(From : Calder Loth
Architectural Historian
Member Garden Advisory Committe for Dumbarton Oaks)

COPY

Dr. Edward L. Keenan
Director
Dumbarton oaks
1703 32nd Street NW
Washington, DC 20007

'00 MAR -9 P4:10
OFFICE OF ZONING
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

November 4, 1999

Dear Dr. Keenan,

In September 1987 Kent Brinkley, Catherine Howett and I were invited by the director of Dumbarton Oaks to serve on the newly formed Dumbarton Oaks Garden Advisory committee. The committee was asked to help develop "intelligent guidelines" for restoration and long-term maintenance of the garden's unique character. I was told by the director that my expertise and wisdom would be invaluable to the institution.

It was noted that the garden would always be subject to evolution and changes but that such evolution and changes needed informed direction so that the garden's fundamental character would not be compromised. The committee first met in November 1997. We had a substantive discussion on preservation philosophy and had a very informative tour of the garden. I was quite familiar with the garden in any case since I had visited it many times as a member of the Dumbarton Oaks Round Table organized by John Dixon Hunt. In our meeting, we concluded that we needed more detailed background information on Beatrix Farrand's work there along with later changes by Mrs. Bliss. Dumbarton Oaks subsequently sent each of us a healthy package of materials to study. A second meeting has never been called.

In that I have never been told that the Garden Advisory Committee has ceased to exist, I still maintain a sincere and, I hope, legitimate interest in the garden and how it is treated. Indeed, I am firmly of the opinion that the garden is one of the nations' greatest works of landscape architecture. During our one meeting, I stated that the garden should receive official definition and recognition through having it nominated as a National Historic Landmark. I hope this yet will be done.

Under the circumstances, the current proposal to excavate the North Vista terrace and install an underground library in that location causes me considerable concern. while this project may indeed have received thorough consideration, it cannot be

BZA
Case No. 16555
Exhibit No. 35

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16555
EXHIBIT NO.35

denied that this is a drastic intervention into an extremely delicate and fragile environment. having seen the present library area I fully appreciate the need forbetter facilities, but can we put a unique living organism, one famed worldwide. at such risk? Can anyone really know what the long-term effects on the ecology of the garden will be?

At best they will be neutral, at worst they be disastrous, but no one can honestly believe that they will be positive. And certainly any deleterious effects will not be reversible.I know this a tough decision, but the fact that such an intervention may well result in irremediable, adverse environmental conditions should make it imperative to consider every alternative to the fullest extent possible.

Moreover, as a practical matter, I have known few underground facilities to be immune to water damage. The below-grade DeWitt Gallery of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation was heralded as a state-of-the-art decorative arts museum. Within a few years of its completion it suffered flooding with over a foot of water on its entrance level floor. Likewise, a burst pipe in the below-grade area of the new storage area of the Virginia Historical Society caused damage to its collections. Books especially don't like water.

Unless the Garden Advisory Committee has indeed been discharged, I would like to recommend that it be convened to consider the propsed library's potential impact on the garden. Please don't take this as meddling but rather a sincere concern and love for a unique creation where our "expertise and wisdom" may be of benefit.

Sincerely,

Calder Loth
Senior Architectural Historian