

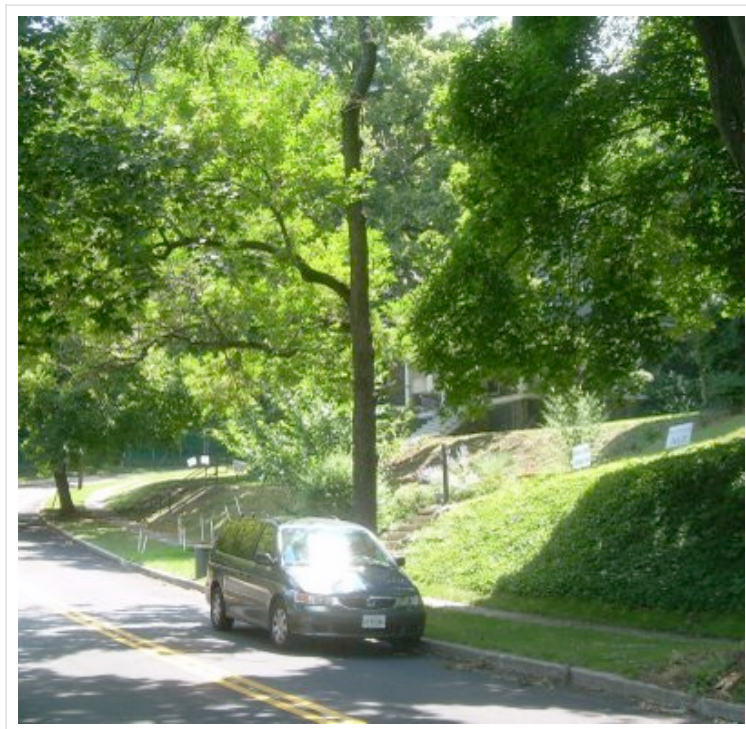
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Tuesday, July 15, 2008

Baltimore Country Club



Hillside Road in Roland Park, across the street from the Baltimore Country Club site, with anti-development signs on the lawn.

LAND WAR IN ROLAND PARK

The battle between the Roland Park community and the Baltimore Country Club over their intention to sell part of their land to create the Keswick Center for senior living has all the classic earmarks. In terms of the rhetoric of both the community and the developers, this is the last piece of land that matters. "Keep the

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- ▼ 2008 (10)
 - ▼ July (1)
 - [Baltimore Country Club](#)
 - ▶ June (1)
 - ▶ May (2)
 - ▶ April (2)
 - ▶ March (1)
 - ▶ February (1)
 - ▶ January (2)
- ▶ 2007 (27)
- ▶ 2006 (19)
- ▶ 2005 (11)

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About Me

GERALD NEILY

Baltimore, Maryland, United States
 > Have lived in Baltimore most of my life, which is unfortunate since it is well known that out-of-town experts are always smarter. > Born in 1952, so I'm old enough to remember when streetcars clogged up and were clogged up by the streets of Baltimore, and made you walk in the streets to get on them. > Got my BS and

Park in Roland Park" is the community's battle cry, as if the elimination of this open space would involuntarily change the name of the neighborhood from Roland Park to just plain Roland. To hear the developers, there is no other place in the entire city in which a comparable senior housing complex could be located.

When a battle line is drawn in the sand, or in a gorgeous verdant hillside, it always helps to create the illusion of scarcity.

But there is no scarcity of great development sites within spitting distance of Roland Park and the Baltimore Country Club, most of the land for which is owned by the City. There are no small sites. There are only small minds.

The key is to expand the definition of what is Roland Park. The City should be reweaving the natural fabric and beauty of the Jones Falls Valley so that the magic of Roland Park can be extended as far as the eye can see, and even farther.

We should learn that expanding neighborhoods is a tried and true tactic of the real estate industry. Real estate agents are the foot-soldiers of land wars, and it is no secret that when they want to sell a property, they describe it as being in the most desirable neighborhood possible. Federal Hill used to describe only the houses adjacent to the hill itself. Now real estate agents use Federal Hill to define almost the entire South Baltimore peninsula. Buyers buy into the game, and now so has everyone else. Real estate agents have done the same thing in Canton, Fells Point, Charles Village and any other desirable neighborhood they can get away with.

VALLEY OF THE DULLS

Despite the fact that Roland Park is probably Baltimore's premier neighborhood, this is precisely the opposite of what has been done by the City and its co-conspirators over the past 50 years to the west toward the Jones Falls Valley. It all started with the massive line in the sand known as the Jones Falls Expressway, which permanently cut Roland Park off from all of westward Baltimore. Back in those days, the Baltimore Country Club extended all the way down into the Jones Falls Valley to the river and the expressway.

That was just the beginning. The Country Club then sold off a huge chunk of land to the Rouse Company to create the Village of Cross Keys, which was the prototype for Rouse's city of Columbia. In hindsight, Cross Keys would have been easy to market as an

MS in Civil Engineering at Penn State and Northwestern University respectively, specializing in Transportation Planning for both. > Worked for the Baltimore City Department of Planning from 1977 to 1996. > Have done some consulting before and since, whether anyone wanted to hear my advice or not.

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annex to Roland Park, thriving off the reflected glory of Baltimore's premier old money blueblood neighborhood. But this was the 1960s, and Rouse preferred to shut the Roland Park vibes out by creating a faux neo-utopian gated community of somewhat blah modernist architecture.

This fit much better into Rouse's personal master vision. He wanted to reinvent urban or suburban or anti-urban living (whatever you want to call Rouse-ification) rather than simply emulate or add to Roland Park - the pinnacle of Frederick Law Olmsted proven vision from the previous century.



The gorgeous great lawn of the Baltimore Country Club, looking west toward Falls Road, with Cylburn Park in the background. Other than the Harper House high rise in Cross Keys, to the right, none of the vast changes of the past fifty years are visible from this point, including the JFX, Poly-Western and Cold Spring New Town.

The next huge chunk out of the Roland Park Country Club was the City's Poly-Western High School complex, another neo-utopian 1960s vision - this time of public education. Poly moved out of a distinguished old building on North Avenue that was, for better or worse, an inherent part of the inner city, and into a "campus" that was isolated from all the good and the bad influences that could have distracted the City's best young minds. Instead of being surrounded by the real world, the new Poly was surrounded by highways, parking lots, playing fields and chain link fences.

Things got even worse. The other side of the Jones Falls Valley

was heretofore as beautiful as the Roland Park side. It was dominated by Cylburn Park, which was so vast, wild and gorgeous as to make everything that touched it special. So in the 1970s, the City created a sequel to Cross Keys called Cold Spring New Town. This was designed by Moshe Safdie straight from his experiment in weirdo architecture for the 1976 Montreal Olympics, which the entire province of Quebec has never quite recovered from.

Cold Spring New Town was a disaster from day one. The strange houses were constantly problematic with defects, and the City ran out of money very quickly because the development required a huge amount of costly upfront infrastructure (roads and such) with very few home sales to support it.

What's worst of all, Cold Spring New Town didn't relate to any of the beauty surrounding it, including Cylburn Park and the Jones Falls Valley. It was just a weird neo-dystopian compound at the end of switchback roads up a giant hill. About two decades later, the City finally tried to cut its losses by developing the only "easy" parcel left in Cold Spring New Town with standard issue traditional suburban houses instead of trying to match the weird Moshe Safdie originals. But the City still didn't take advantage of its prime location immediately adjacent to the magnificent Cylburn Park. All they did was back a few homes up to the woods, which increased their individual marginal value at the expense of the community (and the City) as a whole.



A typical house in Cold Spring New Town.

There's more. The City expediently took a large chunk of Cylburn Park and the original Cold Spring New Town property and created a "stump dump" where the City now hauls its many dead trees.

The only excuse for such a crappy land use on such previously beautiful land is that the City made this land so isolated by the expressway and other impenetrable obstacles that nobody missed the beauty.

Finally into all this mess in the 1990s, the light rail line was built. Amid the stump dump, the expressway, the carcass of Cold Spring New Town and other urban fragments, there was no place to put a light rail station that could actually serve anyone decently. So the Cold Spring light rail station was placed in an isolated gully at the bottom of a long stairway inside the JFX/Cold Spring Lane interchange. A series of ADA approved switchbacks was provided for handicapped "accessibility". It's handicapped, alright...

WEAVING IT ALL BACK TOGETHER AGAIN

Instead of the Roland Park community and Keswick Center developers fighting over the nicest piece of green space in the area, we need to create a plan that extends the cache of "Roland Park" over the entire area, and makes people want to believe that all of it is actually Roland Park. If we can convince the real estate agents to call it all "Roland Park", or maybe just "Roland Park Area", then we've really accomplished something, and many new development opportunities will emerge along with long forgotten parkland.

Here's the solution: A small new street should be built between the south edge of the Village of Cross Keys and the north edge of Poly-Western High School, westward from Falls Road over the Jones Falls Expressway to the edge of Cylburn Park, then southward into the foot of Cold Spring New Town. In the space of about a half-mile, this small street will directly serve Roland Park to the east, Cross Keys to the north, Poly-Western to the south, Cylburn Park to the northwest, and Cold Spring New Town to the west.



The proposed connector road from Falls Road opposite the Baltimore Country Club (to the east, right) to Springarden Drive in Cold Spring New Town (to the east, left). The road would pass between Cylburn Park and Cross Keys (to the north, above) and Poly-Western High School and the City Stump Dump (to the south, below).

That's some high class neighbors ! Instantaneously, Cross Keys, Poly-Western, Cylburn Park, and Cold Spring New Town will all be able to lay claim to being part of Roland Park. The old real estate agent trick of reflected glory will suddenly be achievable.

To do this will require getting rid of the City's stump dump, but doing this will create a great new development site, and even better, it will create a great new spot for a "Roland Park/Cross Keys" light rail station. Just being able to say with a straight face that the light rail system serves Roland Park and Cross Keys would make all this worth the effort. (If you can't keep a straight face when you say this, ask a real estate agent to teach you how.)

Suddenly, Poly-Western students will be able to take light rail to school without taking their lives in their hands walking across the JFX interchange and down into the gully.

Suddenly, Cylburn Park will really be part of blue-blood Roland Park again, instead of just an isolated arboretum at the end of a long driveway from Greenspring Avenue. Suddenly, post-modern new urbanist architecture which emulates places like Roland Park will be unobtrusively welcome in Cold Spring New Town, to divert our attention from that ancient modern architecture that reminds

everyone how crazy the world was back in the 1970s. The modern will be old and the old will be new.



Looking west from Poly-Western to the Jones Falls Expressway - This is approximately where the new road would cross over the JFX. The light rail tracks and a very small piece of the vast stump dump are barely visible on the other side. Cylburn Park is just to the right and Cold Spring New Town is hidden behind the trees in the background.

NO MORE SEPARATE PLACES

All of the land use and design decisions for this area should be made to try to eradicate the "separatism" which has grown up since the Baltimore Country Club first started its land divestiture back in the 1960s, and in fact, has roots in the origination of Roland Park itself and its unconstitutional covenants. The isolated "campuses" of Cross Keys, Poly Western and Cold Spring New Town may also have roots in the desire to shut off outside influences in the racially charged atmosphere of Baltimore in the 1960s.

The new street between Falls Road and Cold Spring New Town should be named something that provides a link to something that is already there around it. If the new street is physically located close enough to Hillside Road, which enters Roland Park from Falls Road, it should be called Hillside Road. Springarden and Tamarind, the two main roads in Cold Spring New Town, which are now disjointed because pieces of road in the original plan were never built, would also make good names. Cross Keys Road would also be an appropriate name because it would bring the

Cross Keys identity outside of its current gated fortress.

Here are some more helpful guidelines:

Baltimore Country Club Redevelopment - The frontage along Falls Road is the key to any redevelopment, and is probably the land that Roland Parkers are least attached to anyway. The feel of Roland Park needs to be extended to Falls Road. If it is retail, the feel of the Eddie's and Morgan Millard shopping centers on Roland Avenue should be emulated.



Falls Road looking north from Hillside Road - The Country Club is on the right. Poly-Western is on the left. The Harper House high rise in Cross Keys is in the left background. Both sides of this stretch of Falls Road needs to be redeveloped with a Roland Park motif.

Keswick Center - The "gated community" theme for old folks' housing should be avoided, regardless of where this development ends up taking place. We must get away from separatism and weave all development into the community. There are many alternative sites in the area, many of which are discussed below.

Poly-Western High School - The land for the new road will be taken from here, so some reconfiguration of the campus must occur. There is a huge amount of wasteful surface parking, so everything should be able to fit very easily. Beyond that, the school should be re-oriented toward either the new road or Falls Road to make it part of the community, rather than sitting behind a sea of parking. Better yet, the school should also be incorporated with new development (such as research labs) that brings new learning opportunities to its students.

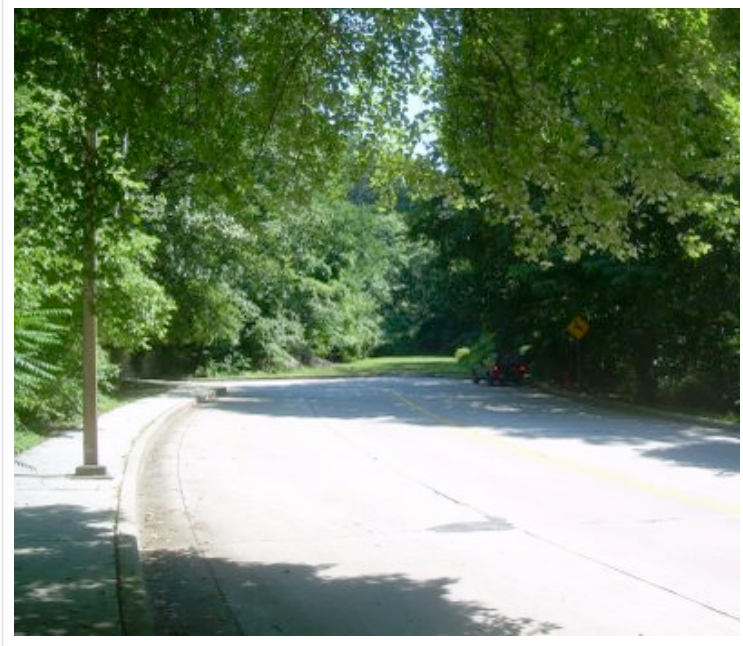
Cross Keys - The new road will be a new southern edge for Cross Keys, so this is an opportunity to expand it with more of a community orientation. There should be at least one new entrance, and if a gate motif is really considered essential to the Cross Keys identity, well, so be it. But at least most of us know that the gates are pretty much fake and symbolic - unlike the CIA or National Security Agency.

Light Rail - The Cold Spring Light Rail Station should be relocated to immediately south of the new road. Good riddance to the old expressway interchange gully station !

Stump Dump - This is a great new transit oriented development site which should take maximum advantage of its proximity to the new light rail station and Cylburn Park.

Cylburn Park - The north side of the new road west of its JFX overpass should become the new southeast edge of Cylburn Park, with a prominent park entrance for pedestrians and bikes, and perhaps cars as well.

Cold Spring New Town - The new road should intersect CSNT at the big bend where Springarden Drive was supposed to be extended southward away from its Cold Spring Lane entrance. If the grades can't be made to work for such a connection, then the new road could be linked directly with Cold Spring Lane at the existing stump dump entrance. Either way, new development should be encouraged along the new road.



Springarden Drive - Looking north toward the big bend at the foot of Cold Spring New Town. The road was supposed to be continued straight but never was. It should be, to create the west terminus of the new road connecting to Cross Keys and Roland Park.

BGE Oil Tank - The huge oil tank just south of Cold Spring Lane and the stump dump should also be redeveloped, along with the surrounding land. A few years ago, this land was going to be made into a light rail park-and-ride lot, but it fell through because of cost, largely related to the difficult topography of the site. However, the topography also makes the site very interesting and attractive for development. There is an underpass under Cold Spring Lane next to a Vinegar Factory that can be used to weave the new development into the stump dump site and transit station, and also tie Cylburn Park into the remaining parkland to the south toward TV Hill and Woodberry. A small land swap with the Vinegar Factory may be necessary. This may prove so successful at yuppifying the area that many people will be amazed that the Vinegar Factory is actually a vinegar factory and not the name of a new/old condo complex. At least not yet.

So there you have it. There is so much prime developable and redevelopable land in this area that there is no need for a land war. There is strength in abundance.

Posted by GERALD NEILY at [3:14 PM](#)

12 comments:

[Ben](#) said...

You're taking on an interesting and rarefied slice of Bawlmer. In many places, including mine, the NIMBY's work to oust other uses and settle gladly for senior housing. We are warming up to letting Grandma age in place - just down the road, not our place. Anyhow, you are positing a true "connector" road in every sense of the word.

[8:49 PM](#)

[Greg](#) said...

This is one the best ideas I've seen on this blog. I've always thought that this area was sort of disjointed.

Greg

[1:12 PM](#)

[Spence](#) said...

I think this is a great way to create interest in redevelopment of Cross Keys and Coldspring New Town. Although new in Baltimore terms their architecture have aged terribly and hopefully integrated with Roland Park will give this a shot in the arm. Now TOD in Roland Park, I don't know if the residents will go over for it. Polytech and Western Highs are grossly under enrolled hence the unused surface parking lots I did a post about better school utilization on my blog here's a link <http://baltimorefuture.blogspot.com/2008/05/school-facilities-update.html> it involves redistricting schools to the Poly Westerns Campus.

[1:47 PM](#)

[Swamp Thing](#) said...

Great ideas..... but will never happen. The City has seen what the County was able to get done at Bonnie View...just one mile away...and they would love nothing more than to do the same thing - eat up some low-tax-rate green space with some highly taxable dense development.

[12:27 PM](#)

[GERALD NEILY](#) said...

Thanks, folks...

Hey Swamp Thing, how's Adrienne Barbeau doing? You're certainly right about the City's motivation for a higher tax base, which is why they should satisfy that lust with underutilized land that the City already owns and is thus off the tax rolls.

[9:44 AM](#)

[Mike](#) said...

Thank you for sharing this hopeful scenario for "Roland Park West". One element you might weave into it is the new bicycle trail being built from Druid Hill Park up to Mt. Washington. It passes through the underutilized Cylburn Arb. In Madison, WI, where I lived until moving to Roland Park six years ago, planners pushed through a fairly ambitious network of bike trails, one of which runs through a pot-industrial, low income part of town. At the onset, citizens

resisted this connection to one of Madison's few "high crime", minority neighborhoods. The day the trail opened everything changed for the better. New public space was created. Everyone uses it. Property values have risen along the trail. People commute by bike, reducing traffic congestion. I mention this because my vision to link Roland Park to the Cylburn and beyond involves building not a new road but a light pedestrian bridge across I-83. It might even be attached to the existing bridge, lowering costs. If memory serves, there are federal funds available to cover up to 80% of the cost of building pedestrian greenways. I'm thinking a less ambitious, green-oriented plan will more likely be implemented sooner than the commercial and residential redevelopment you propose. Mike

[9:15 AM](#)

[GERALD NEILY](#) said...

"Roland Park West" - I like the sound of that as a name for the new community, Mike.

A great place for the Jones Falls bikeway to cross Cold Spring Lane would be at its underpass next to the Vinegar plant, south of the stump dump and Cylburn Park, which I briefly mentioned. Cold Spring Lane itself is a nasty place for bikes, except for the expert riders who I would not presume to speak for. Attaching a bikeway to the existing Cold Spring bridge would hardly make it any better, because bikers would still need to negotiate the dangerous JFX interchange ramp conflicts that already plague bikes and pedestrians.

So a new bridge is needed over the JFX, totally divorced from that nasty interchange. And this new bridge needs to be a normal local street, to establish continuity with the rest of Roland Park. There are plenty of other places to spend the Federal bucks specifically earmarked for greenways.

Comparing Baltimore with a college/capital town like Madison is not very instructive. We don't put "high crime" in quotes. Our crime fears are real and remain a major impediment to getting folks to shed their paranoia and embrace greenways in places like Leakin and Cylburn Parks.

Planning greenways and development comprehensively, such as I have outlined, is very necessary to dispel these fears and create a new mindset, rather than the kind of less ambitious pure greenway plan you are envisioning.

[9:54 AM](#)

[Mike](#) said...

Gerald,

The idea of reclaiming and creating public spaces is what motivates me. Research shows that a well-utilized, cared for public space- whether a bike trail, a park or a town plaza- reduces crime. In the Cold Spring- Falls- Northern quadrangle we see how fast-moving, heavy vehicular traffic creates barriers to using existing public space. How does building a new vehicular bridge across I-83 reduce that problem?

[9:22 PM](#)

[GERALD NEILY](#) said...

You said it well, Mike, but you're not paying attention to your own answer. As you say, public spaces should be "well utilized" and should avoid "fast moving, heavy vehicular traffic", such as on the JFX and its interchange with Cold Spring Lane.

Creating a well designed new local street that provides continuity with other local streets in Roland Park, Cross Keys and Cold Spring New Town, as well as opening up new open space for Cylburn Park, will make this space as "well utilized" as possible.

The proven successful urban design of the rest of Roland Park demonstrates how slow moving automobile traffic can coexist very well with bikes and pedestrians, and therefore maximize the publicness, surveillance, and safety of the public space.

Cars are not the enemy. Cities around the country, including Baltimore, have learned this with many failed pedestrian malls. If the new bridge over the JFX is not open to cars, the necessary continuity with Roland Park will not happen.

[8:49 AM](#)

[Mike](#) said...

Gerald, I defer to your expertise. And thanks for laying out the arguments; I'm new to all this. Now, can the proposed vehicular road to Roland Park West also have protected pedestrian/bike lanes? And can Falls Rd- all the way from Robt. E Lee Park down through Hampden- also be made safe for bicyclists and pedestrians? Can a lattice of connected greenways and green spaces be built over the entire area so that people can walk, jog or bike from Roland Park to Roland Park West and points beyond? Overlooking my skepticism about new development for the moment, what I've read and experienced elsewhere is that doing the urban area green retrofitting pays off in higher property values. Just look what's happened at Patterson Park.

[9:07 AM](#)

[sp8cemunky](#) said...

WOW! Love this visionary, knowledgeable discussion. I support these creative plans definitely. Are there ways to have these suggestions reviewed by the parties that make the decisions? If you could implement the Green aspects of the idea could you invite some organizations that work as liasons with all the parties? Maybe Environmental Defense or something local? Thanks for making this available!

[11:33 AM](#)

[Mike](#) said...

As you may know, this discussion about Roland Park West and pedestrian greenways takes place as Keswick Long-Term Care, LLC, prepares to request the City to rezone 17a of Baltimore Country Club so they can build a humongous assisted care complex. This will hack off most of the remaining 33a of green space in Roland Park. The Roland Park Civic League envisions a smarter use for that land. Neighborhoods elsewhere in northern Baltimore City are supporting RPCL in this fight. Now is the time to link those scattered green spaces together to make the area more livable. As often happens, necessity is the mother of invention.

[7:30 PM](#)

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