

Country club ratifies plans to sell land parcel

Neighborhood leaders vow to keep protesting Keswick deal

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Positions hardened as Baltimore Country Club members ratified the sale of 17 acres of green space to Keswick Multi-Care Center. Community leaders and a state delegate vowed to continue their month-old fight to stop Keswick from developing a 323-bed retirement community and an underground parking garage on the site.

District 41 Del. Sandy Rosenberg said he would intensify efforts to pass a bill in the General Assembly to preserve the land as open space.

Phil Spevak, president of the Roland Park Civic League, posted a letter on the league Web site, www.rolandpark.org, after the vote was announced, calling it "disappointing" but expected.

"This vote is just the first step in a long process, since the land is zoned low-density residential and the proposed facility is incompatible with the single-family nature of our community," the letter states.

Ninety percent of the country club's membership voted for the sale, General Manager Michael Stott said July 15. A two-thirds majority was required under club rules.

Most members live in Baltimore County, home of the club's main complex, Five Farms.

"We received an overwhelming show of support for Keswick and the proposal it put forth to our membership," said John Daue, president of the club. "We feel Keswick will be an excellent steward of the land, will add valuable and needed services to Baltimore City and will be a wonderful neighbor in the Roland Park community."

Keswick Chief Executive Officer Libby Bowerman said the elder care facility is "very excited" about the club's vote to sell the land. The planned retirement community would be a major expansion for Keswick, which currently provides adult day care, assisted living, long-term care and rehabilitation services at 700 W. 40th St.

But, like Spevak, she stressed that the vote was just the first step in a long process, which she said will involve meetings with the Roland Park Civic League and city officials.

"The next step will be much longer than a month," Bowerman said.

The sale of the land, once home to the country club's tennis courts, has been unpopular with Roland Park residents, some of whom are country club members.

Throughout the neighborhood, lawn signs say, "Keswick NO!" and "Save the Park in Roland Park." At a meeting July 1 at St. David's Church, hundreds of people crammed into and outside of the church to express their disapproval of the sale.

But once city planners, community leaders and elected officials sit down with Keswick officials, "they will see this is a very exciting plan," Bowerman said. She said she thinks elected city and state officials will be open to letting the process play out.

Sixth District City Councilwoman Sharon Middleton, who represents the area around the property, could not be reached for comment. Middleton announced during Roland Park's 4th of July Family Parade that she would oppose the sale of the land, which is contingent on the City Council's and Mayor Sheila Dixon's approval of rezoning the 17 acres.

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