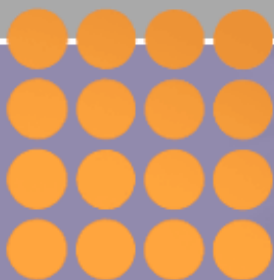


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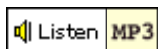
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Top Stories

Roland Park Residents Upset Over Plans to Build Assisted Living Center in Green Space

Melody Simmons



BALTIMORE, MD (2008-07-02) There was standing room only last night in Roland Park at a community meeting to protest plans by the Baltimore Country Club to sell 18 acres to a senior living center. WYPR's Melody Simmons was there and filed this story.

Near the unusual sight of bed sheets painted with protest slogans, stretched on lawns outside ornate Victorian houses, more than 300 Roland Park residents crowded the hall at St. David's Church last night to question a possible new development. Two weeks ago, a plan by the Baltimore Country Club to sell nearly 18 acres of green space to the Keswick Multi-Care Center for a huge new senior development were revealed.

The news struck a nerve in this historic community designed, in part, by Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr., son of the creator of New York's Central Park.

Resident Mary Page Michel said most of her neighbors aren't happy.

The best way to describe it, I think, is it's explosive. So many people are away, I didn't know what so many of their responses would be, but people are just so energized and interested.




Michel researched the community's history and found that Roland Park leaders had never been given an option to purchase the land in question. It is located along Falls Road, near Western High School, and abuts the country club's social hub, a historic clubhouse built in 1898.

Should a 195 million-dollar, 300-unit senior development be built there, the character of the neighborhood would change forever. Michel said the frustration is building.

I just feel like it's a volcano erupting.

Michel's sentiments were echoed by dozens of speakers, who expressed shock and dismay over the pending 12.5 million-dollar land sale. The country club's 2,000 members are expected to vote on the sale on July 15th.

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Del. Sandy Rosenberg, who represents Roland Park in the General Assembly, attended the meeting and pledged unspecified help from the state.

We have already had discussions with leaders in the community, with bill drafters with Department of Natural Resources regarding how we can be of assistance at the state level in terms of money because Program Open Space is obviously one option (FADE)

Timothy Chriss, an attorney for the country club, told the crowd that earlier this year, club officials met with two members of the Roland Park community and solicited a bid for the land sale. David Tufaro, a member of the Roland Park Civic League, disputed that.

Tufaro, a developer, charged that country club officials had rejected past offers by the community to purchase the land. The club, he added, neglected to inform Roland Park leaders about the pending sale to Keswick.

Chriss had this to say:

We did not think it prudent to have both the voting membership and a dialogue with the community occurring simultaneously.

Michael Stott, general manager of the Baltimore Country Club, said the property is for sale because it is surplus. Tennis courts once located there have been moved to a second club location in Baltimore County called Five Farms. The funds from the sale would be used to renovate the historic clubhouse, often used for wedding receptions and private parties.

We understand and respect our neighbors. We've been a part of the Roland Park community for over 110 years, so we're very aware of what Roland Park is and we're respectful of the community. So we understand the feelings and we're sensitive to them.

Roland Park leaders said they will now gather to vote how to proceed on the issue. A city zoning official explained that the land must undergo rezoning to accommodate a large continuing care center. That could bring about a new round of protests at City Hall.

I'm Melody Simmons, reporting from Roland Park, for 88.1, WYPR.

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