Concerned Citizens for Dumbarton Oaks

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March 10, 2000

Ms. Sheri Pruitt
Secretariat to the Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street
Washington, DC

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
'00 MAR 10 P1:13

Re: Case # 16555. Dumbarton Oaks hearing scheduled for March15,2000

Dear Ms. Pruitt,

It was a pleasure meeting you yesterday. In discussing Harvard's proposal to build an 25,000sq.ft. underground library in the garden of Dumbarton Oaks, I failed to mention that in early February we wrote a letter (a copy is enclosed), to Director Andrew Altman of the Office of Planning. As a result of that letter, we had a meeting with Deputy Director, Ellen McCarthy of the Office of Plannng who expressed a keen interest in the case.The Concerned Citizens were represented at this meeting by myself, and Jack Sullivan, Professor of Landscape Architecture at University of Maryland.

As you are aware, the proposal and architectural plans have been through various stages of review, first by the ANC2E and the Old Georgetown Board. The ANC passed a surprisingly adulatory resolution in support of the proposal, a copy of which is in your files. This resolution was passed, despite the many letters of protest from landscape architects, historians, preservationists that had been sent in from across the country. And also, I might add, despite the number of neighbors andprofessionals who were in

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Case No. 16555
Exhibit No. 48

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
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EXHIBIT NO.48

the audience at both meetings of the ANC. The design team and the Director of Dumbarton Oaks were allowed almost an hour for their presentation, while those in opposition speaking from the floor, were summarily dismissed after a few minutes. As one commissioner pointed out the issues of preservation and the cultural significance of a unique and historic garden were not with in their expertise. The only matters the ANC could realistically be concerned with were those of " the safety amd comfort of the neighborhood during construction". Despite this comment the resolution was passed. See the enclosed copy of a report of the meeting that appeared in the "Georgetown Current", December 8, 1999.

The Old Georgetown Board decided that it was not within their jurisdiction to review the proposal for the underground library beneath the North Vista and sent it forward to the DC Historic Preservation Reiview Board. A hearing before the DCHPRB was scheduled for February24, 2000 but was postponed at the request of Dumbarton Oaks.

As I mentioned yesterday, as a matter of historic interest, attempts to build under the garden were made 25 years ago. Plans were prepared by architect Hugh Jacobsen, but were withdrawn after a tremendous outpouring of opposition similar to that which is being expressed today. The article by Henry Mitchell in the Washington Post of May 28, 1976, which I enclosed with the material I submitted yesterday, describes the outcome of the previous attempt to expand the institutuion at the expense of the garden.

I am sending you herewith a complete List of the Enclosures that should accompany my letter of March 9, to the Members of the Board of Zoning Adjustment. I also enclose a copy of my letter to Mr. Altman and a copy of a newspaper clipping from the Georgetown Current reporting on the ANC meeting of December 8, 1999 both which should also be included in the package I delivered to you yesterday.

I believe that the material I have submitted on behalf of the Concerned Citizens indicates the extent of the concern on the part of professional landscape architects, historians, preservationists, neighbors and those who value and enjoy the gardens regarding this proposal. A proposal which could have a devastating impact on this unique garden.

I should also draw your attention to the fact that we have set up a web site **(www.Dumbartonoaks.Eboard.com)** which may be consulted for further information. At this site we have an electronic petition addressed to President Rudenstine protesting the proposed expansion. For the information of the members of the Zoning Board, I enclosed a printout copy of this petition with my letter to the Board I submitted yesterday, I should appreciate your circulating all these materials I have submitted to the Board and including them as part of the record pertaining to this case.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

Florence Everts

Florence Everts
Concerned Citizens for Dumbarton Oaks
2351 Forthy ninth Street NW
Washington, DC 20007

Enclosures

To: Board of Zoning Adjustment
From: The Concerned Citizens for Dumbarton Oaks
Case: 16555

A. Printout of Petition to 2/9/00 :
Mr. Neil Rudenstine,
President, Harvard University

B. Letters: Note: Many of these letters were received by email , thus the copies do not have letterheads

1. From: Janice Schach, President
American Society of Landscape Architects
363 Eye Street NW
Washington, DC
To: Mr. Neil Rudenstine, President
Harvard University

2 From : Elizabeth Meyer
Assoc. Professor of Landscape Architecture
University of Virginia
To: Dr. Edward Keenan, Director of Dumbarton Oaks
Washington, DC

3. From: Jack Sullivan
Professor of Landscape Architecture
University of Maryland
To: President Rudensstine
Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass

4 From: Michael Van Valkenburgh
Charles Eliot Professor of Landscape Architecture
Harvard University
To: Mr. Peter Pulsifer.Chairman
Georgetown Advisory Neighborhood Commission

5. From: Dr. Kent Brinkley
Landscape Architect, Colonial Williamsburg
Foundation, Williamsburg, VA
To: Mr. J. Carter Brown, Chairman
Fine Arts Commission

6. From: Dr. Calder Loth, Architectural Historian
Director, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA
To: Dr. Keenan

7. From: Robin Karson, Exec. Director
The Library of American Landscape History
Amherst, MA
To: Dr. Keenan

8. From: Diane Harris
Asst. Professor of Landscape Architecture
Asst. Professor Architecture
Umiversity of Illinois at Urbana-Champagne
To: Mr. Peter Pulsifer, Chairman
Georgetown Advisory Neighborhood Commission

9. From: Reuben Rainey, Professor of Landscape Architecture
University of Virginia
To: Dr. Keenan

10. From: Mary Slusser, Research Scholar
Sackler Museum, Washington, DC
To: President Rudenstine
Harvard University

11. From: Jacqueline Kelly, Concerned Citizen
2539 Waterside Drive, Washington, DC
To: President Rudenstine

12. From: Laura Roper, Biographer of Frederick Law
Olmsted and friend of Mrs. Mildred Bliss,
To: President Rudenstine

13. From : Ann Loeb Bronfman, daughter of John Loeb a major donor to Harvard University
To: President Rudenstine

14. From: Georgetown Garden Club
To: Chairman of the ANC 2E

15. From: George Dodds, Architect and former Dumbarton Oaks Fellow
To: President Rudenstine

16. From: Statement by Concerned Citizens for Dumbarton Oaks,
To: ANC2E, November 3, 1999

17 . From: The Concerned Citizens for Dumbarton Oaks
To: All members of the Board of Overseers and the Corporation of Harvard University

18. From: The Concerned Citizens for Dumbarton Oaks. February3,1000
To: Mr. Andrew Altman, Director
DC Office of Planning
801 North Capital Street

C. Newspaper Clippings:

i) The Harvard Crimson article, January10, 2000

ii) The Harvard Crimson, January14, 2000. Letter to the Editor from Florence Everts

iii) The Georgetown Current, December 8,1999. Report of ANC2E meeting December 7,1999

iv) The Washington Post , **May 28, 1976.** Article by Henry Mitchell

Concerned Citizens For Dumbarton Oaks

www.Dumbartonoaks.Eboard.com

Mr. Andrew Altman, Director,
DC Office of Planning
801 North Capital Street
4th Floor
Washington, DC 20002

February 3, 20002

Dear Mr. Altman,

I am writing to you as a member of the Concerned Citizens for Dumbarton Oaks to bring to your attention just how many of us there are who are greatly concerned about the proposal of Harvard University to build an underground library beneath the North Vista of the garden.

I am sending to you herewith, copies of letters that have been written, from landscape architects, preservationists, historians and citizens who value and enjoy the gardens, protesting this proposal to the Fine Arts Commission, the Old Georgetown Review board, the ANC, to Dr. Rudenstine, President of Harvard and to Dr. Edward Keenan, Director of Dumbarton Oaks. All of these letters show concern for the potential damage that the construction of a 25,000 sq.ft. building underground could pose to the garden and also possibly to the base water flow into Dumbarton Creek below.

The plan would mean a major intervention into the heart of the garden which is considered one of the most important designed landscapes in the United states. Interest in the garden goes far beyond Georgetown or Harvard. It is an example of landscape art of the highest order, and like all landscapes extremely vulnerable. Dumbarton Oaks and the Rockefeller garden in Maine are considered the two outstanding works of Beatrix Farrand - one of the finest landscape architects of her generation. It is an

irreplaceable work of art and is part of our national heritage.

The reason for this expansion is to provide more space for the library and collections and to improve facilities for the Fellows in residence. We do not deny the need to expand. **We believe that the proposed building is in the wrong location, particularly since there is an alternative site off S Street behind the Fellows building which is a large, open space within the property holdings of Dumbarton Oaks.**

When asked why this site, was not considered, the answer given is that there must be contiguity between the scholars and their sources and that a campus arrangement is unacceptable. The Director, Dr. Keenan, has described such an arrangement as a "programmatic liability". He argues that scholars, objects and books must be contiguous, therefore the need for an immediately adjacent library. Few scholars worldwide have such an ideal arrangement. Who wouldn't prefer to walk through a garden to consult their sources in an above ground library with natural light? What is being proposed is a major intervention in the garden driven by the internal needs of the institution; the need for expansion overiding potential damage to the garden

Furthermore, the issue of an underground building remaining permanently waterproof **cannot be guaranteed**. Time and corrosion take their toll and inevitably there will be a time when the roof will leak, an underground pipe has to be repaired and the garden dug up again. There are many examples of failed underground buildings: the Sackler Museum here in Washington DC, the De Witt Museum of the Decorative Arts of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, the gymnasium at Georgetown University to mention just a few.

Despite the assurances by the Director and the architect that the garden, its walls, its trees, the Star Garden (one of the jewels of the entire garden which will have to be dismantled) will be restored exactly as it is today, there are many unforeseen risks. It is optimistic to assume that the North Vista, as a roof garden, which is what it will be, can ever have the same

character and viability as it does today. Accidents can happen in the disassembly of the walls with their elegant stone carvings, and there is the possible danger that can ensue from construction to the ecosystem of the hillside. This is an enormous, complex and difficult task. Once the damage to the garden is done, it cannot be reversed.

Plans have already been prepared by the architect and have been through various stages of review by the Advisory Neighborhood Commission of Georgetown and the Old Georgetown Review Board. The ANC decided to support the project despite the many letters of protest from landscape architects and preservationists across the country and the dozen or more neighbors in the audience who flatly opposed the proposal, approval for the project was granted. It might be noted that while the team for Dumbarton Oaks were allowed almost an hour for their presentation opponents speaking from the floor, were summarily dismissed after a few minutes. Commiissioner Art Schultz noted that the preservation and historic issues were not within the purview of the ANC. "These concerns..... were beyond the expertize of the advisory neighborhood commission". He asserted that the only matters the commission could realistically be concerned about "are safety and comfort of the neighborhood during construction". (See 'The Georgetown Current" December 8,1999). Mr. Schultz was right.

The Old Georgetown Board decided that it was not within their jurisdiction to review the proposal and have sent it to the DC Historic Preservation Review Board which will review the case on February 24, 2000.

President Rudenstine is aware of public and professional concern about this proposal and recently sent down a team from the Harvard Graduate School of Design to assess the situation. Among their recommendations were; 1) study the possibility of alternative sites and 2) reinstate the Garden Advisory Committee that had been set up some years ago, but was arbitrarily disbanded by the present Director, Dr. Keenan.

I believe that Mrs. Bliss had the belief when she handed over, and richly

endowed, Dumbarton Oaks to Harvard that it would be the most trustworthy steward of her beloved garden, that she and Beatrix Farrand together spent 20 years developing, against the needs and interests of scholarly research? I, for one, think she would consider it a betrayal of her trust in Harvard.

We have set up a web site **(www.Dumbartonoaks.eboard.com)** which may be consulted for further information. At this site we have an electronic petition addressed to President Rudenstine protesting the proposed expansion. (see enclosed printout of petition to date)

Among the enclosed letters, I would draw your attention to one letter in particular from Elizabeth Meyer, Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Virginia and former Fellow at Dumbarton Oaks. I think that this letter presents very cogently the reasons why this proposed underground structure should not be built.

I should also add, that it is the gardens and not the scholarly collections, for which Dumbarton Oaks is known and loved. One has only to see the bus loads of tourists who come to visit to appreciate how much it is valued by the general public. It is ironic that an institution that was established in part for the study of garden scholarship and as a repository for Mrs. Bliss's unique collection of rare horticultural and historic garden books, should be involved in the possible destruction of one of the country's finest gardens.

Finally, as a matter of historic interest, I should mention the earlier attempts 24 years ago to build under the North Vista. Plans were actually drawn up (by architect Hugh Jacobsen), but met with opposition similar to that which is being expressed today. Harvard finally withdrew its proposal. At a meeting held at DumbartonOaks, Mrs. Charles U. Daly, Harvard Vice President for Community Affairs, said:

> "Harvard University would choose instead of the controversial north lawn, a secluded site behind the Fellows building on S Street" (Washington Post, May 28, 1976, article written by Henry Mitchell)

A wise decision made 24 years ago which is as valid today as it was then.

I and some of my colleagues, look forward to meeting with you to discuss this issue which is a concern not only for those who believe in protecting a part of the nation's cultural legacy, but one close to hearts of the residents of the District of Columbia.

Yours sincerely



Florence Everts
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cc Ellen McCarthy
Mary Vogel

THE GEORGETOWN CURRENT
DECEMBER 8, 1999

you need?" asked Harriet Bronstein, who has lion from special education funds to fund an

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Georgetown ANC approves Dumbarton's underground plan

By CHARLES BERMPOHL
Current Staff Writer

The Georgetown advisory neighborhood commission Tuesday night gave its unanimous, if cautiously worded, approval for an underground research library at historic Dumbarton Oaks.

The project's strength on the commission was not reflected in the audience, where as many as a dozen neighbors either flatly opposed it or complained about a lack of public input in the approval process, or among several landscape architects from institutions across the country who wrote letters in opposition for one reason or another.

It also seemed clear, judging by the commission's vote, by letters from other impressively credentialed scholars and by others in the audience, that the novel plan has strong support.

"This makes sense to me and, apparently, to other people," said commissioner Barbara Zartman, who offered the resolution to back the project.

The project would bury the library under a long rectangular lawn that stretches out north of the mansion where the United Nations was formed on land that was part of an overall garden design by famed landscape architect Beatrix Farrand.

Those associated with the estate, a museum containing pre-Columbian artifacts and a center for scholarship that includes three libraries under the control of the trustees of Harvard University, said they needed the library, that they had looked for other building alternatives and that put[illegible] the facility underground would [illegible]do damage above ground.

"For 60 years, we[illegible]aken good care of these garden[illegible]'re going to continue to do that," said Dumbarton Oaks dir[illegible]or Edward Keenan.

The project, he insisted, was "responsible, sensitive" and would benefit greatly by a technology that will permit a massive excavation, putting a library in the hole and covering the whole thing up in a way

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that would barely be detected from above.

Keenan also blamed a former research fellow for orchestrating a campaign of scholars against the project.

If there were such a campaign, it was at least partially successful.

A professor of landscape architecture at Harvard, Michael Van Valkenburgh, wrote to advisory neighborhood commission chair Peter Pulsifer last week, saying, "There are better alternatives for adding library space that do not include putting a building underground in this fragile landscape."

Another landscape scholar, Dr. Dianne Harris of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, said that if the library is built where it is planned "it is unlikely that the North Vista would ever recover or regain its present state of grace and beauty."

The executive director of The Library of American Landscape History, Robin Karson, wrote to Pulsifer expressing concern for the landscape and claiming she was "deeply troubled by the speed of [the] current course of events."

But a landscape architect from the Institute for Greenery Planning and Garden Architecture at the University of Hannover in Germany said he did not agree an underground library "would damage the main threshold between the house and the gardens, the North Vista, as well as the adjacent Copse and Pool terrace. I also don't expect any problems for restoring the North Vista after the construction work has been finished."

Those concerns, however, were beyond the expertise of the advisory neighborhood commission, said commissioner Art Schultz. He claimed the only matters the commission could realistically be concerned about are the safety and comfort of the neighborhood during construction.

"You should assess the damage to Dumbarton Oaks," said local resident Jackie Kelly, who added that she was "dumbfounded" that the commission could make such a bad decision without looking at alternative sites for the library.