

Trying to park 'between rock and a hard place'

Rolden residents oppose senior living center's parking plan

By Larry Perl
 lperl@patuxent.com

Posted 11/11/09



(Enlarge) Roland Park Place wants to demolish this vacant church in the 4000 block of Roland Avenue and build a 30-space parking lot. But the Rolden Community Association is opposed, and the Roland Park Civic League doesn't want parking to the neighborhood's detriment. (File photo /2009)

The Rolden Community Association has rejected Roland Park Place's revised plans to create 42 parking spaces in the 4000 block of Roland Avenue.

The Roland Park Civic League doesn't seem too receptive to the plan, either.

Roland Park Place, a longtime senior living community on West 40th Street across from the Rotunda mall, made a presentation to the civic league Nov. 5, seeking its blessing for a plan to add a 30-space parking lot by demolishing a church in the block, and to add 12 more spaces by tearing down two garages behind a house in the same block.

Roland Park Place owns the church and house. Both are vacant.

Roland Park Place also proposes to build 32 spaces on the west side of its campus. That would add a total of 74 spaces for the

seniors' complex, which would alleviate a serious parking crunch, according to President Teresa Snyder.

The Baltimore City Council must amend Roland Park Place's Planned Unit Development in order to build the additional parking on Roland Avenue.

Rolden, a small but assertive community in the 4000-4001 blocks of Roland Avenue, opposes a PUD amendment. The Rolden Community Association says building parking would wreak havoc on a street of row houses, stores and the Elmhurst Nursery School.

"We feel that to do so would be to poke a hole in the neighborhood," said Anne-Elizabeth Murdy, president of the Rolden Community Association, in her comments to the league.

Snyder told the civic league that Roland Park Place has a shortage of parking for its residents, staff and visitors, and currently rents 55 spaces just for employees at the Rotunda and on Elm Street, alongside the mall, during the day.

Employees are encouraged to ride MTA buses to work and Roland Park Place has even considered having a Zipcar rental center on campus, Roland Park Place officials said.

They also said they considered underground parking, but it would cost as much as \$4 million, compared to \$1 million for the current plan.

Zurich American Insurance Co., which recently vacated its office building next to the Rotunda, is willing to rent spaces there, but only until a new owner or tenant is found, according to Baltimore City Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke, who represents the area.

And Hekemian & Co., whose plans to redevelop the mall have stalled in the recession, is renting spaces to Roland Park Place on a month-to-month basis, Snyder said.

Snyder cited a "compelling need for a long-term solution" to the parking crisis, which she said has caused Roland Park Place to cancel some programs for seniors.

Councilwoman Clarke, who was in the audience, would have to introduce any legislation to amend the PUD, said William Miller, a former executive director of the Greater Homewood Community Association, and now a consultant for Roland Park Place.

Clarke would have to be convinced to move forward with the legislation, meaning a compromise must be reached with Rolden, Miller said after the meeting.

Many seniors who live at Roland Park Place came to the league meeting in a show of support for the plan.

Kathleen Molz, who is in her 80s and chairs the Roland Park Place Residents Association, accused league members of being insensitive toward the needs of seniors to have parking for themselves as well as their families and caregivers.

"You are all going to get old," she said.

But many residents of Rolden and Roland Park were also in the audience of 50 people at Roland Park Presbyterian Church -- and most of them were against the plan.

Many argued that a parking lot on Roland would be noisy, and an aesthetic disruption to the character of the street.

Dennis Cardiff, who rents two apartments at 4029 Roland Ave., and lives in the third, held up a 55-inch long piece of yellow "caution" tape, and told the league, "This is how far the parking lot is going to be from my bedroom."

Julia Pierson, a founding member of the association, said she constantly sees spaces that are numbered and reserved for Roland Park Place residents but are empty.

The league has not yet taken an official position on Roland Park Place's plans.

Though members seemed sympathetic toward both Rolden and Roland Park Place, some didn't like the idea of building spaces to the detriment of the neighborhood.

"We're willing to work with Roland Park Place ... but don't undermine the character of the neighborhood," said board member David Tufaro, a developer.

Earlier this year, Roland Park Place bowed to community opposition and dropped plans to raze the vacant house to make room for additional parking spaces.

Instead, Roland Park Place said it will use the old house as administrative offices.

But the revised parking plan is faring no better with Rolden residents.

Civic league board member Chris McSherry summarized Roland Park Place's problem in a nutshell.

"I can see that you're between a rock and hard place," she said.

user comments (0)