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# The park in Roland Park

By Ann LoLordo  
July 12, 2008

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At the outset, Edward H. Bouton recognized how much appeal a country club would have for prospective homeowners in the new Roland Park. A place for men to golf, for women to lunch, for debutantes to preen, for families to socialize, for children to play on the rolling hills and under the canopy of trees that distinguished the setting in North Baltimore. Mr. Bouton, the general manager of the development company, had the right instinct, and sales reflected that.

Novelist [Henry James](#) once recalled the pleasure of dining on one of the club house's "deep southern verandas, with great trees close at hand, flinging their shade." In 1906, a local publisher characterized the club as "probably the best attraction Roland Park has."

But by the 1960s, more than a half-century after its founding, the Baltimore Country Club was selling off its land in the city. The first parcel to go was 68 acres of its in-town golf course for a new planned community built by developer [James Rouse](#) to be called Cross Keys. Then, the city of Baltimore moved to gain control of 35 acres of club land along Falls Road to build two high schools, one for boys and one for girls. The club eventually sold it, and the Poly and Western campuses remain there. The club relocated its golf course - an award-winning one - to a Baltimore County setting dubbed Five Farms; it built a swimming pool and then eventually moved its tennis courts there. Over time, more of its members left verdant Roland Park for the outer suburbs and the club's expanded holdings in the county.

Now the club is considering the sale of another 17 acres in Roland Park, and residents are adamantly opposed to losing this great, bucolic expanse of green to development. It's a confounding prospect for the Roland Park Civic League, which has tried repeatedly in the past to buy this very same acreage for what it calls fair market value. In 1999 and 2001, the league, established by Roland Park's original developers in 1895, made offers of \$4.2 million to buy the property for which the Keswick Multi-Care Center has offered \$12.5 million to build an assisted-living facility, a sale that would be contingent on changing the land's residential zoning.

The Roland Park Community Foundation in 2000 related its

"standing offer" to buy the land to a club president. In 2003, the civic league made another offer but was undercut by two nearby private schools whose proposal also was rejected. It has never succeeded in purchasing the property and the question is why, given the affluent community's obvious interest and desire to keep the area as the original developers intended, for residential use and recreation. The club's refusal to sell to the league is indeed curious.

Now, as in the past, club members have the final say, and they vote Monday. The club's board has recommended the sale because, as it explained in a letter to members, it needs the money to improve the historic club house in Roland Park and enhance its other facilities.

History is often instructive, and historical records illustrative. Certain covenants and restrictions were included in early deeds and agreements drawn up by Mr. Bouton and the Roland Park Co. Among them was a prohibition for any "business house of any kind, no hospital, asylum or institution of like ... the said premises shall be occupied and used for residential purposes only and not otherwise."

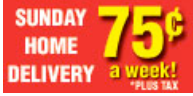
Neighborhood residents want to keep it that way.

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