

August 16, 2008

Through comments and questions, Roland Park residents have been extremely helpful in focusing our discussion. Here are answers to four important questions you have asked about the proposed sale of 17 acres of Baltimore Country Club land to Keswick Multi-Care Center.

1. What is the issue here?

The fundamental issue here is zoning. The land is currently zoned R-1, which limits its use to single-family houses, schools and houses of worship, and recreational areas. This limitation was established in the 1920s. Over the years, there have been many proposals to depart from the R-1 zoning. As a community, we have consistently rejected these proposals because we know that the low-density, single-family character of Roland Park is the essence of our historic neighborhood.

The planned unit development (PUD) proposed by Keswick requires a zoning change to allow for a major institutional use of health care and retirement facilities, uses not allowed under the R-1 zoning. Our problem is not with the type of business that Keswick operates, it is with the location of that type of business in the middle of a single-family residential neighborhood, protected by R-1 zoning. If the PUD were approved, it would establish a precedent that might encourage similar higher density development in other parts of our community. These uses could include apartment houses, banks, drug stores and pharmacies or even industrial uses like a warehouse. This makes the zoning change proposed by Keswick an issue that is highly relevant to all of us in Roland Park.

2. Do we have a shot in defeating this?

Absolutely, yes! Since the PUD is essential to Keswick's intended use, the sale is contingent upon the zoning change. Keswick will not buy the land without it. If the PUD is not approved, the contract is dead.

A PUD must be approved by the City Council and signed by the Mayor. Traditionally, a PUD is presented for approval by the councilperson in the involved district (Sharon Green Middleton), the City Council President (Stephanie Rawlings Blake) or the Mayor (Sheila Dixon).

Sharon Green Middleton has announced publicly that she will neither present nor support the PUD. The other councilpersons we have met with have indicated that they will support Council Person Middleton and her position. The Mayor has not yet announced her position, but heard many members of the Roland Park community speak out against the zoning change at the Mayor's Neighborhood Conversation held on August 12th at Loyola. We are currently working with Mayor Dixon's office to schedule a meeting to fully brief her on the community's position.

3. If we defeat this, do we have the dollars to buy the land?

We have expressions of support by organizations for the purchase of the land for public use. Please understand that, at this point, we cannot publicly announce what these organizations are and it would be unwise for future negotiations to say what the size of that support is.

While we haven't officially begun community fund-raising efforts, we have already received significant contributions from members of the Roland Park community. Roland Parkers have a record of contributing generously to important projects. Think of the library.

Of course the Baltimore Country Club has the right to sell the land to whomever it wishes. Given BCC's previously stated goals for the property (e.g., maintaining a clubhouse view corridor), we believe that when the appropriate time comes, a Roland Park offer would be compelling on many fronts for the BCC leadership and membership.

4. If we can buy the land, do we know what we want to do with it?

The Civic League's Alternative Plan Development Group has created an initial draft of land use concepts for the space. The ideas are quite exciting. They were presented to the Land Use Committee on Aug. 24 and will be provided to the Civic League this week. Beginning after Labor Day, residents will have the opportunity to see these plans and participate in roundtable discussions, which will take place in homes in every Plat throughout Roland Park. An announcement about these neighborhood meetings will be mailed this week. I hope every Roland Park resident will attend one of these meetings.

Keep up your input and your questions.

One last important item:

Save the Date: October 2 (7-9 p.m.), for a very important community meeting. More information to follow.

**Sincerely,
Philip Spevak
President, Roland Park Civic League**