



Keswick data called 'sideshow'

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Retirement community seen adding \$23.6 million to city coffers

The proposed Keswick Multi-Care retirement community could be a revenue bonanza for Baltimore, according to a company hired by Keswick.

The proposed development in Roland Park, if approved by the city, could add up to \$23.6 million to the city coffers, according to the report from real estate consultants Lipmann Frizzell & Mitchell.

But opponents of the development call the economic impact analysis a red herring to the main issue of whether the facility should be built at Falls Road and Hillside Avenue.

The report, issued in early June, projected that construction of the 323-bed facility would generate about \$863,965 in taxes for the city.

Once the facility is up and running -- expected to be in 2015 -- it should generate \$1.18 million in taxes annually, a number that would increase with inflation, according to the report.

The report also says that the project is expected to create 251 construction jobs and 158 permanent jobs at the retirement community.

However, the veracity of those figures and the impact they would have on the city's operating budget are being called into question by opponents of the project.

The economic analysis is a "side show," said Phil Spevak, president of the Roland Park Civic League.

"Their economic analysis only looks at the benefits of such a development, not at the costs," he said in an e-mail Aug. 25. "That is like trying to evaluate the profitability of a company by looking only at its revenues without considering its expenses."

The report ignores expenses such as the added strain on emergency services -- paramedics, the fire department and the police -- Spevak said.

"The economic benefits for the city would exist if Keswick built on another location in Baltimore," he said.

Keswick CEO Libby Bowerman said estimates of the taxes that would be generated by the retirement community are conservative.

The development would mean more paychecks for city residents, she said.

About 82 percent of Keswick's current employees live in the city and at least one third of employees who would be hired at the retirement center would be "specialists at very high pay scale," she said.

The proposed Keswick project has angered many Roland Park residents.

Opponents say the green space where the retirement community is proposed, once the site of Baltimore Country Club's tennis courts and golf course, is an integral part of Roland Park, the first planned community in the nation.

They also have expressed concern that the project could overwhelm area roads and sewers.

More than 90 percent of the Baltimore Country Club's membership ratified the sale of the land to Keswick last month.

Since then, the Roland Park Civic League voted to oppose the land sale and has started a campaign opposing the development.

Signs the read "Keep the Park in Roland Park" and "Keswick No" have been posted throughout the neighborhood. The issue dominated a recent "neighborhood conversation" with Mayor Sheila Dixon at Loyola College.

Tensions over the project have reached such a peak that The New York Times wrote a story last week about the fight.

The \$12.5 million sale is contingent on the city approving a planned unit development amendment density restrictions on the land, which is zoned residential.

Current zoning allows only for single family homes on three-quarters of an acre lots.

The mayor and City Council would have to approve any PUD amendments, and the project is opposed by Councilwoman Sharon Greene Middleton, whose district includes Roland Park.

However, Bowerman has repeatedly expressed a desire to work with the neighborhood, so that the facility feels like a part of the community. According to the Web site www.keswickcommunity.org, plans call for seven acres to go undeveloped, with five acres of landscaped gardens and five acres of development on the site of the former tennis courts.

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