



More green space in danger if BCC sells land to Keswick

Hudson's Corner: Not in 40 years has Roland Park been faced with such a potential loss of green space

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HUDSON'S CORNER

The proposed sale of 17 acres of the Baltimore Country Club to the Keswick Multi-Care Center has stunned Roland Park residents since an e-mail announcement went out June 16. Not in four decades has Roland Park, or north Baltimore, been faced with such a potential loss of green space.

In the 1960s and '70s, Roland Park and surrounding neighborhoods were transformed by development and commercialization. The widening of Cold Spring Lane (three houses, one a massive Georgian brick, were torn down), the demolition of St. Mary's Orphanage and the construction of the 4401 Roland Ave. apartments and Roland Springs, plus the construction of the Wynnewood Towers apartments (now Loyola College dorms) increased density, traffic and noise.

The sale of most of the country club golf course brought The Village of Cross Keys and Poly-Western. The gardens and ponds behind the Maryland Casualty Company became a massive parking lot for the Rotunda shopping center. Roland Park Country School playgrounds and fields became Roland Park Place.

Now only in August does the community feel similar to what preceded those massive changes. In recent years, our garden off Cold Spring Lane has felt like an interstate, with constant vibrations from heavy trucks, speeding cars and perpetual sirens of ambulances, police cars and fire engines on Cold Spring Lane, Roland Avenue and Falls Road.

I often wonder what landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and visionary Roland Park Company general manager Edward H. Bouton would say about the erosion of open space our community has allowed. Of course, Bouton himself was clearing hillsides, but he hired the premier landscape design firm in the country to plan development around swaths of green space. Much of that green is long gone.

Seventeen more acres are now slated to disappear. Surrounding residents were the last to know. The former Roland Park Civic League president met with and wrote to the club, but secrecy about plans was maintained.

The timing of the recent announcement, after schools let out and many residents had left town, is curious, as is the fact that community leaders were asked to withhold information for 72 hours after receiving it.

This is not neighborly behavior from two of our best institutional neighbors. The Baltimore Country Club is an elegant, beautifully maintained facility at the heart of the community.

Keswick has been invaluable to my family. I have a soft spot for the place, and for many of its leaders and employees.

The bell tolls for greenspace, a precious urban commodity, as well as what defines this internationally studied, planned community. Roland Parkers should hear it as a wake-up call to long overdue action. Let us hope that our actions will benefit many, not just our 1,000 households.

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