

SLOW GROWTH FOR HERNDON?

By William Nicoson

Whether the campaign slogan is “smart growth” or “slow growth”, the electoral banner that swept out the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors and unchaired the chairperson of the Prince William County Board has been unfurled in Herndon. Mayor Thomas Rust, a 10-year incumbent unopposed for reelection in his last two terms, faces a “slow growth” challenge by Michael James in the mayoral race to be decided May 2.

James moved to Herndon from Reston a year and a half ago and works as an auto mechanic in Fairfax City. This will be his first venture into electoral politics. He told me he initially planned to run for a seat on the Herndon Town Council, but when he read in a newspaper that the Mayor was unopposed, he raised his sights.

I asked how James planned to slow Herndon’s growth. He said he would work with state legislators and county supervisors to impose new regulatory measures on the development process. Closer to home, I pointed out that the Mayor has one of seven votes on zoning matters before the Town Council. Was James running on a slow-growth slate with candidates for the Council? No, but he believed some of the other candidates would see things his way. He cited John De Noyer but had difficulty recalling other names. From the list I read him, he identified, Jeff Delmontagne and William Tirrell.

John De Noyer told me he favored revising zoning ordinances and regulations to bring them into compliance with the comprehensive plan but not to slow growth. William Tirrell reacted the same way, adding he would not favor taking rights away from anyone. Jeff Delmontagne, on the other hand, believed more stringent ordinances might improve development quality.

I asked Mayor Rust whether he himself had any plans to jump on the slow-growth bandwagon. He said he was firmly committed to enforcement of Herndon’s comprehensive plan. He also pointed out that residential growth last year was four-tenths of 1%, consisting of 39 single family homes.

Rust has served Herndon over a total of 18 years as Mayor and 5 preceding years as a Planning Commissioner. He has presided over the revitalization of Herndon’s historic downtown applauded by residents and urban experts alike.

Michael James, with no experience at all in local government, must make a virtue of his fresh, uncluttered outlook and might well be tempted to embrace causes of demonstrated appeal to voters in adjacent jurisdictions. But even as he promises to plant the slow-growth banner in Herndon, a backlash has been reported among citizens in Loudoun County who deplore the adverse impact on property values expected to result from proposed new restrictions on the development process.

When citizens realize that “slow growth” means making it harder for land owners to exercise the full current measure of their ownership rights and therefore tends to depress property values, the lure of a growthless or less-growth status quo is appreciably dimmed. Sure, the velocity of growth in the Tysons-Dulles Corridor reminds us of a high-performance racing car. But, Michael, this car ain’t broke, so why fix it?

William Nicoson is a former publisher of Connection Newspapers.