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June 16, 2008

Ms. Sonya Malunda  
Office of Community Affairs  
Administration Building, Suite 605  
5801 So. Ellis Ave  
Chicago, IL 60637

Dear Ms. Malunda:

I am a University of Chicago student and a gardener at the 61<sup>st</sup> and Dorchester Community Garden. I recently learned that the garden is slated to be developed as the new site of the Chicago Theological Seminary. The garden is well-established in the community and strongly contributes to the culture of environmentalism, activism and entrepreneurialism that characterizes that area – evidenced by the Experimental Station, the recently established Farmers' Market, and other nearby urban gardens and youth programs. To destroy it would be injurious to the community and to the University's image within it. I am writing to ask you to reconsider this move.

I am a recent graduate of the College and am currently enrolled in the Urban Teachers' Education Program, a joint Masters degree and certification program of the Graham School. This year, I worked at an elementary school that is adjacent to the garden. Influenced by my study of John Dewey and experiential education, I incorporated the garden into my tutoring work and brought groups of students there. During the brief spring we spent there, the garden was an extraordinarily valuable resource in that it gave students an alternative environment to the classroom that was safe, pleasant, and richly educative. Access to safe outdoor green spaces is very constrained for young people in Woodlawn, yet the garden made it possible for some students to see themselves as part of a natural ecosystem—an experience urban students are typically denied, and one which is incredibly important given the current environmental crisis.

The garden has a unique function as a space that enjoyed by people from Hyde Park, the University, as well as residents of Woodlawn, both long-standing and recent. With the University's rapport in Woodlawn deteriorating due to its intrusive and unpopular South-Side expansion, the garden is one of few sites in which these groups convene and build positive relationships. Additionally, both the garden and the new Farmers Market at this site seek to address the food desert problem in Woodlawn. This is a real opportunity for the University to improve its image in the community.

The garden is an invaluable asset to a community facing a challenging set of circumstances. It should not be perceived by University developers as a "vacant" and available space for development, but as a well-established and influential community institution. As a graduate and now graduate student of the University, an educator and advocate for Woodlawn youth, to see such a space squandered would be demoralizing for my work as an activist and representative of the University. To destroy it would be unwise and socially irresponsible. I hope you will reconsider this move, or at least be willing to discuss possible ways to preserve some of the effort our community has invested in the garden.

Sincerely,

Shulamit Bien  
B.A. 2008  
Expected M.A.T August 2009