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## Ye Olde Roland Park Country Club

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### Ye Olde Roland Park Country Club

#### ***On the Record—A business and legal blog for Maryland***

August 20, 2008

The lordly New York Times has caught wind of the debate in Roland Park over the sale of 17 acres of open space belonging to the Roland Park Country Club to Keswick Multi-Care Center, a company that wants to build a 300-unit eldercare facility with a 400-space parking garage underneath it.

Many Roland Park residents are upset because the sale signals the loss of publicly-used green space to development, and because they say there already sufficient facilities for retirees in the neighborhood.

But the Times couches the dispute largely in terms of what Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., the urban planner who designed Roland Park in the late 1800s “to interrupt this city’s concrete sprawl with an oasis of big sky and lush fields,” would have wanted for the neighborhood.

Lifelong-resident Kathy Hudson is quoted as saying, “This is not what the residents or Olmsted had in mind in designing this community,” while 85-year old retirement home denizen Jack Bremermann countered,

*“It is hard to say what Olmsted would have wanted...but I feel pretty confident that he probably would have some way for elderly people to be a part of the full community.”*

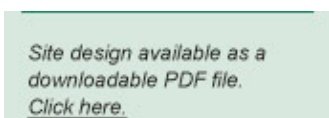
Some further research into Olmsted’s life revealed that most of his career was spent working for the preservation of national parks, not planned communities. One account claimed that he valued “the concept of neighborhood-centered development, the differentiation of streets by function, the importance of common open recreational spaces, and the need for continuing maintenance and aesthetic oversight to preserve the quality of the community,” but also, vaguely, that he embraced the idea of “the interrelationship of people and their environment.”

It’s safe to say the jury’s still out on WWFLOD (What Would Frederick

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Law Olmsted Do?), but isn't it sort of silly to be quibbling over the speculative desires of a man who died in 1957? Wouldn't the upset residents of Roland Park, who are likely to lose this battle—it's a private land deal, essentially, and the community's Civic League can't afford to buy the land, so the city is likely to approve the sale—be better served talking about the needs of the community in the here and now, rather than century-old history of their affluent, idyllic neighborhood?

ROBBIE WHELAN, Business Writer

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