

Pushing Roland Park farther down a very developed road

Hudson's Corner

Kathy Hudson
hudmud@aol.com

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A new institution wants to build in Roland Park. This time, a developer wants to build on Roland Avenue at the site of the Marianist property. The site was initially slated for a 19-unit, three-story townhouse development.

The townhouse community won't fly in this economic downturn, but the health care industry is still growing. The Baltimore Country Club wants to sell to the Keswick Multi-Care Center for a continuing care retirement community.

Now, the owner of the Marianist property, Frank Harvey of F.M. Harvey Construction Co., wants to sell the land to Capital Funding Group and build a memory-care facility.

These are two very different, but related, proposals.

Unlike the BCC property, the Marianist property is not zoned R-1 - a single-family residence designation - but partly R-6 and partly R-4 - for general residence. Harvey's proposal calls for 63 units in a 47,000-square-foot building.

The renderings show the south side of the building within 15 feet of Somerset Road backyards. Some parking spaces appear to be cut in the Marianist front lawn -- which now visually blends with the sweeping lawn of 4401 Roland Ave. A service entrance is also shown on the north side, close to 4401 Roland.

Commercial interest in Roland Park is not flagging. I am not opposed to businesses and institutions in Roland Park. The village concept has been alive and well in Roland Park since its inception. The Roland Park Shopping Center was built as "the business block" of the neighborhood. The Roland Park Co. gave nearby land for a church and a woman's club and gave cut-rate prices for a golf club and a school.

However, Roland Park has become more urbanized in the last 40 years with increased development on Falls Road, widening of Cold Spring Lane, a proliferation of commercial enterprises, and institutions on the community's oddly configured perimeters.

Over time, the "business block" has extended to many.

All of the area's schools and colleges have expanded, as have shopping areas, Roland Park Place and Keswick. New stores, banks and restaurants have emerged.

Some of this makes for a vibrant, interesting community, but too much development pushes Roland Park farther and farther down a very built-up road.

The proposed Keswick continuing care community is not in itself a bad idea, but the proposed location, with its R-1 zoning, is a problem. And with the R-6 zoning in place on the Marianist site, care still must be taken to preserve the architectural integrity, the residential nature and the green aesthetic of the neighborhood.

A mental care facility would not generate much traffic from residents, but employee cars, delivery trucks and ambulances would generate more traffic than the quiet Marianists did. Thirty-one parking spaces are slotted, five times more than the half-dozen there now.

What would be refreshing is if the new architect and builder would actually improve the site, with wider and greener perimeters than currently proposed, and a brick-clad building that's architecturally compatible with the neighborhood.

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