

BREAKING NEWS: Keswick scales back retirement center

But Roland Park Civic League questions timing of revisions

By Adam Bednar

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Two weeks before a city-imposed negotiation deadline, Keswick Multi-Care Center has offered to scale back its planned retirement and continuing care facility on 17 acres of Baltimore Country Club land in Roland Park.

But the timing of the revision so close to the deadline is already causing a stink.

The Roland Park Civic League announced Keswick's revised plan this week but quickly complained that the planned changes don't give the community enough time to study them and respond before a March 15 deadline set by Baltimore Mayor Sheila Dixon.

The mayor late last year asked both sides to continue negotiating and try to come to a compromise by March 15.

"That Keswick took three months to provide their plan until the mayor's deadline is but two weeks away is either tardiness, or a deliberate attempt to shorten the time for a community review," league President Phil Spevak said in a March 4 letter to the community.

The new plans would reduce by 59 the number of people the proposed facility would serve. Independent living spaces would drop from 225 units to 200 and assisted living spaces would fall from 58 beds to 40 beds, while slots for nursing care would decline from 40 beds to 24 beds.

The number of underground parking spaces would drop from 403 to 322.

The largest visual change in the conceptual plans is the removal of four independent living buildings on the south side of the project along Hillside Road, east of Falls Road.

The plans are posted on the Civic League's Web site, www.rolandpark.org.

According to the site, the area to be developed would be reduced by about 98,000 square feet, or 16 percent.

Despite the revisions, Keswick still must obtain a Planned Unit Development to build the continuing care complex because current zoning does not allow for such a facility.

It's unlikely that Keswick would be granted a PUD unless the civic league dropped its objection to the plans. The PUD must be approved by the Baltimore City Council. But, Councilwoman Sharon Greene Middleton, who represents the area, has stated publicly that she opposes a PUD.

City Council President Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, who formerly represented the area, also is on record as opposing a PUD.

Roland Parkers have opposed the development since the country club announced its plans to sell 17 of its 32 acres in Roland Park to Keswick for a reported \$12.5 million. The deal is contingent upon approval of the PUD.

The civic league has been trying to purchase the entire parcel of undeveloped green space for several years in order to preserve it from development, and has offered the country club more than \$4 million.

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