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(copy received by email)

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Edward Keenan, Director
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Dear Ned,

I write to convey my thoughts about Dumbarton Oaks' proposal to build a library under the North Vista, the terraced lawn which extends the central axis of the house into the gardens. I understand you too, desire to improve the research facilities for scholars in residence. As a recent Dumbarton Oaks Fellow, I can attest to that fact that the current office spaces for Landscape Architecture Fellows are quite inadequate as productive and comfortable working environments. I can appreciate your desire to consolidate the three departmental library holdings, even though there are considerable merits for some Fellows in having them distinct. However, I question the decision to directly attach this new space to the existing building, especially given the historical significance of the adjacent gardens that would be impacted by the underground structure, and given the amount of land near the Fellows Building on S Street that is appropriate and desirable for the construction of several free standing buildings.

Design decisions for a historic property should not be primarily internally driven. Rather, there should be a careful assessment of both the internal space needs and the significant and, perhaps, fragile status of the historic landscape so that a design solution can be reached that does not sacrifice the historic designed landscape to interior space planning decisions. With this in mind, why not pursue the excellent option available to you, the S Street site near the Fellows Building? This site has great benefits. New buildings there could complement the existing lodging and dining programs of the Fellows Building, and vastly improve parts of your land holdings, the parking lot and service yard, that are not significant designed landscapes. By building on the S Street site, Dumbarton Oaks can avoid altering and damaging the main threshold between the house and the gardens, the North Vista, as well as the adjacent Copse and Pool Terrace.

Furthermore, as both an academic and a practicing landscape architect who has worked on, and added to, several significant historic landscapes. I am surprised

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that you are proceed[redacted] with a construction project insid[redacted]nd underneath, the garden prior to undertaking the historic landscape research and analysis that is required for such and intervention. Recent scholarly presentations of new research by the National Park Service architectural historian, Dr. Kay Fanning, as well as by Brian Katen, Assistant Professor at Virginia Tech and former consulting Landscape Architect for Dumbarton Oaks, reveal that the Dumbarton oaks story is even more compelling than we knew, and that the garden is more significant in the history of American landscape architecture than previously determined. Perhaps more important, Dumbarton Oaks, an institution entrusted to manage the property of the Blisses, does not have a working master plan for the grounds. The decision to build in the upper garden is premature given the lack of a historic landscape report and a landscape master plan. As someone with strong allegiances to both the private and public Dumbarton Oaks - the research library for Studies in Landscape Architecture and the physical environment of the house and gardens - I strongly urge you to commission a historic landscape report prior to final site selection for the addition. From research and synthesis that such a report could provide, you should develop a landscape master plan for the entire property. That document should clearly state what is significant about the garden, how that garden supports the Blisses' conception of a scholarly community, and how future additions necessary for the growth of the research institution can ensure, not threaten, the garden's integrity. A landscape master plan will enable you to make design decisions within in a historical context that includes the entire garden, both upper garden and lower park, as a cultural product shaped over time.

What I have outlined is common practice for institutions that own a historic garden and landscape. This process of research and synthesis prior to action is required of a Harvard University institution that includes studies of historic and contemporary designed landscapes. Such a report is absolutely necessary for an institution that owns a resource designed by prominent landscape architects such as Beatrix Farrand and Alden Hopkins, and architects such as McKim, Mead and White and Philip Johnson. I realize that commissioning a historic landscape report will appear to slow down progress on the project. To the contrary, such an effort will demonstrate that you are taking seriously your obligation to be stewards of this significant ensemble of buildings and gardens that is 1) a physical expression of the Blisses' commitment to building a scholarly humanist institution set in an extended garden, 2) an exemplar of twentieth landscape architecture, and 3) a mature example of the work of Beatrix Farrand - a founding member of the ASLA and among the first professional women in that profession. Accompanied by such a process, your expansion plans would be viewed with less scepticism and opposition. While you might incur delay, you will avoid losing credibility as a place dedicated to the study of landscape architecture.

Ned, this letter stems from my admiration for Dumbarton Oaks as a research institution and as a masterpiece of American landscape architecture. I have been visiting the gardens for more than 20 years, and attending the Studies in Landscape

Architecture symposia for more than a decade. While I was a Fellow, the gardens were fundamental to my work as a scholar, They were part of my daily routines. Yes, I walked through the gardens with colleagues discussing aspects of our research, while seeking the earliest blooming scilla and aconite. But, I also worked in the garden, I edited and read there. I strolled alone working through conceptual problems of a particular argument, or passage. My perspective as a resident scholar permitted me to experience the gardens as Farrand and the Blisses conceived of them, as a catalyst and setting for intellectual discourse and community. For the Landscape Architecture Fellows, the garden is part of the Dumbarton Oaks' collection. But, for all Fellows, the garden is a source of inspiration, and itself an inspiration. Why risk disturbing the garden when you have other excellent choices?

I am convinced that expanding the research facilities at Dumbarton Oaks is not so urgent that the integrity of the designed landscape should be compromised. I am also convinced that a vibrant academic community at Dumbarton Oaks is better fostered within a dispersed campus scheme which includes the gardens than within a single building scheme. One need not sacrifice the garden to meet the institution's goals. It is unconscionable to presume otherwise.

Harvard University has a responsibility to care for this historic landscape which is an integral part of Dumbarton Oaks' research mission. I ask you to reconsider your decision, and to commission a landscape master plan before proceeding with a design project. Finally, I urge you to withdraw the November 4th Old Georgetown Board design review of the current scheme which is the prerequisite for the final review by the Fine Arts commission.

Respectfully,

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