

LET THERE BE LIGHT – AT RESTON CROSSROADS

By William Nicoson

A new chapter opened this year in the sprawling historical saga of Reston streetlights. Phil Tobey, President of the Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce, wrote Fairfax County Supervisor Bob Dix on April 28th to request that the same fixtures and lamps installed in the Town Center area and North Reston be installed at key intersections on Wiehle Avenue, Sunset Hills Road and Sunrise Valley Road to provide effective illumination, enhance safety and offer an attractive architectural perspective. The Presidents of Reston Association (David Haas) and Reston Citizens Association (John Lovaas) followed with letters fully supporting this request.

At the Board of Supervisors meeting on June 7, Mr. Dix asked unanimous consent that the staff be directed to review the issue and determine possible funding sources.

Board Chair Kate Hanley smiled, noted that Mr. Dix had made the request with an “almost absolutely straight face,” and indicated that objections could be expected. On cue, the objections tumbled out: that any such review should be county-wide in scope; that many neighborhoods throughout the county were listed as waiting for new streetlights; that illuminated intersections of unlighted streets might be hazardous; that historically Reston never wanted streetlights; and that the lights installed at Town Center were part of an experimental and expensive program not yet assessed.

In other words, don't expect the County to turn on any new Reston lights anytime soon. But Supervisor Dix tells me he'll continue to push this issue. Working with the Reston Streetlight Committee, he's established a Reston Streetlight Fund, fed with commitments by developers to a level approaching \$50,000. That's a start.

Meanwhile Restonians, who assess themselves through the Reston Association and Reston Community Center for services financed elsewhere in the County by general revenue including Restonians' taxes, may be politically offended by the airy disregard displayed by supervisors for Mr. Dix's narrow request for County assistance. This was not a moment when Mrs. Hanley, elected at large, demonstrated any sympathy or gratitude for Reston's unique propensity for self-reliance. Cathy Hudgins, a Reston resident who formerly served on Mrs. Hanley's staff, is campaigning against Mr. Dix for his seat on the Board of Supervisors. For Restonians, Mrs. Hanley's performance on streetlights failed to light the tiniest portion of the way toward political victory for her former staffer.

Mrs. Hudgins has, of course, publicly asserted her independence from Mrs. Hanley on issues arising in the campaign. Furthermore it's unlikely that other board members needed Mrs. Hanley's prompting to raise objections based on loyalty to chauvinist interests. But politics is governed by appearances. An incumbent supervisor will win some and lose some – and Bob Dix's wins far exceed his losses -- but a political challenger, at best, is out of the game and, at

worst, may be tarnished by association with a doubtful friend of a major voting constituency.

Disaster may be a better spur to government action than political risk. I remember some years ago at dusk witnessing a truck colliding with a car after barreling through a red light at the intersection of Wiehle Avenue and North Shore Drive. The truck driver claimed he failed to see the car. To this day that intersection remains unlit. Let's hope the supervisors see the light in Bob Dix's streetlight proposal before they visit Reston's dark and busy intersections to become a witness like me or worse.

William Nicoson has been a political supporter of both Supervisors Hanley and Dix and a former publisher of Connection Newspapers.