

Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ)

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Sent: Friday, September 13, 2024 4:51 PM
To: DCOZ - BZA Submissions (DCOZ)
Cc: Reid, Robert (DCOZ)
Subject: Opposition to BZA #41132

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9/13/14

Board of Zoning Adjustment
441 4th Street NW, Suite 200S
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Opposition to BZA 41132 - office use for 3100 R Street NW by Harvard University

Dear Members of the Board,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the application to use the residential rowhouse property at 3100 R Street NW owned by Harvard University, as office space. As a 5th-generation Georgetownner and a former two-term ANC 2E07 Commissioner, I have always been deeply invested in the well-being and integrity of our community. My concern about this project stems from my commitment to preserving the historic residential character of Georgetown and ensuring that all developments in our neighborhood serve the interests of its residents.

During my time as ANC Commissioner, I observed that Dumbarton Oaks, under the auspices of Harvard University, has consistently failed to engage meaningfully with the local Georgetown community. Unlike other local institutions such as Tudor Place, Dumbarton House, Oak Hill, and Mt. Zion, which actively engages proactively and contributes to the community, Dumbarton Oaks has remained largely insular. They do not open their campus for Georgetown community events, do not proactively invite or engage with immediate Georgetown residents, and do not contribute to the social or cultural fabric of our neighborhood.

A review of Dumbarton Oaks' website reveals that the individuals they host, whether scholars, lecturers, or students, are predominantly from out of the area or state, with little to no relationship to the local community. Their directors rotate every few years, and it is challenging to find any programs they offer for DC public schools or the Boys and Girls Club that promote learning within the District. While they do open their gardens to the public, the attendees are primarily from outside Georgetown and the District, therefore increasing car and bus traffic for its immediate 2-3 block radius several months throughout the year, and the benefit to our neighborhood and the District as a whole remains questionable.

Additionally, I am deeply troubled by the financial aspect of this proposal. According to their 2023 financial statements, Dumbarton Oaks/Trustees for Harvard University has \$1.4 billion in assets, \$65 million in revenue, and spent \$45 million in 2023. Yet, they claim at the July 29 community meeting they are too financially constrained to afford the renovation of this home. This application, if approved, would allow them to stop paying taxes for this property. This is astonishing, given that their budget for the long term renovation project is almost \$10 million for this attached row house at 3100 R, NW.. This long term project is to house temporary scholars and lecturers when they visit to present on its main campus. It is difficult to reconcile their financial statements with their claims of financial hardship.

If the Board of Zoning Adjustment approves this application, it sets a concerning precedent for Georgetown and the District as a whole. Many homes in our residential area are under 10,000 square feet, and the property at 3100 R Street is just over 8,000 square feet. Approval of this project would open the door for wealthy entities to purchase residential townhouses, only to convert them into office spaces through the use of legal maneuvers. This would fundamentally alter the character of our neighborhood, which is home to a diverse mix of residents, including those in small townhomes, condos, and apartments.

Finally, I want to highlight the recent impact of Dumbarton Oaks/Harvard University's activities on the community. If you have driven down the 3200 block of S Street NW in recent months, you would have noticed the trucks, cars, and traffic congestion caused by their staff. This is a clear indication of the growing footprint of Harvard University in Georgetown, and it underscores the need for the Board to scrutinize their real estate acquisitions more closely. Until Harvard University is required to create a comprehensive Traffic Demand Management plan for all their buildings, it would be irresponsible to grant them further zoning approvals..

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.21143
EXHIBIT NO.42

In conclusion, I urge the Board of Zoning Adjustment to deny BZA application 41132 for 3100 R Street NW. The potential harm to our community far outweighs any benefits that the Trustees for Harvard University claims this project would bring. Georgetown is a historic residential neighborhood, and it must remain so for the benefit of its residents.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Monica Roaché
Former ANC 2E07 Commissioner
Lifelong Georgetown Resident