



Group against country club land sale goes postal

Some Roland Park residents target voters of sale through mailings

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Posted 7/09/08

An anonymous group of Roland Park residents is trying to convince Baltimore Country Club members to vote against the sale of 17 acres of club land by employing a direct-mailing campaign.

The group has sent letters to 1,300 of the club's 1,553 members, who will vote on the controversial sale that must be approved by two-thirds of the club's membership to become official.

Club members have until Tuesday, July 15, to vote.

The club's board announced that it had signed a contract June 12 to sell the land to the Keswick Multi-Care Center for \$12.5 million.

Keswick intends to build a retirement community on the site to house more than 300 residents with an underground garage with parking for 400 cars.

The land was the site of the country club's tennis courts until its Five Farms facility in Lutherville expanded last summer, adding 10 courts and a clubhouse. About the same time, the Falls Road courts closed, fanning speculation about a sale.

In the letter to club members, dated July 4, residents ask the members to vote against the sale to maintain the land's historic role as green space in the community.

"Like you, we share responsibility for this land. Just as BCC has magnanimously maintained and afforded for community use for the past 110 years, Roland Park has fiercely defended the original historic neighborhood that surrounds it," the letter read.

It also says that a letter to club members, dated June 12, "stated that your Board of Governors interviewed other interested prospective purchasers, including developers and neighboring schools. Why was Roland Park Civic League left out?"

The letter criticizes local newspapers and television stations for not providing accurate coverage of the neighborhood's reasons for wanting to preserve the land.

"The TV stations and the newspapers make it sound like we are telling you what to do with your land or that we just want to keep the sledding hill, but that is not the case," the letter says.

Phil Spevak, president of the Roland Park Civic League, said his organization is not involved with the campaign. The letter is signed only, "Members of the Roland Park Community."

Yet there are plenty of people dedicated to stopping the sale, such as the estimated 400 who attended a Roland Park Civic League meeting July 1 that addressed the sale with representatives of Keswick and the country club.

The sale has sparked protests by residents who repeatedly have picketed near the Falls Road site. Protesters also made their presence felt in the community's Fourth of July parade.

The sale of the land to Keswick especially has angered Roland Park residents, who offered more than \$4 million for the tract through the neighborhood's nonprofit foundation three times in the past decade, according to David Tufaro, former chairman of the Roland Park Foundation.

Country club officials never responded to the neighborhood's offer for the property, Tufaro said.

At the July 1 meeting, country club representative Timothy Chriss said the club needs the sale to pay for clubhouse renovations.

Keswick's CEO, Libby Bowerman, has also told Roland Park residents that the development would be sensitive to the neighborhood's needs and would preserve part of the land as green space.

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