

## **A WALK IN TOMORROW'S PARK**

By William Nicoson

I remember my walk in the delightful future urban park of Reston Town Center.

I was dreaming, of course, inspired by the pictorial rendering on an easel of a park surrounded by 15-story apartment buildings, a key residential component of Phase II of Town Center. I was part of the audience of Reston citizens being briefed last year on plans for Phase II by Town Center's developer. Tom D'Alesandro, Terrabrook's chief executive, spoke eloquently without notes about the park, the small amphitheater to be sited in the park, a cultural center overlooking the park, and the urban feel and prospective animation provided by high-rise residential structures surrounding the park. D'Alesandro spoke of bringing the best of Philadelphia's famed Rittenhouse Square to Reston.

So it came as a shock some months later to learn that an architect had been asked by Terrabrook to study a plan for 4-story residential space around the celebrated park to be created in Phase II. Somehow 11 full floors seemed carelessly to have been mislaid, compromising the promised necklace of urbanity showcasing the flowers, plantings and greensward. Furthermore, I couldn't recall many 4-story structures around Rittenhouse Square.

The concept of Town Center has been high-intensity use of land, consistent with creation of a regional commercial and residential complex as the final project in Reston's development as a mixed-use community. Many planners and community activists were disappointed that no residential space was programed into Phase I of Town Center. Retail and office uses weren't much of a mix. Just wait, was the answer: wait for the high-rise apartments of Phase II.

Promised residential density is of enormous import to the merchants already installed in Town Center as well as those considering location in future phases. Residents around the corner will be their most reliable source of custom. Residential density is also a factor in calculating the economic feasibility of transit, within and without Town Center. Commerce in Town Center will thus be energized both directly and indirectly by Town Center's residential mass.

In an interview, D'Alesandro answered my questions directly, stating that no decision had been made concerning the type of multi-family housing surrounding the park. He indicated that some developers proposed a mix of high- and low-rise structures, while others insisted that uniform 4-story buildings with a loft should be examined. In any case, he assured me that the maximum permitted residential density of 50 units per acre under the master plan was his objective. He contrasted this with Stratford House, under construction on Reston Parkway opposite Town Center at a density of 35 units per acre with most of its 334 dwellings classified as low- rather than high-rise units.

The decision for the developer turns on the relatively high cost of concrete construction for

towers with underground parking, as opposed to the relatively low cost of wood construction for low-rise dwellings with surface parking. But the price premiums for high-rise units demonstrated at Stratford House, to the extent permitted by underground parking within the structural footprint, argue on economic grounds for a mix, at least, of high- and low-rise units around the park in Phase II. That way lies greater capital commitment and economic risk perhaps, but also greater potential for reward.

For the community, a mix including high-rise units will mean more direct exposure of residents to the amenities of the park and cultural center and far greater animation in the neighborhood. The design and character of these units deserve the immediate attention of the Reston Town Center Architectural Review Board. The resulting decision by the developer will also be worth the attention of residents to whom much has been promised.

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