

RESTON AS A NATIONAL HISTORIC PLANNING LANDMARK

By William Nicoson

"...it is never good to bring bad news."

– Cleopatra, threatening a messenger with a dagger,
in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*

Despite Cleopatra's injunction, the journalistic profession is constantly accused of preferring, even encouraging, bad news while ignoring, even suppressing, good news. It has therefore been reassuring to follow The Reston's Times' full coverage of the award bestowed on Reston as a "National Historic Planning Landmark" by the American Institute of Certified Planners at the annual meeting of the American Planning Association in Chicago on April 16. This is the most prestigious award which planners may confer on any U.S. community.

At the same meeting Robert E. Simon, Jr., Reston's first developer, was given the AICP's National Planning Pioneer award, the most prestigious award which planners may confer on an individual community planner, builder or developer.

On May 9, The Reston Times gave extensive coverage to these events, and on May 29, printed an op-ed piece by Reston resident and AICP fellow, Phil Clark, who nominated Reston and Simon for their respective awards. Clark placed these awards in the context of prior Landmark and Pioneer award winners of the most eminent distinction. He also quoted from the awarding jury's opinion recognizing the importance of using urban village centers and higher-density zones to liberate open space and accommodate the full range of land uses (residential, commercial, cultural and recreational).

The jury must also have noticed how carefully these land uses are sited in relation to each other and how pathways among them have been landscaped to encourage walking instead of driving from homes to destinations such as schools, shops and recreational facilities – or simply walking beside lakes, streams and gardens, divorced from roadways, autos and overhead utility lines, to enjoy Reston's natural beauty.

Reston's natural beauty, by the way, is magnificently documented in the photographs by Charles A. Veatch with commentary by Claudia Thompson-Deahl, in their book, "The Nature of Reston." And cultivation of Reston's natural beauty remains a work in progress, as evidenced by Reston Association's recent dedication of a breathtaking Native Plant trail in its Nature Center.

Reston's registration as a National Historic Planning Landmark by the institute which certifies U.S. planners is particularly significant since Andrés Duany, the initiator of a planning movement known as "New Urbanism," has spoken slightly of Reston. Duany extols the benefits of "walkable communities," implying that the concept was first invented by him in his recent projects of 300 acres or so. Yet Reston is clearly a "walkable community" of some 7,000

acres – an extraordinary achievement at such a scale and an achievement from which the “new urbanists” have much to learn as they increase the scale and ambition of their own projects.

Reston’s Landmark plaque was received at the Chicago ceremony attended by more than 2,000 planners by Tom Williamson on behalf of Terrabrook, Reston’s current developer. At a reception for the Reston public on June 6 from 5:00 to 7:30 PM at the Lake Anne Storefront Museum, Terrabrook will deliver the plaque to Reston Historic Trust, founder and manager of the Museum, for exhibition and preservation as a significant emblem of Reston’s contribution to the history of community building.

That is, as Cleopatra would wish, good news.

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