

The Nexus of Nimbies and Naysters

By William Nicoson

Restonians are witnesses to a vast conspiracy. It's not that vast right-wing conspiracy about which the Clintons complained. It's not that vast left-wing conspiracy which the Bushes no doubt sense without complaint. It's Reston's own invidious nexus of Nimbies and Naysters.

The Nimbies want to keep their backyard pristine, and backyard means of course any surrounding property influencing their own in any way. The Naysters oppose any significant change in the community, particularly any change which costs money.

The campaign for and against Reston Association's Nature House illustrates the power of this negative nexus. RA proposes to expand and winterize its existing structure in the Nature Center. Classes could then be held there year-round. Disturbance of the existing environment would be minimal. As a matter of fiscal management the proposal is eminently sensible: it will turn a wasting asset into an asset worth far more to the community than the costs of improvement.

Many property owners nearby regard any improvement in the Nature Center as anathema. More use of the Center means more strangers in "their" backyard and more traffic on "their" streets. The Naysters joined the debate long ago, demanding that RA be focused on existing facilities, as if teaching the joys of nature year-round were somehow beyond RA's existing mission.

The strength of this negative coalition led the RA board to proclaim that the costs of this improvement would be borne by charitable contributions instead of RA funds. Rather than rejoice, the Naysters promptly accused the board of seeking to avoid a cost-required referendum on the Nature House. The board then voted to hold a referendum even though no capital costs would be covered by membership assessments. The referendum of RA members is now underway and will close July 9 at a cost of some \$30,000.

It's a prime irony that Naysters constantly demand costly referenda in hopes of stalling or reversing decisions they claim to be too costly. Management by referendum shifts decisions from the board elected to make such decisions to the membership as a whole. Directors are obligated to take the time to carefully study the often complex issues facing RA. The membership has no such obligation. Management by referendum yields perverse, uninformed decision-making.

The Nimbies' negative efforts yield their own prime irony. It is that the Nature House will almost certainly improve the value of adjacent property owned by Nimbies. The same is true for increased development densities near proposed transit stations, densities which Nimbies are in full cry to reduce.

Contrarian facts such as these will not shake the determination of the Nimbies and Naysters to

pursue single-mindedly their own interests as they understand them. Hopefully there will be other residents now, as there have been in the past, who are prepared to pursue the interests of the Reston community as a whole.

William Nicoson is a former director of Reston Association.