2539 Waterside Drive, NW
Washington, DC 20008
December 13, 1999

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF ZONING
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Mr. Edward L. Keenan, *Director*
Dumbarton Oaks
1703 32nd Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007

Dear Mr. Keenan:

I had the pleasure of meeting you at last week's ANC meeting in Georgetown. As you may remember, I attended the session to express my grave concern about the planned underground expansion of Dumbarton Oaks. You very generously offered to allow me to tour the grounds in order to better understand the rationale for Dumbarton's position.

I have given your invitation a great deal of thought because I certainly would be honored to accept it. However, since our interchange, I have spoken with architects, engineers, and other individuals with expertise on this issue. I continue to believe that Dumbarton's current course is misguided.

I mentioned to you that, when I first came to Washington over thirty years ago, I spent every free moment at Dumbarton. Then, I was driven by my love of its Byzantine ivories. Over time, I realized how truly beautiful the gardens were as well. I am sure that we both agree that the collections and the gardens are unique.

At the risk of sounding patronizing, which is absolutely not my intention, I really believe that you think you are doing right by Dumbarton. You and your team made an initial assessment that programmatic interests, as Jim Urban said after the meeting, superceded the interests of the garden. Obviously I and others believe that both can be accommodated at an alternate site. Perhaps a second building will not have the conceptual integrity that you had intended, but it will preserve the gardens. In fact, after my recent discussions with subject matter experts, I think that it might preserve the collection as well. Underground structures have notorious leakage problems, and any effort at reparation entails reexcavation of the site—a devastating prospect given the labor and cost of dismantling the gardens a first time. (I have personal experience right across from you in Rock Creek Park. After renovating my house, water leaked into the kitchen and destroyed the entire room. I had to remove the stone patio that had just been installed, dig up the entire backyard, waterproof the wall again, rebuild the kitchen, rebuild the patio, and relandscape. The kitchen wall is still not completely dry because underground water is so difficult to trace.)

Here is my fear. I know well that, once an individual or institution has decided on a course- in this case, opting for resource contiguity—and then gone on to invest a tremendous amount of time and energy in fine-tuning, embellishing, and marketing

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16555
EXHIBIT NO.42

BZA
Case No. 16555
Exhibit No. 42

the plan, that plan is not easily overturned. Quite frankly, most people do not have the mettle to reevaluate their position when given input that threatens their original conclusions. Mr. Keenan, I am respectfully asking you to do just that. Instead of offering me a tour, I am asking that you reopen the dialogue on the advantages of an alternate site with professionals who can more accurately than I evaluate what is at stake. Evidently, a Dumbarton Oaks Garden Advisory Committee met once, but was never reconvened. Perhaps its views can better inform this decision. And it is such a significant one.

I believe that we pass quickly through this life, and must bring our very best to it. You have a great deal of power over one of the world's treasures. I hope that you will rethink its future.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Kelly