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## Just keep talking

Our view: Roland Park residents, care provider must work together

July 6, 2008

Roland Park residents are distressed by the prospect that their neighbor, the Baltimore Country Club, may sell 17 prime acres of open space in the community to a company that wants to build an assisted-living facility on the property. If the sale goes through, zoning officials will face a dilemma: balancing the benefits of preserving the city's green spaces against the long-term need for more housing tailored to the elderly as the population ages.

Those goals need not be contradictory if community residents and the Keswick Multi-Care Center, which has offered \$12.5 million for the property, are willing to work together. But so far, it appears neither side has found an effective way of talking to the other, and as a result, both have missed opportunities to avoid a confrontation that now seems based as much on emotion as on the issues.

Residents say development would change the character of the neighborhood and deprive them of open space they've enjoyed for decades. They say the BCC and Keswick should have kept them informed and given them a chance to buy the property; they led the restoration of the local library. BCC says it tried to do both. How seriously is questionable.


Given that BCC members will vote on the sale in less than two weeks, it's a waste of time focusing on who's to blame for past mistakes. Both sides would do better to seek common ground now than entrust their fates to a big zoning board battle down the road or the uncertain hope of state buyout money. For example, many residents recall sledding on the hill above Falls Road. Can't Keswick's architects preserve a place for that tradition? The dispute needn't be a zero-sum game. Open space and housing for the elderly both benefit the city. What's needed is to turn down the volume so the two sides can hear each other. Then they might be able to find their own way out of the hole they've dug themselves into.

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