Dec]:
There are other alternatives that should be explored.

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Lance M. Neckar [22 Dec]:

Associate Dean, College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, University of Minnesota
MLA, HGSD, 1981

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Stephanie McAllister [22 Dec]:
145 Keller Street Petaluma, CA 94952

Harvard, MLA 1984
smac@pon.net

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Judith B. Tankard [23 Dec]:
Instructor, landscape design history, Radcliffe Seminars, Harvard University judith@tankard.net

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William Clendaniel [27 Dec]:
President, Mount Auburn Cemetery 580 Mt. Auburn St.
Cambridge, MA 02138
bill@mtauburn.com
Harvard, JD 1975
Board member, Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation, National Association for Olmstead Parks, Soc. for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Historic Massachusetts
Based on our experience at Mount Auburn, North America's first large-scale designed landscape open to the public, where we face the same issues as Dumbarton Oaks, preservation while adapting to modern usage in limited space, I strongly urge completion of a master plan before making such a drastic alteration. The experience and sincere concern of those putting forth cautionary arguments require you to stop the forward momentum and seriously reconsider all aspects of the problem. Your responsibility as the steward of this great artistic treasure calls for no less. If you were dealing with a great painting and so many distinguished curators and scholars questioned the efficacy of a proposed conservation treatment that might be irreversible, you would certainly reconsider it, especially since there are acceptable alternatives.

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Sunny Jung Scully [29 Dec]:
Past President, Potomac ASLA Principal: Lewis, Scully, Gionet, Inc.
8320 Old Courthouse Road, Suite 120
Vienna VA 22182
sunny@lsginc.com
No information or presentations which I have observed have dealt with the initial programming and priorities for the new space. There is inadequate dialogue regarding alternative sites, including the question of whether the scholars should consider being affiliated with another campus or site. The garden, one of America's foremost historic garden sites, cannot move. It must be protected and treasured for our cultural heritage, and I strongly urge decision makers to place preservation of the garden as the first priority in any expansion being considered.

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Robert Cmarik [29 Dec]:
1717 Dublin Drive, Silver Spring,
MDbcmarik@lsginc.com
ASLA - Potomac Chapter
A great deal of concern has been raised concerning the proposed library addition at Dumbarton Oaks. Serious consideration should be given to any possible alternatives due to the importance of the site in the history of the Country, and its significance to the field of landscape architecture.

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Carolyn Revelle [31 Dec]:
Planner,Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission, Silver Spring,MD When I was Director of the Landscape Design Program at George Washington University, our students found Dumbarton Oaks an important resource for the study of garden history. Alteration of the North Vista would diminish the garden's historic and instructional value. I urge you to explore a more suitable site.

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Ellen Revelle Eckis [31 Dec]:
7348 Vista del Mar, La Jolla, California My late husband, Roger Revelle, and I lived in Washington from 1961-63, before he became Director of Harvard's Center for Population Studies. I spent many happy hours at Dumbarton Oaks, and strongly oppose the proposed library location.

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Cari Goetcheus [03 Jan]:
Co-Chair ASLA Historic Preservation Professional Interest Group; Treasurer, The Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation
email: cari_goetcheus@nps.gov

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Andy Miga [04 Jan]:
112 Austin St.Newton, MA 02460

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Carla Corbin [04 Jan]:
Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture, University of Illinois Associate Member, ASLA; Registered Architect
MLA,Harvard G S D, 93

Gardens are ephemeral; too few examples exist such as Dumbarton Oaks which are both significant in terms of design as well as having been continuously well-cared for. The site is an important teaching tool for generations of landscape architecture students.
Additionally, based on my experience as an architect in practice, construction is a destructive process to existing mature trees, no matter how well specifications are written or how vigilant the landscape architect and other overseers are. Construction, and construction traffic, will have significant negative impact on the large trees which are so important as a spatial frame of the lawn.

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Jay Olmsted [05 Jan]:
You are working with one of the most significant gardens in the United States. Please reconsider the location of this project to maintain the design intact. This would be a loss to all.
========
Julie Ferrari [05 Jan]:
Sasaki Associates64 Pleasant Street
Watertown, MA 01274
jferrari@sasaki.com

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Joy Kuebler [05 Jan]:
Cannon Design2170 Whitehaven Road
Grand Island, NY 14072
jkuebler@cannondesign.com

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Kat Hardesty [05 Jan]:
Beals and Thomas, Inc. Southborough, MA
khardesty@btiweb.com

What a beautiful, beautiful place. That anyone should have on his/her conscience the 'replacement' of the irreplaceable is so sad. Replacing even an 8' by 8' vegetable garden is impossible. Please reconsider.

========
Selene Weber [06 Jan]:
4 Burnett Ave., South Hadley, MA 01075
This garden deserves to be preserved intact. Please reconsider your plans and explore other options.

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Allyson M. Hayward [06 Jan]:
Chair,New England Garden History Society21 Albion Rd, Wellesley Hills, MA 02481
amhayward@aol.com

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Robin Dripps [08 Jan]:
Director, Program in American Urbanism, University of Virginia. dripps@virginia.edu It seems remarkably short sighted to make such large and irreversible interventions to such an important garden when, with recent scholarly research, the possibility exists to reconstitute the original setting and reveal the profoundly inventive ideas of how widely different conceptions of nature are able to be reconciled.

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Chris Moyles [11 Jan]:
Senior Associate, Child Associates, Inc.240 Newbury Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02116
childasc@ix.netcom.com

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Annette Marchesseaul [11 Jan]:
Landscape Designer, Child Associates, Inc.
240 Newbury St.
Boston, MA 02116
childasc@ix.netcom.com

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Andy Evans [11 Jan]:
Landscape Architect, Sasaki Associates
Watertown, MA
aevans@sasaki.com

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Carol Moyles [11 Jan]:
Senior Associate, Sasaki Associates
Watertown, MA 02172
camoyles@sasaki.com

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Heidi Schenck White [11 Jan]:
RVK Architects, San Antonio, Texas
white@rvk-architects.com

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Robert Page, ASLA [12 Jan]:
1832 Biltmore Street, Washington, DC 20009
bob_page@nps.gov

The current proposal represents a complete lack of understanding of the significance of the Dumbarton Oaks property. The destruction of this portion of the garden, and the potential effect to the surrounding areas during and post construction, are unacceptable. There is no question that alternative locations off-site should be seriously investigated.

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Karen Kumm Morris [12 Jan]:
Urban Design Coordinator, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

Dumbarton Oaks is a nationally recognized "jewel" among historic landscapes. It is highly valued by scholars, design professionals and the public. Other building sites should be seriously pursued before the worse-case alternative of an underground building is even considered. It is common knowledge in the design profession that underground facilities often fail over time to maintain water tight conditions, in other words, they leak. In numerous large office and residential projects in Bethesda, Md., I have witnessed this unfortunate phenomena. When the leaks must be repaired, the surfaces are dug up time and time again. There is no guarantee that this will not happen to Dumbarton Oaks. I urge you not allow Harvard to undertake such a risk to the historic garden.

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Joshua Gewolb [12 Jan]:
Harvard Class of 2001405 Mather House
Cambridge, MA 02138

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Iris Miller [12 Jan]:
Iris Miller & Associates, ASLA, Director of Landscape Studies and Adjunct Assoc. Professor in the School of Architecture and Planning at the Catholic University of America
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Alix Myerson [12 Jan]:
As a resident of the District and Harvard daughter (Henry '32) I sincerely hope that you will work to preserve the integrity of the Dumbarton Oaks site and find alternative space for scholars
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Stephen J Kramer AIA [12 Jan]:
Please take time to look at other options before taking a drastic step that may not be able to be reconsidered later.
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Anne Solsbery [13 Jan]:
MLA University of Virginia, Historic Preservation,6801 Broadway,
San Antonio, Texas 78209

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Margaret Bryant [14 Jan]:
Asst. Professor, Landscape Architecture, Virginia Tech. 101 Architecture Annex (0113) Blacksburg, VA 24061
========
Elizabeth R. Messer [14 Jan]:
Assistant Professor, Landscape Architecture, West Virginia University
P.O. Box 6108
Morgantown, WV 26506
emesser@wvu.edu

Please reconsider this plan - there are always alternatives to anything, and this situation clearly warrants a very careful exploration of alternative solutions.

========
Christopher C. Hill [14 Jan]:
Architect/Developer5111 Broadway
San Antonio, Texas 78209
cchill@stic.net

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Kay Williams [14 Jan]:
Associate Professor, University of Florida
Department of Landscape Architecture
331 ARCH
Gainesville, Florida 32611

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Dr. Alon KvashnyProf [16 Jan]:
Preserve Dumbarton Oaks and select an alternative site for development
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F. Scott Bush [16 Jan]:
I am concerned that either site may result in "Noise Pollution" for visitors to Dumbarton Oaks Park, particularly when the Air Conditioning Chillers are operating. One may only walk that Park nearest the Safeway to hear the effect on a hot day during the summer. Please be sure to assess any potential impacts in your planning.
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Gina Crandell [17 Jan]:
Visiting Lecturer, Harvard Design School
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Ann Komara [17 Jan]:
Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture, College of Architecture and Planning, University of Colorado at Denver. Campus Box 126. P. O. Box 173364. Denver, Co 80217-3364It amazes me that the Harvard board seems to think that the landscape will suffer no fundamental change during construction - have they never been to a construction site!?! Such an intervention will unavoidably alter the site. Such an intervention, should it occur, will change in ways unimaginable the integrity of a valued and significant example of landscape architecture. I think a full planning and development study should be implemented, and that the oh so difficult aspect of "value and meaning" of the site be grappled with and acknowledged before one spade of earth is dug.

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Loriann Gordon [17 Jan]:
737 Bishop Street, Suite 1530Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

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Denise Bradley [17 Jan]:
Senior Landscape Historian, Dames & Moore
221 Main Street, Suite 600
San Francisco, CA 94105
email:sfodab@hotmail.com

I would hope that the enduring and inherent value of this significant work of art would be considered equal to the immediate needs of providing more library space and that alternative plans for the library space can be found that do not impact the landscape. To say that the landscape can be "reconstructed" is to justify the immediate need at the expense of the landscape. I am sure that the Bliss's awareness of the value of Dumbarton Oaks as a work of art to future generations was one of the reasons that they entrusted its preservation to Harvard University. I would hope that the University will consider this role of trustee as the current project decisions are being made.

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Mary Ann Gerster [17 Jan]:
agerster@greenbelt.com
Legal Editor, Washington, D.C.
The preservation of the gardens should be a top priority for the stewards of Dumbarton Oaks. The scope of this proposal provides little real reassurance that an important piece of the history of U.S. landscape art will be preserved.
When I walk to Dumbarton Oaks from work, I come to marvel at the gardens and nothing else: The region has no finer green space. (And on some days, it seems it has every other color in the palette as well ....)

========
Mark Miller [17 Jan]:
civic@greenbelt.comM.L.S., J.D.
I am a strong supporter of libraries, but I strongly oppose the ill-advised location of a library that would violate the historical integrity of the Dumbarton Oaks garden.

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Susan Dolan [18 Jan]:
Past-Chair ASLA Historic Preservation Professional Interest Group,
susan_dolan@nps.gov. ASLA Historic Preservation Professional Interest Group opposes any construction project within the Dumbarton Oaks garden, or any historically significant landscape, without prior historical research, analysis and planning to mitigate the affects of the project. However, mitigation for a project of this magnitude cannot be achieved without the loss of the authenticity and integrity of the historic landscape. A subterranean building is completely inappropriate in this context and an alternative should be sought.
========
sally schauman,FASLA [18 Jan]:
Loeb Fellow 76/77Professor of Land Arch and Women Studies
Dept of Land Arch, Univ. of Washington
sebring@u.washington.edu

Please don't be so oblivious of the landscape--to suggest one can mitigate for this loss is total design arrogance.

========
David C. Streatfield [18 Jan]:
Professor of Landscape Architecture, Urban Design and Planning, Adjunct Professor of Architecture University of Washington
Seattle, WA 98195-5734

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Susan Hitchcock [19 Jan]:
100 Alabama Street SW, Atlanta, GA 30303
susan_hitchcock@nps.gov

As a member of the ASLA Historic Preservation Professional Interest Group, I reiterate the statement made above by Susan Dolan. We oppose the present plans that would destroy part of a very significant historic landscape. An alternative site should be found.

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Tom Skolnicki [19 Jan]:
Landscape Architect Lee & Liu Associates, Inc.
638 Eye Street NW, Washington, DC 20001

The recent announcement by the design team that a 'cultural landscape historian' will be added to the team is not necessarily a sign that this significant designed landscape will be better protected. On the contrary, historic preservation legislation sometimes allows for documentation of historic buildings and landscapes, through written words and images, as adequate 'preservation' of a site. I strongly concur with Karen Kumm Morris' assertion that an underground building faces the likelihood of occasional major maintenance and repair. If this building fails even one time, the University will have broken faith with those to whom it has promised that the gardens will be disturbed and closed to the public only once. Can the fragile walls and cast stone sculptures be moved more than once? As I read the many comments on this petition, I came across many points which alone should raise a flag. Together, they advise that an alternate course of action would be much more prudent.

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Ron Benoit, ASLA [19 Jan]:
The proposal for an underground library essentially puts the garden in the category of "on structure" plantings. In over 25 years of practice, I have yet to see a planting of this type that can match plants and trees in a full natural soil condition. I feel the design statements that allude to replicating the garden as it is now in a fully mature state are not well thought out, to say the least. Once the trees are gone and the garden is demolished it will be a little late for apologies from the design team. As I see it, the alternate site is the best solution.
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Robert B. Riley [20 Jan]:
I marvel at the logical, reasonable tone of my colleagues. Alas, this is neither a reasonable world nor a reasonable decision. My own reaction is less tempered. As I wrote to the DO administration a couple of months ago, (a letter to which I received no response-surprise) I view DO as one of only two pre-WWII gardens in North America of world significance. To so desecrate/endanger it is - pure and simple - an act of cultural vandalism, hardly ameliorated by being self-inflicted. As an architect, let me point out the architectural consensus that the Phillip Johnson pavilion is one of the silliest, most precious, and self-indulgent baubles ever produced by a famous architect, a subject of critical derision since its sketches were first published. Now... try to imagine what would happen were IT proposed for demolition and "restoration".
As a former chair of the Board of Senior Fellows I am disturbed and disappointed (but perhaps not surprised) by their seeming acquiescence, along with that of the Director of Landscape Studies.

Shame!

Robert B. Riley FASLA,AIA
407 e. Mumford Drive
Urbana,Illinois 61801

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Iain M Robertson [20 Jan]:
Assoc. Professor & Chair, Department of Landscape Architecture
Box 355734,
University of Washington
Seattle
WA 98195-5734
iainmr@u.washington.edu

I agree fully with comments made about the impossibility of "restoring" site conditions over and adjacent to buried structures. This, indeed, also applies to any part of the gardens where the water table and soil water movement are affected by the construction of underground buildings. The "restoration" of above ground conditions is simple in comparison with the restoration of below-ground conditions. It is simply impossible to completely restore below ground conditions and thus, so far as plants are concerned, it is impossible to restore their above ground size, form, health and vigor.

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G.W. Longenecker [21 Jan]:
Prof. of Landscape Architecture, West Virginia University. clifside@westco.net
This issue and the gardens are both now 25 years older than the first go around. The need for expansion may be greater than before, but the gardens have also become more fragile with age. It seems senseless for simple convenience to destroy a priceless treasure. There are less expensive and less destructive alternatives. As others have suggested, look at the whole picture, rather than the "hole" picture. The hole seems very innovative, I thought so 25 years ago, but this is one place where this kind of innovation does not belong. Doctors bury their mistakes. I hope you don't.

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Sherda Williams [21 Jan]:
Cultural Landscape Program Leader, Midwest Region, National Park Service, Omaha, Nebraska.
I concur with Susan Dolan's position and ask the Board to consider an off-site option.
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Roberta Young [21 Jan]:
The historic landscape preservation has come a very long way in recent years. The fact that Harvard University, where the first landscape architecture program was established in 1900, could even consider such a destructive proposal shows how much farther we must go. It is my hope that Harvard will set an example appropriate to the history of the profession by selecting an alternative site that will not endanger the historic fabric of this great estate.
========
Daniel Bluestone [21 Jan]:
Harvard College, Class of 1975
Director, Historic Preservation Program
University of Virginia
School of Architecture
Campbell Hall
Charlottesville, Virginia 22903
804-924-6458
dblues@virginia.edu

In Dumbarton Oaks, Harvard and Washington, D.C. have an extrordinary garden, a great library, and an important house. The plans for an underground library are particularly unfortunate.

They unimaginatively see the interests of the library as somehow aligned against those of the garden. Going underground only exacerbates the problematic nature this initial perception. The unintended result is that the proposed expansion compromises the form, character, and use of the garden. Even a modicum of design skill brought to bear upon this problem would quickly explore the ways in which the addition to the library can complement and strengthen the experience of the entire garden, house, as well as the broader landscape. The garden should be part of the daily experience of those using the library. The Library expansion needs to draw upon and incorporate the fine character, qualities, and setting of the garden. In this place, the job needs to be done well, eschewing the head-buried-beneath-the-garden approach that characterizes the current plans--plans that timidly avoid the broader richness and possibilities of Dumbarton Oaks as a dynamic, artfully conceived, and historic landscape.

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Kathleen Fitzgerald [21 Jan]:
Historic Landscape Architecture Technician, National Park Service

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Carolyn Adams, ASLA [21 Jan]:
Please reconsider the proposed destruction to a beloved part of Dumbarton Oaks. "There is only one answer to destructiveness and that is creativity." (Sylvia Ashton-Warner, 1963) Get creative!

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Robert A, White [22 Jan]:
Landscape Architect MLA, HGSD 1984, Norwich, VT.

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Michael A. Stern [24 Jan]:
1337 Shady Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15217
HGSD MLA 1984

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Lan Hogue [24 Jan]:
Michael Vergason Landscape Architects4517 16th St. N. Arlington, VA 22207

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Ann Frick Blair [25 Jan]:
Landscape ArchitectPast Chair, Historic Preservation Professional Interest Group, ASLA
11 City View Road
Brookline, MA 02446-2202
e-mail: ablair@brownrowe.com

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Cornelia W. Brown [26 Jan]:
Brown and Rowe, Inc.Landscape Architects and Planners
286 Congress Street
Boston, MA 02210

As a graduate of Harvard College, B.A. 1971, I am saddened by my alma mater's disregard of the significance of Farrand's masterpiece. I know Harvard would not draw a mustache on the Mona Lisa. Why would the University construct physical graffitti in this irreplaceable landscape architectural work of art?

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Mary Chapman [26 Jan]:
197B BoulevardAthens, GA 30601
UGA,MLA Program, 2nd year

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William P. Everts Jr [30 Jan]:
Harvard College,1939Harvard Law School, 1950
weverts@webtv.com
Please don't abandon Harvard's national moral authority with this disastrous and ill-conceived development scheme.

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Sandra Chesrown [30 Jan]:
AICP
CMI
610 N. Cascade Avenue
Colorado Springs, CO 80903
sacpetra@aol.com

Having worked on archaeological sites and World Heritage landscapes where physical interventions of this magnitude are rarely successful, and where UNESCO's guidelines for cultural and historic landscapes strongly discourage such irreversibility, I urge Dumbarton Oaks to comprehensively analyze all alternatives -- the economic, political, and physical -- before proceeding to destroy a carefully crafted and implemented concept. Harvard as the owner has a responsibility to the public to be a careful steward of this extraordinary design and to preserve the integrity and authenticity of Dumbarton Oaks.

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Susan M. Seidman [31 Jan]:
P.O. Box 365, East Hampton, NY 11937. Graduate of Harvard (Radcliffe), 1950. As a dedicated gardener, longtime member and volunteer for the Horticultural Alliance of the Hamptons, and periodic visitor to Washington who has admired the irreplaceable landscape treasures at Dumbarton Oaks, I strongly support this petition.

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Luanne Smith [31 Jan]:
Lecturer, University of WashingtonDepartment of Landscape Architecture

Seattle, WA 98195-5734
I strongly support this petition.

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Susanne Parsons Fyffe [01 Feb]:
1057 26th Road South Arlington, VA 22202
dsfyffe@ix.netcom.com

It is inconceivable that the site behind the Fellows Building has not been considered to incorporate a wonderfully new garden. The opportunity to provide a new library, with natural light, and a garden which connects the two spaces could be magical. The idea that the gardens are growing and changing would welcome the connection.

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Leslie J. Ward [01 Feb]:
LWard@bccon.com
Please have more foresight than to knowingly destroy (in whole or in part)a successful, functioning, popular national landmark. How can we teach people to care for the environment, if it doesn't start here, now?

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Jonathan Bondi [01 Feb]:
BC Consultants, Inc.12700 Fair Lakes Circle
Suite 100
Fairfax, Va 22033
(703)449-8100

jbondi@bccon.com

This project should not go foward without a clear conscience that every alternative to disturbing the gardens has been examined to its fullest extent. Harvard, please convince me.

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Jodi Simons [02 Feb]:
Landscape Architectjodi@bagcorp.com
"Ditto" to All of the Above.

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Brenda Brown [03 Feb]:
Landscape Design Art Research1423 NW 10th Avenue
Gainesville, FL 32605
brenbrow@yahoo.com

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Frederick Steiner [04 Feb]:
Professor & Director, School of Planning and Landscape Architecture, Arizona State Universitysteiner@asu.edu
This is too valuable a place to intervene without a comprehensive evaluation of all the options and the consequences of each.

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Stephanie Poore [04 Feb]:
Student of Landscape Architecture at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaignspoore@uiuc.edu
I am very much against destroying such a historical landscape.

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CB Fellerhoff [04 Feb]:
MLA Student, Univesity of Illinois1209 1/2 E Main St
Urban Il 61802
For all the reasons stated above.

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Shawn Sinn [04 Feb]:
Landscape Architecture student at the University of Illinois, s-sinn@uiuc.eduDumbarton Oaks very important to the history of landscape architecture in the USA and should not be destroyed in any way.

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Kate Laliberte [05 Feb]:
Graduate Student, Dept. of Landscape ArchitectureUniversity of Massachusetts at Amherst
klaliber@larp.umass.edu

As a student new to landscape architecture, who has not yet had the pleasure of visiting Dumbarton Oaks, I am disheartened to think that that which has served to educate and influence a generation of landscape architects before me may not be available for those to come. Please reconsider.

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Amy L. Flairty [05 Feb]:
I am a landscape architecture student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I feel that a site such as Dumbarton Oaks should have landmark status. The garden is just as much important as the building that sits there, if not more.flairty@uiuc.edu

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Laurie McGee [06 Feb]:
lmcgee@uiuc.edu
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Justin Bingman [06 Feb]:
Student in Landscape Architecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This site should not be altered in any way. It is important to the history of landscape architecture.

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Dorothy DeLong [07 Feb]:
209 Wyomissing Blvd, Wyomissing, PA 19610
pbjdelong@worldnet.att.netAs a garden loving tourist, I would hate to see an historic garden needlessly disturbed for months or years of construction, when alternatives exist.

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John Blackwell [07 Feb]:
Urban Planner (retired),U.S.Army Corps of Engineers
Harvard '34, MIT '47,
Boston, Massachusetts

Exercising trust, stewardship and duty are important when considering where to locate new building space for library and other educational program needs at Dumbarton Oaks.

In November 1940, on accepting the gift of the Dumbarton Oaks house and grounds, statuary, books, artifacts and truly exceptional collections, the Harvard Corporation, I feel, knowingly accepted on-going duties of trust and stewardship for the future of those properties, which represented the joint life efforts of the donors, Robert and Mildred Bliss, and their very long time friend, Beatrix Farrand, landscape architect.

Beginning at the north facade of the house, a unique ten acre garden complex was skillfully developed by Mrs. Bliss and Mrs. Farrand over a twenty year span. The complex now has memorial solemnity as it is the burial place of Mr. Bliss and prominently displays the Bliss masonry plaque stating their appreciation and friendship with Mrs. Farrand.

Sensitive trusteeship and stewardship forbid, it seems to me, the current proposal to insert into this garden complex a two-story deep 25,000 sq. ft. underground structure, directly behind the house, under the North Court and the North Vista. Garden physical constraints and practical cost estimates also argue against this location.

Mobilizing for such a construction would require garden-disruptive access and excavation of a garden area a good deal larger than just the "footprint" of the contemplated building. Burying it under a garden would of course be much more costly than erecting the same number of sq. ft. elsewhere above ground. There would be the further multiple expenses of removing, storing and later re-assembling garden masonry features and planting replacement garden vegetation.

Even then, that portion of the garden would only resemble what had been previously placed there by Mrs. Bliss and Mrs. Farrand. Its unique original provenance would be forever compromised. Its in-soil moisture storing capability would be ZERO, replaced by a buried concrete box! Also this would alter both surface run-off and the flow of ground-water surrounding the box.

Given the foreseen evolution and transformation of Dumbarton Oaks from domestic "rus in urbe" to a world-known museum, park, and place of very special higher learning, how shall its building space need be met, over time? Emphatically, not in the Bliss-Farrand garden complex, which gives the house great distinction.

Supplying (i.e., installing) the major utilities that will be increasingly needed is a pre-consideration. The Dumbarton Oaks property contains other unbuilt land. The current building proposal may, in the next five or ten years, be followed by yet another feeling of need for more building floor and wall space. Shouldn't that be taken into account now? Every major academic institution -- not just Harvard -- experiences this need.

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Florence Everts [07 Feb]:
Florence Everts Associates2351 49th Street NW
Washington, DC 20007
email: FEverts@aol.com
Concerned Citizens for Dumbarton Oaks

What GUARANTEES can be given by the Director, or the Design Team that 5,10, 20 years down the road that there will not have been repeated disturbances to the garden for maintenance and repair? ASSURANCES ARE NOT ENOUGH. Directors come and go; some may be concerned with the state of the garden more than others. Who will be the guardian of the subtle grading of the lawn terraces or the restoration of the walls and elegant stone carvings when the time comes to repair a leaking roof?

Furthermore, is it not ironic that an institution that was established in part for the study of garden scholarship and as the repository of Mrs. Bliss's unique collection of rare horticultural and historic garden books should be involved in the possible destruction of one of the country's finest gardens.

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Jack Sullivan [08 Feb]:
Assistant Professor Landscape Architecture Program and Historic Preservation Committee
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742-4452

js337@umail.umd.edu

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Kent Brinkley, FASLA [11 Feb]:
Landscape ArchitectThe Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
P.O. Box #1776
Williamsburg, VA 23187-1776
(former member, Dumbarton Oaks Garden Advisory Committee)
e-mail: kbrinkley@cwf.org

I'll state my views on this issue bluntly: What you are intending to do to the Dumbarton Oaks garden is simply unconscionable! The situation is made even worse by the fact that you have not (and apparently will not) entertain ANY discussions about other possible alternatives!

The entire premise upon which this proposed project is based (i.e. the notion that it is acceptable to destroy a historical and cultural landscape feature to build an expansion wing underground and then put the garden back in place on top of it) is SO totally flawed and SO irresponsible in the extreme that it leaves historic preservation professionals in total shock and amazement! HOW can all of you seriously persist with these plans??!!! What can only be called this "gross error in judgment" is further exacerbated by the fact that due scholarly diligence and circumspection to assess the garden's salient features and cultural values have also never been exercised. This glaring omission only adds insult to the intended injury!

C'mon Harvard folks, it really IS time to stand down and cut your losses on this project!.....by persisting with your single-minded intentions you are certainly setting yourselves up to become the pariahs of the American historic preservation field! This fact alone may not cause any of you to lose much sleep at night, but by doing so, you are also just as inevitably going to considerably diminish (if not cause irreparable damage to) Harvard's long-standing reputation for scholarly excellence and responsible management; qualities that have been hallmarks of your academic institution for over three centuries. Is this ill-conceived project really worth jeopardizing that reputation (and having it occur on your watch?) Is this REALLY the kind of legacy those of you in leadership positions want to leave in your wake??!! Please DO consider these simple questions carefully, gentlemen.
Thank you.

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Eleanor M. McPeck [12 Feb]:
Former Dumbarton Oaks Scholar, Farrand Scholar, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies, Boston, Massachusetts

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Cheryl Wagner [12 Feb]:
MLA Harvarvd GSD '94National Institute of Building Sciences
Washington, DC
cwagner@nibs.org

Co-editor, Making Educated Decisions: A Landscape Preservation Bibliography, National Park Service, 1994.

To assert that without excavating the North Vista the Institution of Dumbarton Oaks cannot grow is a false choice argument. Dumbarton Oaks Garden should never have been allowed to become a political pawn by those to whom it was entrusted - once, let alone twice.

Before continuing to so aggressively champion its current proposal, Harvard would be prudent to:
1) Reinstate the disbanded Garden Advisory Committee with qualified personnel;
2) Resume the discontinued practice of retaining a professional landscape architect experienced in historic preservation as an ongoing advisor;
3) Conduct an unbiased cultural landscape study that methodically examines and analyzes the wealth of primary historical documents available;
4) Acknowledge the significance of this historic resource to the American public by nominating the Garden to the National Register.

In the meanwhile, sincere efforts to examine alternative sites for the Library expansion should be made.