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[Rumble in Roland Park, Part 3](#)



Our latest report on the ongoing saga of Keswick Multi-Care's proposal to build a continuing care retirement community (CCRC) on green space owned by the Baltimore Country Club in Roland Park continues today with an interview with Keswick CEO Libby Bowerman (pictured standing next to the space in question).

We initially [reported](#) on the meeting, two weeks ago today, at Roland Park Elementary School, where Keswick presented its plan and faced strong opposition from the Roland Park Civic League, which hosted the meeting, and its hundreds of supporters in attendance. Soon thereafter, we posted an [interview](#) with Civic League president Phil Spevak.

In today's installment, Ms. Bowerman says she considers the Civic League meeting a total failure in terms of dialogue, and suggests the due process demanded by the Mayor and city government to consider the Keswick proposal has not yet begun. She says that despite promises from Councilwomen Sharon Green Middleton and Mary Pat Clarke not to introduce a Planned Unit Development to the Council—as would be required for development to move forward—other Council members have suggested they would introduce it. Further, she says she's heard from many members of the community who support the Keswick plan and that at least one neighborhood association has invited the Keswick to present it under less hostile conditions. The

plan, she insists, is far from dead.

BM: What was your reaction to the Roland Park Civic League-sponsored meeting?

LB: My initial reaction was, as I said at the meeting, real disappointment that there wasn't any attempt at dialogue. There were dueling Powerpoint presentations. We presented our Powerpoint, there was no time for discussion after that, no time for questions and answers after that, which is the ideal time, if anybody had any questions, to ask them. Then, the Civic League presented their presentation. We understood the meeting was about our—was mainly about us. We didn't realize that the meeting was going to be predominantly about what the Civic League wanted to present.

BM: What are your thoughts going forward? What are the next steps?

LB: Well, as I said that evening and as I still fully believe, the Mayor and city officials are supporting us to go through a due process, and that due process is not dueling Powerpoints or eye candy, as I think one of the land committee members said. It really is sitting down at a table or sitting in a large hall—however many, it doesn't matter—and talking about the real details of how we go forward and work together, both with the Civic League, the full Roland Park neighborhood, and more importantly than that, with the city of Baltimore, because this is really a city project.

BM: Among the people at the meeting, the overwhelming sentiment seemed to be that they weren't interested in this plan. Does that make you think twice about the plan or consider any changes?

LB: I'm still anticipating that we will go through a very long and detailed process. I don't think that's begun yet. I still—going back to the dueling Powerpoints—don't think that we have had a real open exchange process yet and until that happens, I'm very optimistic because that's what we need to have happen, that's what the city is expecting, that's what the Mayor actually requested of both Keswick and the Civic League, that we sit down and talk about the project, not that we present Powerpoints. In my mind, that hasn't happened yet.

BM: What did you think about the message, which Dr. Spevak read, from the mayor's representative, who attended the meeting but had to leave early, saying it was clear to him that what needed to take place for due process had taken place? Did you feel like that was not an accurate reflection of what the mayor was thinking?

LB: It's not an accurate reflection from my conversations with the Mayor, no, because she has been very succinct in stating that discussions needed to take place about the merits of the project. And that didn't happen.

BM: It seemed to me that people did listen to the Keswick presentation, but just dismissed it, out of hand. They weren't interested so much in the details—this was a proposal that people were not willing to consider. What details would you like people to consider that weren't considered that night?

LB: They have yet to tell us anything that they would like to have. Their whole position is that nothing will work on this land. They want nothing.

BM: They want a park.

LB: Well, I don't *know* that they want a park. I'm sure the Baltimore City government would be thrilled to put a city park and a city public swimming pool on that property, because it would serve a lot of people in that part of the city and there's not a public park or a public swimming pool, but I don't know that that's what they want. They just say they don't want anything.

BM: It seemed to me pretty clear that they were saying they want to purchase the land themselves and turn it into a public-use park. That's what I heard at the meeting. You had a different impression?

LB: I did not hear the public park part. That may be what they said. Yes, they did want to purchase the property, I did hear them say that. Certainly we have a legally-binding contract to purchase the property. It is private property. We have two and a half years, or longer if we need it, in order to fill the contingency of the contract. And, again, I still anticipate that one of these

days, we're going to start this due process. We are trying to follow the request made to us of city government and particularly the Mayor.

BM: What do you think the steps would be of that due process?

LB: First of all, it would require that the Civic League begin to share with us some ideas that they might have that we could consider—modifications, changes to, or uses of some of the property. One of the things about a Planned Unit Development (PUD) is that it gives a great deal of protection to property for a very long time, if not for the entire existence of the property, so to speak. And so the neighborhood and the Civic League have a tremendous opportunity to really get some concessions from us around this property and around this use that will be written right into legislation in the PUD. I'm amazed that they're not—I'm really quite amazed, in fact—that they're not actually recognizing that and taking advantage of that.

BM: I think the Civic League is under the impression that, hearing from Councilwoman Sharon Green Middleton and others on the Council, who have said that they will not present a PUD for consideration by the Council, that they don't need to consider alternatives within the plan. That as long as that PUD is not presented, then this plan cannot go forward at all. Is that an accurate way of thinking about it?

LB: The PUD does have to be introduced by legislation, that is correct. And it is correct that Councilwoman Middleton and, I believe, Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke have said they will not introduce the PUD, however, our own interviews and discussions with other members of the City Council show that there is not that tremendous support against this project. And so, therefore, we are confident that, in time, we will prevail with getting the PUD legislation introduced.

BM: Does it have any bearing that the two Councilwomen who represent this area [Middleton and Clarke] are so strong in their opposition? Councilwoman Middleton said that had received something like 515 emails opposed to the plan and 19 supporting it.

LB: Well, unfortunately, all of the people who have spoken to me haven't sent 500 emails to any Councilwoman or Councilman, however I have gotten overwhelming positive support and response to the project. There are probably equally as many people who have expressed excitement, enthusiasm, and support of the project, as from the Civic League. For example, the Baltimore Country Club members, 90 percent of those voted to approve the sale of this property, based on the project, not just the sale. And several hundred of those live in Roland Park. Although perhaps they've been the more silent majority, they have made themselves known to Keswick.

BM: Why do you think they've been more silent?

LB: I think they're waiting for us to get into a due process that provides them the opportunity to speak in a neutral forum, or in a more balanced forum than perhaps the real emotional one of the Civic League meetings. And, as you know, there were people at that meeting who did come forward and speak in favor of the project, that's been true in every meeting that we've been to. So it's not that this project is without support.

BM: What kind of forum do you think would be more neutral?

LB: I think a forum that could be sponsored by some senior groups, could be sponsored by some church, perhaps sponsored by our hospital association, our [continuing care retirement community] (CCRC) groups—sponsors that are not the Civic League and are also not Keswick, but that would present an opportunity for us to really talk about the issues. Also, when you talk about a more neutral setting, I think some place that's maybe more in the city and not that's either in Keswick's neighborhood or Roland Park's neighborhood, some other place where we can have an open discussion.

BM: You've mentioned several times taking the discussion more city-wide. Do you think you'd find more support taking the project city-wide?

LB: Any kind of project that is going to provide housing for seniors—and we certainly know, in today's economic world, that's going to be an even bigger issue than we had imagined, with baby boomers aging—any kind of project like this located anywhere, but most especially in Baltimore City, is really going to draw from, not only the state of Maryland, but also probably

from the east coast region. I've worked in a CCRC before. Many people move there to be close to their children, that would be true of this CCRC as well. Yes, it will draw from the immediate neighborhood, yes it will draw from around the city, but it's not unlike the Lyric or one of the symphony halls because people come there from all over the state and even as visitors. And that would be the same thing as a CCRC. That makes it a very unique kind of program. It attracts not just locally, but also from a broader base.

BM: One of the things that people at the meeting seemed to have the most trouble with was the square footage of development, comparing it to the Legg Mason tower or Mondawmin Mall. What do you say to explain that?

LB: It's difficult to visualize three-dimensionally what a structure such as your home, my home really looks like if it has three stories and so many square feet, it's difficult to visualize that kind of a structure versus a commercial one. What we're proposing is not remotely commercial, it's very residential. That's comparing apples and oranges in my mind. It's hard to compare a very institutional mall with eight houses or ten houses or buildings that have multiple occupancy, like a very small condominium-type structure that has, say, three or four residents in one building. That's what we're talking about. We're not talking about a high-rise or a Mondawmin Mall.

BM: So for now, what's next? In a holding pattern?

LB: I'm never in a holding pattern because that doesn't exactly describe my personality or the way I do my job. We currently are looking at a number of opportunities to talk about the project—I never stop talking about it any place that I am—there are a number of opportunities that are making their presence known to us now. I've had a direct contact from another neighborhood association who was very upset about the process and has offered to allow us to come and present our project because they would like to talk about supporting it. We still need to get into the due process with the city officials and with the neighborhoods.

Posted at 11:05 am

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