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Received by E-Mail

Mr. Edward Keenan, Director
Dumbarton Oaks 1703 32nd Street NW
Washington,DC 20007

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OFFICE OF ZONING
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Dear Mr. Keenan,

I am writing to you both in my capacity as the executive director of an organization dedicated to promoting thoughtful stewardship of historic landscapes and as a landscape historian engaged in writing a book that includes a chapter on the garden landscape of Dumbarton Oaks.

Along with many other researchers, academicians, landscape architects and land stewards across the United States, I am deeply concerned about the apparently precipitous plans to construct underground library facilities beneath the North Vista of the garden. I join my colleagues in urging utmost care before ground is broken. The gardens at Dumbarton Oaks figure among the most importnat designed landscapes in the United States, owing to both the high quality of their design and their remarkable state of preservation. They are works of art of the highest order, and like all landscpe art, extremely vulnerable even under the best circumstances. They deserve the same careful treatment as any superb, irreplaceable work of art.

The widespread, professionally accepted procedure for addressing the need to accomodate new facilities on important sites is to undertake a historic landscape report that documents existing conditions and establishes significant characteristics of the site. This should be followed by a master plan that utilizes the information and perspectives presented in the historic landscape report as a base for thoughtful decisions for altering existing structures and landscape and adding new ones. That neither of these steps has yet been contemplated is alarming.

I have spent considerable time at Dumbarton Oaks over the past fifteen years, as a researcher in the library and on the grounds, an attendee of the landscape studies symposia and an invited lecturer. I am utterly convinced that the spirit of the landscape under your care is extraordinary in its capacity to inspire ideas, emotions, and undertakings that add to the general well being of humankind. Please take the necessary precautions to maintain and protect that spirit for all visitors for all time.

Yours truly,

Robin Karson

THE LIBRARY OF AMERICAN LANDSCAPE HISTORY
405 EAST PLEASANT STREET
AMHERST, MA 01002

EXEC. DIRECTOR, ROBIN KARSON

BZA
Case No. 16555
Exhibit No. 36

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16555
EXHIBIT NO.36