

## Hudson's Corner: Jury's out on new Roland Park gateway sign

*Design a departure from two signs that preceded it*

By Kathy Hudson  
 hudmud@aol.com

Posted 6/30/10



**(Enlarge)** The new Roland Park gateway sign on University Parkway is drawing mixed reviews. (Staff photo by Nicole Martyn)

The jury is still out on the long-awaited Roland Park sign that went up several weeks ago on University Parkway. It is installed, but the plantings around it will not go in until fall. It is too soon to judge the whole picture, but the sign is a departure from the two that preceded it.

Its ironwork brackets and dogwood rosette coordinate well with identical brackets and smaller rosettes on the breadboard signs that mark the Roland Park footpaths. They are unifying features, even if the scrolled brackets seem more ornate when used with lettering more ornate than that on footpath signs.

Originally designed by Anthony Pinto, past president of the Roland Park Civic League, the dogwood emblem came about when the Roland Park Roads and Maintenance Corp. needed its own logo to differentiate it from the league.

It was first used on enamel tags that designated households for organic debris pickup.

The new Roland Park sign is smaller and lighter than the previous two. The 1960's sign was an elegant horizontal black sign with simple gold, block letters and identical to the Guilford sign that still sits on Greenway. (Once, several Roland Park Company neighborhoods had signs of the same design.)

This old-fashioned Roland Park sign appears on the back cover of many editions of the north Baltimore phone directory, The Blue Book.

Just after the Roland Park Centennial in 1991, a more colorful, smaller, red and green wood sign was designed by David Ashton after he finished Camden Yards. Most who saw that design thought it peppier, still classic, yet more contemporary than its predecessor. It continued a horizontal orientation with block letters affixed to the sign. That red and green sign lasted, amid various planting revisions, until a car ran into it several years ago.

The vertical orientation of the new sign takes some getting used to. Roland Park resident and landscape architect Stuart Ortel, of Stone Hill Design, presented a horizontal format along with several other versions and color combinations. Roland Park Roads and Maintenance chose the vertical format, because they found

it, and the smaller size, different from signs of other neighborhoods, more park-like, more oriented to pedestrians instead of cars, and in keeping with the new stacked letters derived from a plat map that dated sometime before 1918.

With historic roots and a Victorian flourish, the curlicue of the 'R' is a small yet distinct change from the lettering of the previous sign, of the Civic League letterhead and of the "carved in stone" type used by the Roland Park Community Foundation.

The font on the Roland Park website is not identical to the others, but is very similar.

As the proposed Roland Park area master plan is implemented, I think it would be easier on the eye and unifying if one style of type is agreed upon by all three organizations and is used everywhere.

I have heard a range of comments about the new sign, everything from too Victorian, crooked and not elegant or classic enough to a nice departure, more rustic, brighter and more formal than the previous sign. Taste is subjective.

Personally, I would prefer the 'R' without a curlicue and letters attached to the sign, not painted.

The sign looks small to me, but I reserve final judgment until the planting context is in place.

Above all else, vegetation defines Roland Park.

[user comments](#) (0)