Laura Wood Roper
316 Riverside Drive
Washington, NC 27889

January 13, 2000

President Neil Rudenstine
Office of the President
Massachusetts Hall
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA 02138

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OFFICE OF ZONING
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Dear President Rudenstine:

As a former resident of Georgetown (for 50 years), a friend of Mrs. Bliss's, a frequent visitor to Dumbarton Oaks, and the writer of the definitive biography of Frederick Law Olmsted (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), I am dismayed to hear that the projected building of a library under the North Vista of the garden has been revived. It was a bad idea when it was thwarted 25 years ago, and it still is a bad idea.

When Mrs. Bliss presented her cherished garden to Harvard, she certainly did not contemplate that The University would undermine one of its most restful and gracious features for the sake of convenience, or for any other reason. I think she would be deeply outraged by this proposal.

The possibility cannot be ignored that the ground above the library, even if properly restored to begin with, may have to be disturbed again, and perhaps again and again (underground maintenance notably requiring frequent attention) to repair roof, ventilating system, whatnot.

Nor can the possibility be ignored that, in future years with changes in style of gardening, restoration might be out of harmony with the spirit of the original--or even incompetent.

BZA
Case No. 16555
Exhibit No. 39

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16555
EXHIBIT NO.39

Dumbarton Oaks, like all man-made landscape, is a fragile creation and, like Central Park, is of preeminent cultural value. It should *NOT* be invaded to meet Harvard's genuine and admitted needs. Surely they can be accommodated elsewhere--for instance, on the ground behind the Fellows' Building--without running the very real risk of permanently defacing a national treasure.

Sincerely,

Laura Wood Roper

LWR/pa

cc: J. Carter Brown
Commission of Fine Arts
The National Building Museum
441 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001