

Hudson's Corner: A serious meeting holds its own against holiday bazaars

Charette on master plan draws crowd

By Larry Perl

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Attendance at the first public charette aimed at drafting a Roland Park area master plan was a pleasant surprise.

Also taking place Nov. 21, the Saturday before Thanksgiving, were the St. David's holiday bazaar and the Friends School Hollyfest. So a 9:30 a.m. turnout of about 140 people at Roland Park Elementary/Middle School was gratifying.

After the reasons for a master plan, the history of Roland Park planning and prior efforts were delineated, participants divided into eight groups.

The point of those sessions was to brainstorm. Since I couldn't go to them all, I am brainstorming now.

Transportation: In a nutshell, we need more public transit with quieter, smaller, more energy-efficient buses, shuttles and access to light rail. Traffic during school drop-off and pickup hours on Roland Avenue, Northern Parkway and Cold Spring Lane must be addressed, along with the high-speed traffic on narrow, residential streets. Better access, possibly with shuttles, to the light rail might encourage people to use it, as would better security on the light rail itself.

Infrastructure: Put simply: It is aging. Instead of reactive repairs to the increasing water main breaks, sewage and electric problems, a proactive approach might avert major crises. Time and manpower are needed to examine the complex infrastructure. As technology advances, the infrastructure should be accommodated tastefully within the historic area. For example, cell phone towers on the roof of 4401 Roland Avenue and the former Wynewood Towers apartments on Cold Spring Lane should be hidden by architectural elements.

Areas for future development: Less is more. I would like to see open space in front of and behind St. Mary's Seminary in 100 years. I'd also like to see most of the Baltimore Country Club green space preserved.

Housing: Diversity and history should be preserved. The architectural integrity of Roland Park is key and should be maintained through uniform design covenants, even if homes are refitted so seniors can age in place and environmental advances become fixtures of the houses. If new housing units are built, I'd like to see them have features to accommodate the elderly and people with disabilities. It is also important to preserve rental units.

Green and Recreational Space: Keep the green. Enhance Stony Run Park with continuous paths from Wyman Park to The Bryn Mawr School and perhaps configure east-west paths and a few small bridges to safely connect walkers and bikers to area green spaces.

Commercial/Retail: As in the original design, maintain the "business blocks" to safeguard against creeping commercialization. The residential nature of the community is paramount. Beautify with plantings all commercial areas. Keep businesses small in scale.

Historic Preservation and Institutions: Again, the historic architecture of the community becomes a more rare jewel as time passes. Preserve, through standard design guidelines and affordable practices, houses and business areas.

Livability: Quality-of-life issues -- bright lighting, noise from traffic and sirens -- must be addressed.

"Cleaner, greener" means less pollution plus safe bicycle and walking paths. Quality public school education is a must. Places for an aging population to live, within their homes and within medically equipped facilities, are also musts.

Taking the time and making the effort to develop a master plan, then implementing it, will pay big dividends now and in the future.

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