

Talk of the town, none of it good

Roland Park residents protest sale of land to Keswick for retirement center

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Many kids grow up with stuffed animals on their beds. Mary Page Michel's children grew up sleeping with tennis balls.

She said they would often grab tennis balls that were knocked out of the Baltimore Country Club's tennis courts across the street from their home on Hillside Road, and bring the tennis balls to bed.

The courts could soon be ripped up to make room for a retirement community.

The club, which now plays tennis at its Five Farms complex in Baltimore County, has agreed to sell 17 of its 30 acres in Roland Park to Hampden-based Keswick Multi-Care Center, which wants to build a 323-bed retirement center on the site.

The thought of all that land being developed infuriates Roland Park residents and has mobilized the community to action. Many residents attended impromptu meetings at neighbors' houses, including Michel's, on June 23, to plot strategies to fight what would be the biggest development in the area in decades. (See Hudson's Corner, Page 8).

The Roland Park Civic League, although taking no official position yet, posted several pages about the proposal on its Web site, www.rolandpark.org, including a page where people can post letters about the plan, plus links to contact city and state officials and to read news articles about the proposal in the Baltimore Messenger and The Sun.

"I get the feeling there is a volcano erupting in the community," Roland Park Civic League President Phil Spevak said.

About 50 people gathered in Michel's home Monday evening.

"It'll really change the character of the neighborhood," she said. "We'd have a city within the city."

Keswick plans 225 slots for independent living, 40 for assisted living, 18 for memory support and 40 for nursing care. Plans also include a 403-space, underground garage.

The planned development would not impact Keswick's nursing home on West 40th Street.

The retirement community would be bordered by Falls Road on the west, Hillside Road on the south and Harvest Road on the north.

Ghislaine Godenne, who has lived in her Edgevale Road home for 40 years, said she was "horrified."

She said the development would bring too much noise and traffic to the community, as well as diminish the beauty of nearby houses.

Peter Grier, who lives on Harvest Road, said he doesn't want to lose more green space in the area.

"There's not any parks in Roland Park if you take this away," Grier said. "If you take this away, it's Roland Parkless."

The Civic League is scheduled to meet Tuesday, July, 1 at 7 p.m. at St. David's Church, and the league's board is expected to vote later that week on taking a formal position.

Construction of the retirement community is far from certain.

The sale must be approved by a two-thirds majority of the country club's membership at its meeting July 15. And the membership has nixed sales in the past, such as a proposal by Friends School to buy some of

the land and turn it into athletic fields.

The land is zoned for residential use only, and has Planned Unit Development status that dictates the type of development allowed.

The Baltimore City Council would have to approve an amendment to the PUD.

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