



Food fight?

Old covenant could block Wyndhurst cafe

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Old covenant stands in way of Wyndhurst cafe

If this was 1976, a battle with surrounding neighborhoods would be brewing over a planned gourmet coffee shop and cafe in the Wyndhurst Station Shopping Center.

Times have changed, but a 33-year-old covenant banning restaurants there hasn't. That's why the center's owner, Michael Weinfeld of Kittredge Properties, is proceeding cautiously with his plan.

Weinfeld is asking the three area community associations that negotiated the restrictive agreement with a previous owner to let him amend it. The three are the Wyndhurst Improvement Association, the Roland Park Civic League and the Blythewood Association.

"I have no idea what the opposition would be at this point," Weinfeld said. But he said he has heard that some area residents are unhappy about the idea.

Weinfeld was scheduled to meet with the Wyndhurst Improvement Association on May 13. Its president, Nick Fessenden, and Blythewood's president, Tom Frazier, could not be reached for comment.

The Roland Park Civic League has not taken a position yet.

"We're in the information-gathering stage," President Phil Spevak said.

Wyndhurst Station, at Wyndhurst Avenue and Lawndale Road, was the old Notre Dame station on the Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad's Baltimore-to-York, Pa. line. Now, the center offers a mix of businesses, including boutiques, real estate offices, the florist Mille Fleurs and the barber shop Shear Classic -- but no restaurants. The 1976 agreement between the center's then-owner, the Hercules Investment Co., and the three neighborhood associations disallowed "an unreasonable degree (of) noises, odors, traffic congestion, litter, and other offensive or noxious conditions which will in any way detrimentally affect the quality of life" of residents in the area.

And the document, which is posted on the Roland Park Civic League's Web site, www.rolandpark.org, stated that the center wouldn't be used or leased by "a food store, restaurant, delicatessen or similar use."

Weinfeld said the deal was made in exchange for the neighborhoods' blessing to redevelop the center.

"It was the pre-Starbucks generation. I'm sure they didn't want a greasy spoon," he said.

According to Weinfeld and the civic league, the center has changed hands twice since then. Kittredge is co-owned by Weinfeld and his wife, Sonya. They bought it in November of 2007.

The previous tenant of the space where Weinfeld wants to open his as yet unnamed cafe was also a food store of sorts, Executive Sweet, a candy and gift shop.

Weinfeld, a Ruxton resident who grew up in Homeland and swam in the Roland Park Pool, said he was getting his hair cut at Shear Classic when he thought of buying the shopping center. He said Kittredge focuses on acquiring community properties and also owns Ruxton Station, next to the popular Graul's Market.

He said he knew about the covenant when he purchased Wyndhurst Station and that the agreement might present a problem in opening an eatery.

But he said he also knew that many in the community wanted a restaurant.

"We have received constant feedback from both tenants and customers at the center that they wanted

some kind of food there," he said.

He envisions leasing the 1,000-square-foot former Executive Sweet space to an operator who would run a gourmet coffee shop and cafe selling specialty coffees and breakfast items such as muffins, bagels and croissants.

At lunch, it would serve smoothies, ice cream, panini sandwiches and salads.

"We wouldn't have a commercial kitchen," Weinfeld said.

He hopes to attract residents and the area retail and office community, as well as swimmers at the Roland Park Pool, where he said he spent many a summer day in his youth.

He doesn't want to start a fight with north Baltimore.

"We view this as something we want to do as an amenity for the neighborhoods," he said.

"If there is opposition from the neighborhoods, we will not proceed."

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