

## **EARLY MORNING IN SIMON GARDENS**

By William Nicoson

It had been a late and celebratory night. What followed -- not surprisingly like the night, the day -- was a rocky early morning. I needed the fresh breezes of spring and a park bench to relax and recover. As usual, I headed for Simon Gardens.

I parked, as I often did, at Plaza America and then set out on the landscaped path leading southwest to the East Gardens with spring flowers and flowering shrubs. The West Gardens, on the other side of the Leader Transit Tower, were more lively in fall.

I stretched out on my favorite bench just in front of the newly installed bronze statues of Bob Simon and Tom D'Alesandro shaking hands. The sculptor had worked from a photo my wife took at the "Bob & Tom Awards" conferred in Chicago by the American Planning Association on April 16, back in 2002. Of course the Simon Gardens and their gleaming peripheral towers built over and next to the Dulles Access Road were then no more than a prophetic, if insistent, sermon preached by local activists like Joe Stowers.

In fact it had been at a charrette (planning workshop) mounted by Fairfax County just days before (April 11-13) that important people began seriously to consider air-rights joint development around the proposed transit station serving Reston Town Center.

I mean by "important people" people who could make the project happen. I mean the chief executives and project chiefs at the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority and the private development companies which formed the Reston Joint Development Coalition. And equally significant, and more challenging because of political hazards, I mean the Fairfax County supervisors.

Not long before the historic charrette, the county had just incorporated into its Comprehensive Plan recommendations from its Land Use Task Force for more intensive land use. Suddenly county supervisors and staff were confronted during the charrette with the realization that still more intensive uses would inevitably be needed to capture the enormous economic, design and life-style benefits inherent in uniting Reston by bridging the multiple traffic lanes which had cut the community in two since its inception.

There was also the realization that time was short for the concerted public-private planning process necessary before transit planning decisions became locked in.

Of course ground (or air) wasn't broken the day after the charrette. But the assembled "important people" couldn't fail to be impressed by the gentle if impassioned plea of veteran, award-winning planner Pat Kane and by other leading experts on physical and financial feasibility.

At that thought, I abandoned my restorative slouch on the East Garden bench and walked southwest through more landscaped paths to my favorite Reston structure, the imposing Cultural Center erected by the Reston Joint Development Coalition in what was once a barren Nextel parking lot. I enjoy reading and rereading the plaque set to the right of the marble entry: “In memory of the eloquence of Patrick F. Kane, Planner, in urging eloquence of design throughout Reston and, on April 11, 2002, urging eloquence of design at this site.”

The Cultural Center, with its 700-seat theater managed by Reston Community Center, its visual arts exhibition space managed by GRACE and its community history, planning and development exhibits mounted by Reston Historic Trust, was closed of course, but radiant in the light of dawn.

Suddenly I became aware of another source of light. My wife had turned on the bedside lamp. “Snoring again,” she mumbled. “Just heavy breathing,” I slowly replied, adding to myself, “the heavy breathing of rapture.”

*William Nicoson remembers only prophetic dreams which come true.*