

WILL RA DECLINE TO SUPPORT RESTON'S HERITAGE?

By William Nicoson

What attracts home buyers to Reston? What offers homeowners in Reston a community experience they will never find elsewhere? What makes Reston home buyers confident of appreciation in the value of their investment? It is the combined planning and architectural excellence of the community which is epitomized in the lakefront design of Lake Anne Plaza.

Once again a debate has been unleashed concerning community-wide support for the upkeep of Washington Plaza at Lake Anne. In an informal meeting of board members of Reston Association on October 27th most directors indicated opposition to a budget item of \$30,000 over two years to assist Lake Anne of Reston, a Condominium, in maintaining the Plaza.

At one time RA made annual contributions to Plaza maintenance of over \$40,000. Some ten years ago, the RA board ended its funding partnership with the Condominium, citing an arcane legalism: in connection with debt financing by Fairfax County of Plaza revitalization, an easement was granted to the County which, it was said, devalued the Plaza easement previously extended to RA.

But the interest all Restonians share in maintaining the integrity and animation of Reston's birthplace at Lake Anne is not defined by easements. Among the world's planned communities, Reston stands in the first rank for highest quality in planning and development, of which Lake Anne is emblematic. Reston's exceptional reputation in this regard is reflected in property values throughout the community.

Assurance of residential access by easement is therefore not the issue. The issue is protection and enhancement of Reston's property values, a principal objective of RA under its founding documents.

Furthermore RA owns Lake Anne itself, regulates its use and derives revenue from boat rentals there. The value of the lake to RA members cannot be isolated from the quality and vitality of shoreline development, particularly on and near the Plaza. Among alternatives, RA should explore accepting an undivided property interest in the Plaza and assumption of a related share of debt service for the revitalization which was essential to preserve Reston's heritage for the benefit of all Reston residents.

Professional penny-pinchers intent on trimming the RA budget at the risk of trimming members' property values recite their mantra over and over: treat no village center different from any other. But all other Reston village centers are self-sufficient shopping centers contributing little of significance to Reston's heritage. The mixed-use condominium at Lake Anne has a vastly more complex mission, and its small commercial base cannot be expected to carry the full burden of maintaining Reston's heritage.

In the interest of full disclosure, I am one of ten owners of a commercial Lake Anne unit purchased to assure long-term, affordable occupancy on the Plaza by the Store Front Museum dedicated to celebrating Reston's history. Drop by the Museum to check out what makes Reston such a special place, why its history deserves celebration and why Lake Anne Plaza strengthens property values throughout Reston. Then tell the RA board to shape up.

William Nicoson is President of the Reston Historic Trust for Community Revitalization which established the Store Front Museum, President of Planned Community Archives, Inc., headquartered at George Mason University, and a former director of both Reston Association and Lake Anne of Reston, a Condominium.