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A more sensible site for Keswick center

By Janet Felsten
July 10, 2008

Let's take a broader view of the issue *The Sun* presented in letters to the editor as "Open space fight roils [Roland Park](#)."

Keswick Multi-care Center desires to build a high-end senior living facility, including 225 independent-living units, 58 assisted-living units and 40 beds for residents in need of skilled nursing. Across the street from Keswick's current facilities, Hekemian & Co. desires to develop the many acres of impervious surface that surround the Rotunda shopping center, including residential units (302 apartments, 44 condos and 12 townhouses, according to the last publicly available description), with "a goal to focus on pedestrian life and activity, sensitivity to scale of surrounding buildings and reducing the impact of traffic on surrounding streets."

While it wouldn't address the Baltimore Country Club's desire for funds that selling off its Falls Road property would generate, a move by Keswick to pursue development close to its current operations would be logical and a good marketing strategy. The Rotunda would offer seniors the potential to have more walk-to options, to be neighbors with seniors at Roland Park Place and the apartments towers nearby (many of them probably old friends, given the Smalltimore syndrome) and to be closer to urban amenities.

This idea offers economies of scale, wonderful views out over the city, the opportunity to add greenery where paved surface reigns supreme and, for Hekemian, a built-in market with energy, disposable income and cultural and intellectual capital to help attract commercial tenants. It seems like a no-brainer - and a much more attractive site for those considering a move to a continuing care community than being isolated on a west-facing hillside overlooking traffic and athletic fields.

The Baltimore Country Club wants to sell its surplus land and hopes to do so for \$12.5 million, predicated upon the rezoning of historically green space. Is this rezoning a realistic expectation, considering the opposition of the surrounding community and the clear policy on the part of the city to preserve open space, channel development to underutilized, developed land and increase the urban tree canopy?

If BCC will consider a price more in line with the fair market value under existing zoning, I feel certain that more appropriate and compatible alternatives for the site's future can be found.

For the vitality of our urban setting and the health of the Jones Falls watershed, let's encourage all parties involved to take advantage of the obvious synergies here.

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