

Rouse Co. backtracks on neighborhood name; Plan to honor ex-senator opposed by black leaders

By **Liz Atwood**

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Gorman's Promise won't be kept.

The Rouse Co. said yesterday that it has decided not to name its newest neighborhood after a former U.S. senator who tried to keep blacks from voting in the early 1900s.

"Unfortunately, we probably did not do a very good job of researching the name of the North Laurel parcel," said David L. Tripp, vice president and director of corporate communications. "I can tell you it will not be named Gorman anything."

The company's development arm had selected the name Gorman's Promise for the 517-acre project north of Laurel in memory of Sen. Arthur Pue Gorman, a Howard County native who was an early baseball player and the state's Democratic Party boss for 30 years.

Tripp said the company was unaware that Gorman had pressed for legislation to disenfranchise blacks when it chose the name of its project. He also pointed out that a road and school near the project are named after Gorman.

"Our long-standing, well-documented commitment to racial diversity is out there," Tripp said. "I am really irritated and upset that anyone would imply that the Rouse Co. chose this in a racial manner or to be racist."

Rouse's subsidiary, Howard Research and Development Corp., which chose the name last fall, didn't plan to focus on Gorman's political life. When company officials discussed the name, they wanted to focus on Gorman's time as baseball player for the Washington Nationals in the 1870s. The company proposed naming streets within the development after baseball terms and players.

"We try to stay out of politics, past and present," David E. Forester, vice president for Howard

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Research and Development, said this week.

But the choice drew criticism from black leaders and Columbia officials, who said Gorman's baseball career could not be separated from his political life.

On Wednesday night, Kings Contrivance Village Board voted unanimously to oppose the name of the project.

"This is supposed to be the 'city of diversity,' and if you condone this," said Victoria Dieringer, a board member, "it's kind of like flying the Confederate flag in South Carolina over the Capitol."

The Rouse Co. has proposed making the new neighborhood part of Kings Contrivance.

Tripp said another name would be chosen, but he declined to say when.

Rouse's project on the so-called Key property, which straddles Interstate 95 between Gorman Road and Route 216, is to have 1,145 homes, 1.2 million square feet of office space and 100,000 square feet of retail space.

Sun staff writer Erika Niedowski contributed to this article.

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