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April 15, 2003

Mr. Geoff Griffis, Chair
Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 Fourth Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20001

Dear Chairman Griffis:

Re: BZA Case 16974 - Tudor Place

The Citizens Association of Georgetown believes that a single transparent and easily understood standard should govern the operation of all the Great Houses of Georgetown and should protect against the collective impact of the Great Houses and other nonprofit operations. We support the continuing operation of programs at Tudor House, and we support the application for a special exception for this Great House – with specific provisos.

The present order governing operation of Tudor Place includes conditions intended to minimize the impact on the residential neighborhood in which it is located. This applies in part to the "limited number of special events" which the Board in its prior order deemed not to be commercial. However, the order establishes absolutely no limits on certain classes of these events, to wit:

- Evening events for up to 75 persons are completely unlimited in number and require no special considerations for neighbors; these events need have no connection with the purposes of Tudor Place.

- Large evening events of under 200 persons are subject to no limitation; these events, too, need have no connection with the purposes of Tudor Place.

- Even the modest limit on larger events of up to 500 persons (which usually occur in the months of milder weather) would permit these to occur on three out of four weekends a month for three months in a row; again, these need have no connection with the purposes of Tudor Place.

The new application seeks to extend all of these privileges and extend some of the uses to the Dower House as well.

CAG joins many Tudor Place supporters in readily acknowledging what a special place it is, what its gardens contribute to the atmosphere of the residents and visitors (human and otherwise). We also appreciate the welcome Tudor and the other Great Houses give to community events that benefit greater Georgetown.

CAG is aware of and grateful to the Executive Director of Tudor Place for her repeated statements about how few such events she intends to have occur at Tudor Place. However, CAG believes the place for such restrictions is in the BZA's order governing the extension of the special exception.

BZA
Case No. 16974
Exhibit No. 63

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 16974
EXHIBIT NO. 63

We bring to the BZA's attention our concern that the residents of this portion of Georgetown are impacted by the collective functions of the Great Houses. If extended to other Great Houses, for example, the standard in the current order – 10 very large evening events, permissible thrice monthly – would make for a very different quality of life in Georgetown. Consider three big June weddings at Tudor, at Evermay, at Dumbarton House, at Dumbarton Oaks, and at Halcyon House. Consider unlimited 200-person events occurring at several Great Houses simultaneously, and the collective burden this would place on the community.*

There is simply no capacity to comply with the Board's conditions were this pace of operation to occur. There is no longer designated tour-bus parking on K Street; no replacement is currently available. The parking areas for private vehicles cannot support valet parking for multiple events.

For this reason, CAG asks the Board to establish specific standards for events unrelated to Tudor Place programs, about which the Board and the community and Tudor will reach agreement:

- Lower absolute numbers for the intense use (up to 500 persons) to perhaps four each year, no more than one in any month

- Limits on the number of large events for up to 200 persons to perhaps four each year, no more than one in any month

- Limits on the number of evening events for up to 75 persons (presently unlimited and without mitigating provisions); perhaps this number should be divided between smaller events for up to 30 persons, which might remain unlimited, and events for 30 to 75 persons, which would be limited to two in any month.

Further, the Board should address the absence of designated tour-bus parking areas.

We believe amendments such as those proposed above will work to assure that the collective impact of the several Great Houses does not overwhelm the residential community.

Sincerely,

Barbara Zartman

Barbara Zartman, Chair
Historic Preservation, Planning, and Zoning Committee

* We are aware that Evermay has at this point withdrawn its special exception application, and that Dumbarton Oaks has voluntarily stopped hosting wedding receptions at this time.