



Historic tennis clubhouse at country club torn down

Demolition comes hours after meeting with Roland Park Civic League

By Larry Perl

Posted 12/09/08

The Baltimore County Club razed its historic, but abandoned former tennis clubhouse in Roland Park on Dec. 9, without notice to a community already angry over the club's decision to sell 17 acres of its green space for development as a retirement community.

The demolition came hours after a meeting between representatives of the club and the Roland Park Civic League to discuss the club's plan to sell 17 acres to the Keswick Multi-Care Center.

The league opposes the sale and has asked club officials to sell the land to the league instead, so the league can preserve it from development. The league reiterated at the meeting Tuesday that it wants to buy the land, league President Phillip Spevak said.

Spevak said club officials made no mention at the meeting of their plan to tear down the clubhouse later in the day.

"We thought we had a constructive meeting," Spevak said, adding that club officials requested the meeting in light of Mayor Sheila Dixon's call last week for the two sides to have a continued dialogue about the land.

"They said nothing about following up the meeting with a wrecking ball," Spevak said. "I think it's extremely sad."

The demolition fueled suspicion that the club has no intention of negotiating with the league.

"It's hard not to think that they're sending us a message," said Hillside Road resident Mary Page Michel, who has lived for 13 years in a house overlooking the club land and the clubhouse. "I suspect that the next thing is, they won't let us sled there."

Michael Stott, the country club's general manager and chief operating officer, insisted the demolition had nothing to do with plans to sell the land to Keswick.

Stott said razing the building was the final step in relocating the longtime club tennis program from Roland Park to the club's main campus, Five Farms, in Baltimore County. That happened last year and the club hadn't used the old clubhouse and tennis courts since June 2007, he said.

The structure was also dilapidated and the locker room ceiling had recently collapsed, he said, adding that the club's insurance company had deemed the building unsafe and recommended that it be torn down.

"We've had a permit to do it for a couple of months," Stott said.

The tennis program in Roland Park dates at last to 1904, when the club hosted qualifying matches for Davis Cup hopefuls. The grass courts were then the only ones south of the Mason-Dixon line and were considered among the finest in the country, Michel said, quoting from the book "Baltimore Country Club: One Hundred Years," which was published in 1998 by the club.

The club's early tennis greats included Charles Garland, who won the men's doubles at Wimbledon in 1920, according to the book, Michel said.

In 1969, the club held its first and last professional tennis championship at Roland Park, Michel said. Ten of the world's greatest players participated. Pancho Gonzalez defeated Roy Emerson but went on to lose to Rod Laver. Billie Jean King lost to Rosemary Cals.

All that history makes the loss of the old clubhouse especially sad to residents.

"The building has historical significance," Spevak said.

user comments (0)