

Build retirement center on a site that needs redeveloping

Kathy Hudson
hudmud@aol.com

Posted 7/23/08

HUDSON'S CORNER

We are at a critical juncture in the greater Roland Park area. The Baltimore Country Club's planned sale of in-town land to the Keswick Multi-Care Center for development as a retirement community is more significant than any development in my lifetime, except for Cross Keys.

I do not remember a development proposal in Roland Park in the last 50 years that planned to transform a property with the most restrictive, residential R-1 zoning to the less restrictive, higher-density R-5.

In the 1970s, Roland Park Place was built at the former Roland Park Country School. That property was already institutional, although certainly not as built-out or paved-over as it has become since it first went up. Lots of green has been lost there in recent years, as is true at all area private schools.

In 1995, Baltimore Gas & Electric proposed an assisted living facility where the BGE pumping station on Stony Run sat off Cold Spring Lane, but the Evergreen community rejected that zoning change.

I am a big fan of Keswick Multi-Care Center. Both of my parents received fine care there before they died. I would dearly love to find another home for their retirement community, one that is in need of redevelopment and beautification. How much better it would be for Keswick to redevelop the Rotunda, which is not currently zoned the most restrictive R-1.

If that site, where development seems stalled, is unavailable, surely other suitable sites could be found in Baltimore City.

What is proposed for 17 acres off Hillside Road would begin with 323 beds and 403 underground parking spaces. That is not tiny, and what starts off one size tends to grow and grow and grow.

Smart growth is not about paving over green space. Smart growth is about judicious development combined with preserving and enhancing existing natural resources.

Suggested now as a compromise is that only five of the 17 acres would be developed. Five would be gardens, and seven would remain intact. Looking at the artist's rendering, it is hard to imagine those buildings and an underground garage squeezed onto five acres. Would the gardens be built over the garage? Would Keswick sign covenants guaranteeing that no future building would ever occur on the remaining 12 acres?

I admire Keswick for wanting to work with Roland Parkers, but so much erosion of urban green space has already happened. The thought of losing more has brought most residents to a tipping point. A few have said they feel as if they are living in a hostile takeover.

How much better it would be for the acreage to be sold to the surrounding community that earnestly wants it as open space used by all Baltimoreans. Think Homeland Lakes or Stratford Green, what the Roland Park Company first called the area we know as Sherwood Gardens.

No property in our neighborhood should be converted from the most restrictive residential R-1 to a less restrictive zoning category, particularly when Roland Park has the ability to raise millions of dollars to preserve it as environmentally friendly, city parkland.

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