



Letters

Posted 8/06/08

Fighting development while walking dog in Roland Park

My border collie, Patti, and I set out on our daily walk around my Roland Park neighborhood. This time I had a blue petition slip and pen stuffed into my back pocket.

I saw a woman I didn't know in her back yard.

"How do you feel about the Keswick proposal for the Country Club property?" I asked.

She said she had just returned from vacation and wanted to read more about it. She has lived in her house for more than 40 years. She doesn't want to see Keswick Multi-Care Center build a retirement community on 17 acres of Baltimore Country Club property. But she said she couldn't sign the petition because her husband is affiliated with Keswick.

"It would be nice if they could find another space," she said.

I spotted Frances standing by her back door.

"Need anything at the store today?" I asked.

"No, my daughter went shopping for me yesterday," she said.

I know she wouldn't sign the petition. I had already asked. She and her husband are older and they want to stay in their home. They worry about the possible increased traffic on Club and St. Johns roads, but at the same time, they wonder if something much worse might happen to the 17 acres up for sale.

That concern popped up here and there as I continued on my walk. Everywhere there were signs that said: "Keswick NO!," "Keep the Green in Roland Park," and "Save the Park in Roland Park." The homemade signs stood out most, like the bed sheet hanging from the side of a house on Hillside Road. It read: "Let BCC pave Paradise."

I met a woman walking a black dog and trying to keep up with a 4-year old. She said she had been living overseas and was visiting her parents on Ridgewood Road. She didn't know whether they would sign the petition.

The other day, her father, who is in his late 70s, laughed and said he might have to move into Keswick himself. That didn't sound like a good prospect for my petition. I didn't even ask her name.

The next day I passed the house and decided to ring the doorbell. The woman's mother turned out to be an old friend. She readily signed the petition.

Another day I took a different walking route and this time I knocked on someone's door. I vaguely knew the elderly gentleman who lived in the house on Elmwood Road. I used to wave to him if he was out in the yard. I didn't know his wife had died and he was living alone.

He was doing all right, he said. His daughter brings him groceries and food for the cats and he is very good at using the microwave. He used to like to work on his car and it needs some repairs now. But, for the moment, it seems like he doesn't have the energy. Maybe tomorrow.

He doesn't want to move to a retirement home and he doesn't want to see the country club green space disappear. He signed the petition.

He remembers the country club golf course that extended to the other side of Falls Road, where Cross Keys is now.

"Seems to me the original plan called for a lake," he said. "Wonder what happened to it."

He told me to talk to the woman directly across the street.

"I think she will sign your petition," he said.

I rang that doorbell and a face peered through the glass window. Seeing me with my dog she must have thought it was all right to open the door. We sat on the porch and talked for a long time. She is in her 80s and lives alone. She regularly walks up the hill to Eddie's to buy her groceries.

"I can't buy much," she laughs."I have to carry it home."

She not only signed my petition, she asked how she could help fight.

On the way home I knocked on the door of a new neighbor across the street. She talked about growing up on Ridgewood Road and watching as the open space where she played as a child turned into a development on the corner of Cold Spring and Falls. It cut off the area from the neighborhood, she said.

By now my petition paper was full of signatures and well crinkled. I had talked at length to people I did not know and I had concluded something I should have known. The people in Roland Park are very interesting individuals and they will fight for what they believe in.

As for myself, I have lived in the same house in Roland Park for 56 years. I remember what it was like before Cross Keys and the schools were built. I hate to see more open space swallowed by development.

The country club has a perfect right to sell the land it is no longer using, but let's hope that whatever happens, the original concept of Roland Park as a community with large trees and expansive open spaces persists. Once you build something on the scale that Keswick is proposing, you can't undo it and you have truly lost something more valuable than the current asking price of the land.

I keep thinking how nice it would be if someone with ties to Roland Park would donate the money to the Civic League to buy the land if Keswick would sell it. Maybe we could create a park in his or her name , a gift that would truly be worthwhile.

I will continue walking in Roland Park with my dog as long as I possibly can. I am damned if I will ever go to a retirement home or a nursing home..

Sally Foster

Roland Park

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