

Search

Home > News > Sun Editorials

Text size:



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- Cars
- Real Estate
- Apartments
- Lawn & Garden
- Celebrations
- Boats
- Personals
- Pets
- Grocery Coupons

- Weather**
- Traffic**
- News**
- Maryland**
- Sports**
- Entertainment**
- Life**
- Business**
- Opinion**
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- Letters to the Editor
- Op/Ed
- Talk Forums
- Columnists

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- Fun Stuff**
- Travel**
- Partner Sites**
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- Metromix.com
- bthesite.com
- Explore Baltimore Co.
- Explore Carroll Co.
- Explore Howard Co.

- Resources**
- Print Edition
- Wireless Edition
- RSS Feeds
- Newsletters/Alerts
- Archives
- Topic Galleries
- Site Map

- Services**
- Subscriber Services
- Media Kit
- Reader Rewards
- Sun Store
- Sun Fan Shop
- Contests

## Tie-breaker?

Our view: Mayor urges talks in Roland Park land dispute, but compromise seems unlikely

December 15, 2008

A piece of Baltimore Country Club history was demolished last week: the tennis clubhouse that served four grass courts that were built in 1903. Over the years, it was home to local tennis champions and even hosted the occasional star, including [Pancho Gonzalez](#) and Billie Jean King. Phil Spevak heard about the demolition hours after it occurred Tuesday, though he had met that morning with club leaders. It's not surprising. Mr. Spevak is the president of the Roland Park Civic League, which has masterfully rallied the neighborhood against the club's sale of 17 acres for a proposed continuing care retirement community.

The Civic League has wanted for some time to buy the parcel and preserve it as green space for the community. But the country club has a buyer, the nearby Keswick Multi-Care Center, and it's moving ahead with its plans. Until recently, [Mayor Sheila Dixon](#) had stayed out of the contentious debate over retaining Roland Park's leafy character. In a Nov. 24 letter to the Civic League, Ms. Dixon objected to the development as presently designed by Keswick, but she urged the two sides to get together "to determine whether compromise is possible."

Ms. Dixon gets an A for effort, but it will take more than a mayoral nudge to resolve this dispute. That's because what the two sides want is mutually exclusive. The community has the backing of two City Council members in its effort to keep the land undeveloped, which poses a major obstacle for Keswick as it seeks the necessary approvals to build an assisted-living facility there. The club leadership has said plainly that it won't sell the land to the community and rejects outright the contention that the public has any right or claim to the property.

In tennis, there's never a draw. Keswick should begin design work on a new facility that is smaller and greener. But if city officials expect to break this stalemate by spring, they should heed the advice of tennis pro Dale LeProvost: "Have a winning game plan before you ever walk on the court."

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