

'Thrilling Gamble'

Rouse Labels Land Plans

James W. Rouse, President of Community Research and Development Corp., whose subsidiary recently acquired 14,000 acres of land in Howard County, addressed a group of 200 apprehensive citizens at Ellicott City Junior High on Thursday, December 5. He was accompanied by William Finley, former National Capital Planning Commissioner, who is coordinating the planning aspects of the

Rouse holdings in this county. Mr. Rouse, who was introduced by Robert H. Marks, Jr. President of H.C.C.A., began by apologizing to the audience for the anxieties caused by his firm. He said, however, that he is "aware of his responsibilities as a large land-owner and anxious to share the pride in the result."

He gave the background of his company's vast experience

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Robert Marks

William Finley

James Rouse

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in this field and an explanation of their choice of Howard County, saying they had explored the entire Eastern Seaboard. He quoted statistics showing that two million people will be added to the Baltimore-Washington area by 1980.

Mr. Rouse stated his aim is to "accomplish growth and at the same time retain forests and open spaces."

"We acquired the land in the belief that our cities in America don't have to be big, grim, traffic-snarled, and oppressive. He added that their whole purpose is to prove this.

The idea (and he repeated that at this stage it is still an idea rather than a definite plan) is a sort of experiment -- something new in the American scene where towns and cities have simply grown like Topsy.

He emphasized that "by the grace of timing" they were

able to secure the immense tract, enough land to do comprehensive planning.

"In two years it would have been too late," he noted. Acquisition of the land was classed by Mr. Rouse as a "thrilling and fearful gamble." Nineteen million dollars was spent.

He listed as his company's objectives:

1. To build a whole balanced community--not a dormitory--so complete that it might even contain a university.
2. To make it financially balanced----providing enough assessable base to provide needed services.
3. To provide the residents with the finest possible environment.
4. To dignify the landscape --to preserve and create rather than destroy.

Referring to the recent statement of policy by the County Commissioners and Legislators (THE NEWS, November 21), James Rouse said, "We accept it; we welcome it; we are glad to have standards." He assured the listeners, "You don't have to fight, because we are not going to fight!"

He continued, "We will plan so well, we will win support, however, we want you to stay concerned, examine every month what we propose to do." Mr. Rouse proposed at the outset of the meeting, and Mr. Marks at the conclusion, that a series of community development conferences be held. The December 5 meeting was considered the first of the series.

A question and answer period followed his address. Jack Pessin asked, "How could you get financing for such a nebulous plan?"

favorable comparison of land values. On this count, he had mentioned the reasonable prices earlier, saying they would enable them to devote some of the acreage to non-economic uses such as parks.

In reply to another inquiry Mr. Rouse remarked, "We hope you will be made happier than if we had not been here."

Carville Collins inquired about the expense of roads, schools, and utilities. Mr. Rouse said it would be their job to answer this before they got these services. He listed the venture as a hope rather than a threat.

Asked about the race question, Mr. Rouse answered frankly, "I don't think it is

possible to have a segregated community today." He also said he has no desire to incorporate the community as a separate town.

On the lighter side, and evidencing his intent to cooperate with the present residents, he said the area has no name as yet, and asked for a show of hands on the name "Columbia". (Of the few responding most seemed

against.) One sarcastic spectator, making a slur at the idealism of their plan, suggested the name "Shangri-La."

Most of the questions aimed at pinning Mr. Rouse down to specifics, which he avoided because concrete plans have actually not been formulated, he said.

The H.R.D. spokesman said the present zoning would not satisfy the needs, but pointed out that if anything injurious was brought in H.R.D. would suffer most. He attempted to ease apprehension by a reference to our safeguards--good laws, responsible public officials, and "probably the most vigilant civic association in the Baltimore area." Again in the humorous vein, Mr. Rouse referred to himself as "that land-owner monster."

In answer to Charles Wehland's query, he said we should not reconsider our General Plan at this time. However, he approved of what the Atwater-Clark Report said about zoning for this type of planned community. (THE NEWS, NOVEMBER 14) In answer to Ridgely Jones' quest

tion, he assured, "We will not break down your system of zoning laws."

He said no appreciable increase in the growth rate would result from their project. This was in response to a question posed by Edward Cochran. He qualified his reply by saying that a fine community will attract industry

and people. A population of 900,000 is predicted for the corridor between the two cities. A plan will eliminate the usual urban sprawl, he concluded.