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[Rumble in Roland Park, Part 2](#)



After I posted my [recap](#) of the Tuesday night's meeting in Roland Park, where [Keswick](#) presented its plan to build a retirement community on land sold to the company by the [Baltimore Country Club](#), I spoke with Dr. Phil Spevak, president of the [Roland Park Civic League](#), who led the meeting and spoke eloquently in opposition to Keswick's plan.

Dr. Spevak thought the meeting marked a turning point, at which both Keswick and Baltimore Country Club seemed to realize that their plan would not succeed. Besides the community's near-unanimous opposition, City Council members, including local representative [Sharon Green Middleton](#), signaled they would not introduce the necessary PUD legislation for the product to go forward. That reality was reinforced this morning when City Council president [Stephanie Rawlings-Blake](#) sent an e-mail to Roland Park residents, promising, "I have no intention of introducing the PUD. I also know that Councilwoman Middleton has no plans of introducing a PUD or any other legislation to change the current zoning to accommodate the project as proposed."

With that in mind, I think Dr. Spevak's thoughts on what happened on Tuesday night and where the

community goes from here are especially enlightening.

Baltimore Magazine: How did you think it went Tuesday night?

Dr. Phil Spevak: I thought it was just a tremendous meeting. I was so excited to see the size of the audience, the enthusiasm, it was just such a great sign of a healthy community. I think it showed the near-total opposition of the community to the Keswick plan. It really sent a definitive message to Keswick. It also gave Keswick a full opportunity to talk to the community, which they absolutely were entitled to, and we wanted them to. I thought they had sufficient time, they acknowledged that they had sufficient time and I was very happy that that happened, because we want to be fair to them. But despite that, I think at the end of that presentation there was no doubt that we all think it's a terrible plan and we don't want it.

BM: Keswick CEO Libby Bowerman said at the end of the night that she didn't think people came with an open mind. How do you respond to that?

PS: They're smart people in Roland Park and Baltimore and [Keswick] told us they provided all the information [before the meeting] and we carefully made that all available to the community. The community had many opportunities to see the material, they saw it in the 12, 13 roundtables that we had, they saw it on the website, so I think, in some sense, intelligent people looked at the information and did think it was a bad project before they came. But I think you could tell by the way people sat and listened—almost nobody made any comments—people absolutely were willing to listen and would have had their minds changed, but there wasn't anything that would change anyone's mind in what they did.

BM: Do you feel pretty confident now that, because of the City Council's stance, the Keswick proposal seems like a dead issue?

PS: Yes, I was really happy to see the definiteness of the council. We've had multiple meetings with the Council members and we heard nothing but support for opposing the PUD, but, to hear the definitive statement by Councilperson Middleton, that the entire Council was standing with her was very good news, and I would say that was a very important take-home message of that meeting. I think the PUD is dead. We're certainly looking to the Mayor, to hear her opinion on this and that's important, but I'm also optimistic on what she'll say. She came out and walked around the land with me. We looked at the land, we talked about the Keswick proposal, and I had the opportunity to explain the community's alternative plan, and she was excited about the community plan.

BM: Ultimately, if the BCC does not want to sell to the community, so it can build a public park, does the community have any recourse?

PS: Yes, but I don't think that's gonna happen. I think we can change and get that conversation going. But, to answer your question, it would depend on what that alternative were. If it's something that would require a zoning change, then it's just like what we're in now. If it's something that doesn't require a zoning change, then there absolutely would still be opportunities for the community to weigh in. The one that would potentially be most likely to be pursued would be a housing project. The community absolutely has an opportunity on housing development to weigh in on design and setbacks and we've had that in other parts of Roland Park, on much smaller sorts of projects.

BM: But they can still go ahead with it, without any approval?

PS: A housing development can go ahead by right, but it doesn't mean the community doesn't have any opportunity to weigh in on it.

BM: Did you get a sense that, over the course of the meeting, [BCC President] Mr. Daue seemed to come around to, if not the inevitability of having to look at other options for the property, then certainly that possibility?

PS: I did. I think you're absolutely right. I felt that from Mr. Daue and I also felt it from Keswick. I think that meeting was a reality check. Both groups, unfortunately, didn't understand the community when they went ahead with this and they gradually have learned more and more about where the community is, but I think it really was this meeting and seeing the near-universal, just complete rejection of this idea. I think they really got it. And I think that's the basis for Mr. Daue's—I believe I heard it—invitation to meet with me, which I would be really

happy to do. I also thought Keswick, in their faces and in their words, was also seeing the reality that if they want to go ahead with this kind of project, I felt that they were seeing that it was a waste of time to keep trying to pursue it on this property. It was impossible that they were going to get their PUD and they'd be wasting their time to pursue it.

BM: Did Mr. Daue say anything to you after the meeting that gave you any insight going forward?

PS: The message I heard from Mr. Daue, in the brief opportunity we had to exchange comments makes me optimistic that there could be an opportunity to talk and I really hope that would be possible, because I think there is really an opportunity for both the club and the community to find a solution that they both would see as preferable to where we are.

BM: What are the next steps?

PS: We're doing a few things. We're looking to the mayor for her announcement and we've let her know that we've completed the process that she's asked us to complete. And I know she knows that because her representatives were there. Second, we're going to be communicating to our community, first of all that we're so appreciative of what everyone has done, and then to let them know where we're heading. It would be good to reflect that while a few of us were up there in front, we have an army behind us and some are visible and some don't even want to be recognized, and the reason that we were so effective is because of all those people. Just an enormous number of supportive people and we're gonna communicate that and try to thank people appropriately.

Also, I am going to take up that invitation of Mr. Daue. I was really happy to hear the meeting end in that way. And, as I said my goal is both, protecting zoning and stopping the project, but also to get to the community's plan and I am going to do whatever I can to try to get a productive dialogue going between the Civic League and the club.

Posted at 1:02 pm

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