



Jesuits plan to expand

Deciding whether to raze existing residence on Roland Avenue

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Posted 11/25/08

On 12-acre site in Roland Park

Here's a planned development that doesn't appear to have Roland Park in an uproar.

The Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus wants to build a new residence on the current 12-acre grounds at 5704 Roland Ave. The province has 360 priests and brothers; as many as 40 at any one time could live in the expanded residence.

"I think the need is to expand the community," province spokeswoman Mary Tilghman said. "There are Jesuits out there who need to come to community."

One of 10 Jesuit provinces in the United States, the Maryland Province encompasses Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia and Washington, D.C.

The province is home to 360 Jesuit priests, brothers, scholastics and lay colleagues, who are working in a wide variety of ministries such as education, social justice issues and pastoral care, according to its Web site, www.mdsj.org.

Its basic Jesuit philosophy is to "find God in all things," the Web site states.

Jesuits are scattered in rectories throughout the Maryland province. The Roland Park location, known as the Claude La Colombiere community, is a kind of home base, with a chapel on the grounds, Tilghman said. Priests hear confessions there and have group meetings. Some have their own offices, where they do their writing, Tilghman said.

Province offices are no longer there. They moved to 8600 LaSalle Road, in Towson, Aug. 4, consolidating offices that were in three different locations, Tilghman said.

Tentative plans are to build a new residence either in place of, or behind, the existing one, Tilghman said.

"That's what's being worked on -- what to do with what's there now," she said.

She stressed that province officials are in the very early stages of planning, and have done little beyond forming a committee, taking soil samples, and alerting homeowners in the area of the tentative plans.

"The Jesuits are so early in the process," Tilghman said, adding that there is not yet a timetable for development.

But they do know that they want a residence building big enough to accommodate 30 to 40 Jesuits, compared to 10 to 15 now, she said.

Any new building is likely to be environmentally friendly, with the latest geothermal technology for heating and cooling.

"They're very green," Tilghman said of the Jesuits.

So far there has been no community outcry about the plan, which would preserve the land from commercial development.

"The Jesuits have been in touch with the neighbors and with local officials," Tilghman said. "The direct neighbors are all in the loop."

Province officials are developing schematic designs and will call a community meeting once they have specific designs ready, she said.

According to the Web site, the seeds of the Maryland province were planted in 1634 when the Jesuit priest the Rev. Andrew White and two colleagues landed on St. Clement Island in southern Maryland with a group of Catholic and Protestant settlers.

The province staff arranges for the training, education, care and support of Jesuits, including those who are pursuing their own studies and those who are associated with Jesuit-sponsored ministries, including those who live and work in the province and also members of the province who are serving elsewhere in the U.S. and around the world.

The Jesuits are the largest order of the Roman Catholic Church, according to the province Web site. Local Jesuit institutions include Loyola College, Loyola Blakefield High School, and St. Ignatius parish in downtown Baltimore.

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