

Community Foundation Update: The Baltimore Country Club Land

By Mary Page Michel, Chair, RPCF

In September 30th, the leadership of the Baltimore Country Club (BCC) invited members of the Civic League and Community Foundation to a meeting at the Club. They announced that they have completed a master plan and voted to sell the 20 acres of surplus land along Falls Road. They invited Roland Park to submit a bid.

When Roland Park was first developed, the Roland Park Company recognized that a requirement for this meticulously planned neighborhood was the creation of shared community recreational space. They carved out park space and later established the Baltimore Country Club, which added the new sport of golf. The community recreational space was here before the country club, seen as a necessity for attracting homeowners.



A map envisions the features a park in Roland Park could include.
Map courtesy of RPCF

The sale of the land, expected in the next few months, creates a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to finally put a park in Roland Park. Purchasing this land was one of the highest priorities identified in the 2010 *Greater Roland Park Master Plan (GRPMP)*. The land is all that remains of the first and last holes of the golf course, as well as historic tennis courts. The golf course once included land now used as the Jones Falls Expressway, Baltimore Polytechnic and Western High School and Cross Keys. The golf and tennis activities were moved to BCC's suburban location decades ago. The remaining green space is stunning and would create a community gathering space that we could leave as a legacy to the next generation.

In the *GRPMP*, the community vision for this park includes space for picnicking, playground play, dog walking, frisbee and soccer, among other activities. The park would be private, but open to the public, in the style of Sherwood Gardens or Pierce's Park in the Inner Harbor. It would be designed in the style of Frederick Law Olmsted who, with his sons, planned much of our community. Olmsted's designs embraced the natural topography of the land, so our own Olmsted Park would have winding paths and a very natural feel. Olmsted is known for designing urban parks that soothe the soul and allow neighbors to engage with one another. The Roads and Maintenance Corporation has been taking care of green spaces in the community for more than 100 years, so the community knows how to maintain park space.

The other bidders for this property would be real estate developers, who could build roughly 50 single-family homes. The Boys' Latin School recently purchased 28 acres of land adjacent to its campus for \$5.5 million, which gives us a rough idea of the price, although that sale included a building that the school needs to establish a boarding program.

Over the past several months of COVID-19, people have spent more time than ever outside. According to a National Parks and Recreation survey, 83 percent of adults find exercising at local parks, trails and open spaces essential to maintaining their mental and physical health during the pandemic. Never has home been more important and access to green space more treasured.

Please take a look at the map of what this community space might look like and what an incredible asset it would be, not only for our current residents but also for future generations. It would fit with Olmsted's vision for neighborhood parks and be a gift to Baltimore City. As we move to creating a winning bid, we will need your support. ❖

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