UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

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OFFICE OF ZONING
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

December 4, 1999
Mr. Peter Pulsifer
Chairman, ANC 2E
3265 S. St., NW
Washington, DC 20007

Fax: 202-338-0279

Dear Mr. Pulsifer:

I am writing to express my deep concern about Dumbarton Oaks' proposal to build a library under the North Vista of the gardens. As an architectural and landscape historian and as a former Dumbarton Oaks fellow (academic year 1994-95), I am well aware of the significance of the gardens at Dumbarton Oaks and of the works of Beatrix Jones Farrand in the history of American landscape architecture. Few sites in the United States are the equal of this magnificent and beautifully maintained historic estate and I am deeply concerned about a proposal that would disturb the grounds without adequate preliminary study. Although I am sympathetic to the need for enlarged libraries and study facilities, I urge the commission and the directors at Dumbarton Oaks to prepare a formal assessment of this historic property before commencing construction so that alternate sites within the Dumbarton Oaks grounds may be considered. An obvious alternative, for example, exists behind the Fellows Building on S street, which is currently occupied by a parking lot. Construction at this site would pose no harm to the historic garden and would pose fewer construction problems in terms of access and disturbance for staff, fellows, and visitors. Indeed, there may exist numerous viable alternatives, but without preparation of a historic landscape report and master plan, which should include a careful analysis of existing conditions and their historic significance, such sites will remain unknown.

I have little doubt that the Director of Dumbarton Oaks has only the best intentions with regard to this development proposal. But landscapes are delicate and complex artifacts that require specific types of expertise for evaluation. Although superficial analysis might make it seem possible that the garden might be easily restored after such a massive construction disturbance, I suspect that careful analysis will show that it is unlikely that the North Vista would ever recover or regain its present state of grace and beauty. After all, construction of an underground facility will mean shallow soil depths on top of subterranean structures and shallow soils cannot support the kinds of mature vegetation currently extant. And what will be the long-term impact of heavy construction equipment through the site? Have geologic reports been commissioned to determine whether underground water sources exist that might cause severe problems for subterranean construction? These are just a few of the very serious issues that must be carefully considered for this type of project.

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As an historian of the American and European landscape, I cannot overstate the value and significance of the garden at Dumbarton Oaks. To landscape architects and landscape historians, its significance equals that of the most rare Byzantine and Pre-Columbian artifacts held in the institution's museums. We would no sooner consider destruction of a Byzantine artifact than we should destruction of a portion of Beatrix Jones Farrand's masterful work. Although the recognition of landscapes as essential artifacts of cultural life is only recently coming to the fore in scholarly circles, Dumbarton Oaks has

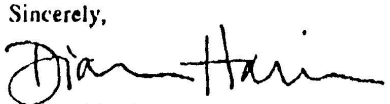
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CASE NO.16555
EXHIBIT NO.37

long remained the key institution for recognition of the fundamental value of landscapes and of landscape studies. I would therefore expect that any construction planned for the Dumbarton Oaks campus would proceed with the greatest possible degree of wise stewardship, including preparation of master plans, historic landscape reports and impact assessments. To neglect such a process would be to undermine the credibility of the institution as the world's foremost center for the study of landscape history, and to risk destruction of a precious American site. I therefore urge delay of the review and construction process until such a report is developed and alternative sites given careful consideration.

Sincerely,



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