Concerned Citizens for Dumbarton Oaks

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OFFICE OF ZONING
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

March 1, 2000

Dear

The reason for this letter is to bring to your attention the concerns that many of us have, not only in Washington but across the country, about Harvard's proposal to build an underground library beneath the North Vista, or possibly the South Lawn of the Dumbarton Oaks garden. Regarded as a masterpiece of garden design and as a part of our national legacy, it was designed by Beatrix Farrand, one of the most distinguished landscape architects of her generation and the only female founding member of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

We ask you as an Overseer / Corporation Member of Harvard to bring your oversight to this issue. We do not deny the need to expand; we believe the siting of the building is wrong since there is suitable alternative space within the property holdings of Dumbarton Oaks.

The concept plans and a model of the underground building beneath the North Vista have already been prepared. In the face of opposition to this location, another site beneath the South Lawn is now under study by the design team. Both sites meet the needs expressed by the Director for contiguity between the scholars and their sources. But both sites present a major intervention into the heart of the garden. The potential damage and impact of this large structure on the character and historic landscape could be devastating. This was a misguided proposal when it was thwarted 25 years ago and it still is a misguided proposal. There can be only one acceptable site for the expansion and that is the open area behind the Fellows building which is outside the designed garden. This site offers an excellent oportunity to enhance a neglected area with a building in a garden setting designed to complement this significant property.

BZA
Case No. 16555
Exhibit No. 45

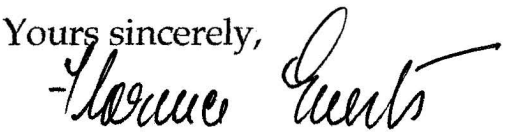
Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16555
EXHIBIT NO.45

Enclosed is a Petition of protest to President Rudenstine with over 100 signatures of landscape architects, historians, preservationists, architects and citizens, from all over the country, who value and cherish what they regard as a cultural resource. We believe that Harvard must honor the stewardship with which it was entrusted by Mr. and Mrs. Bliss, when Dumbarton Oaks was willed to them. How would Mrs. Bliss regard the needs and interests of scholarly research as overiding and posing such a threat to her beloved garden? I believe she would regard it as a betrayal of her trust. Dumbarton Oaks is known and loved by the public for its garden and not as a centre for the study of Byzantine and pre-Columbian culture. It is highly valued by scholars, design professionals and public who visited by the thousands annually. To proceed with a project that would deface a cultural and historic landmark would seriously jeopardize Harvard's reputation for scholarly excellence, for responsible management and as a trustworthy legatee.

We beg you to review with utmost care, this ill-conceived proposal and and ask that you reconsider the need for an underground library contiguous to the main building. A dispersed campus arrangement has been rejected by the Director as a "programmatic liability" arguing that scholars, books and objects must be contiguous. We believe there are few scholars who would not prefer to walk a short distance to an above ground library with natural light.

Therefore, we strongly urge that the open space behind the Fellows building be investigated as the appropriate alternative location and that this current proposal for an underground building within the designed garden be withdrawn. Thank you for your consideration

Yours sincerely,



Florence Everts, Associate ASLA, Potomac Chapter

The Concerned Citizens for DumbartonOaks
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