

FROM
Baltimore
MESSENGER

Dixon gets earful about sale of country club land

Roland Park residents complain about Keswick plan to build retirement center

By Adam Bednar

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Controversy over the planned sale of 17 acres of Baltimore Country Club land to the Keswick Multi-Care Center for development as a retirement community dominated the "neighborhood conversation" that Mayor Sheila Dixon and her cabinet held Aug. 12 at Loyola College.

Dixon was there to hear about issues affecting north Baltimore, but most of the 275 people who attended the meeting were Roland Park residents opposed to development of the green space.

The mayor and City Council must agree to change the zoning of the property or the terms of a Planned Unit Development that restricts the density of development there. The sale of the land to Keswick for \$12.5 million is contingent upon city approval.

However, the mayor and cabinet members remained neutral. Doug McCoach, director of the Baltimore Planning Department, said city officials only recently became aware of the proposal.

Dixon said that even if Keswick builds the retirement community with 323 beds and 400 parking spaces, green space would have to be protected on the property.

"I really look forward to seeing a final resolution," Dixon said, but she stopped short of opposing Keswick's plans.

Keswick did have supporters at the meeting.

Mark Erickson, a Roland Park resident, told Dixon there is a need for senior housing in the area.

"I believe we need additional senior housing," he said.

The crowd jeered when Erickson told the mayor that he had explained to his son that their neighbors "like trees more than old people."

Three others speaking on behalf of the plan included Cross Keys resident Thomas Barland, whose wife has complications from diabetes and is staying at Keswick. He told the mayor it was important to him to be able to put his wife in a local care facility.

"Sooner or later, one of you is going to have to make a decision" about where to put a loved one who needs nursing care, Barland said.

But supporters walked into a lion's den.

Before the meeting, Roland Park residents handed out white T-shirts that said, "Save the Park in Roland Park" on the front and pictures of trees on the back.

Councilwoman Sharon Greene Middleton, who represents Roland Park, was cheered as she walked into the meeting at Loyola's Ryan White Student Center wearing one of the shirts.

After the meeting, residents said they were happy with the meeting and the responses of Dixon and her cabinet members.

"I think they are staying open-minded, and I'm hopeful about that," said Carole Schreck, a Roland Park resident.

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