"That beauty – structural and natural – is a necessity of the good life and should be fostered."

Robert E. Simon
"To create an aesthetically pleasing environment for residents, where architectural structures complement the beauty of the natural land and open space is within walking distance of every home and apartment". This lofty ambition, among the goals articulated by Robert E. Simon for the development of Reston, was the architectural program for the small group of talented architects and planners assembled to design the first physical presence of this new town to rise on seven thousand acres of beautifully wooded rolling Virginia countryside. The village center, high-rise apartment building, and clustered housing around the eastern end of man-made twentyseven acre Lake Anne that resulted from this undertaking set a remarkably durable precedent for the architectural future of Reston. It was to become a base upon which everything that followed would be measured and compared.

Residential Architecture

Unique among most large scale developments, Reston has never had an elaborate set of design guidelines spelling out in great detail the permitted architectural styles, building materials, landscaping
The new developer did determine that in order to appeal to a broader range of the residential market a greater diversity of housing types, styles, and sizes was necessary. Thus came the introduction of the first traditionally designed "townhomes" to Reston. The cluster was carefully designed and planned with curving streets, substantial natural area preservation, heavy landscaping, quality materials, and authentic design features. They fit right in visually, they sold briskly, and the architectural palette of the new town was successfully expanded.

The later sixties and early seventies saw a dramatic quickening of the development pace, especially with rental garden apartment construction. These buildings, by definition, are large and very difficult to nestle quietly into the wooded landscape. A great deal of effort (not enough according to some observers at the time) was put into developing interesting facades, articulated forms, and massing that stepped up and down to conform to the rolling topography. The result was, in most cases, a low profile appearance from major streets that with matured landscaping maintains a residential scale.

As developer, Gulf Reston continued the practice of building most of the housing in Reston, particularly the lower priced,
higher density townhouse clusters. The designs were produced by various consulting architects which promoted a diversity of character, preventing the visual monotony often seen in large housing developments. Some parcels were sold to other builders with contractual stipulations that exterior design had to be reviewed and approved by the developer as well as the ABR.

The rate of development picked up through the mid-seventies, sweeping from west to east through Reston's large southern sector. To satisfy the heightened demand a larger proportion of parcels were sold to outside builders, especially the highly desirable land abutting the golf course and the two 45 acre lakes. These prime parcels presented a minimal architectural risk because the builders were highly motivated by their target upscale market to produce good design. Much of Reston's most dramatic (and continually marketable) residential architecture resulted from this process.

In the late seventies the role of developer was transferred from Gulf Reston to Reston Land Corporation, an affiliate of Mobil Corporation. Reston Land determined that it would not participate in the residential construction business, preferring to act as a land developer only, selling parcels to selected
builders and maintaining a complete right of design and product type review. With Reston now recognized as a highly desirable housing market, the developer has been able to select only the best from a wide range of interested builders.

A major challenge was to find design oriented builders who could produce an adequate quantity of entry-level housing to keep up with the demand, a role previously embraced by the developer. Several large national builders were anxious to enter the Reston market but at first were unwilling to modify their standard designs to be compatible with the Reston norm. After much time and effort (not enough according to some observers) two large merchant builders obtained developer and ABR design approval and began constructing affordable townhouse clusters. This effort is still ongoing at the present time with improved designs seen on each successive project.

In the eighties development moved into the northern sector, the last ¼ of Reston's residential acreage. The experience gained from twenty years of design and site planning is being applied here and the early reviews are encouraging. A major factor in an improved appearance is a set of new street design standards developed exclusively for north Reston. Over the years the
standards prescribed by the state of Virginia for road design have changed resulting in overly wide, flat, and straight street sections which require massive grading and tree clearing. The modified standards for north Reston will permit streets to be designed to follow the rolling terrain and to be narrower and more in scale with the residential neighborhoods.

The celebration of Reston's thirtieth anniversary will provide an opportunity to evaluate the results of the total effect of architecture on the environment in this new town in the rolling wooded countryside of northern Virginia.

Office / Industrial Architecture

The 1000 acres of industrially zoned land lining the north and south sides of the Dulles Airport Access Highway remained virtually dormant for the first fifteen years of Reston's development. The few buildings built during this period were mostly tucked into their wooded sites as their owners wished. Several are truly significant works of architecture.

Rumblings of change began in the late seventies with word that the Dulles Highway parallel lanes would soon become a reality.
The building of the parallel lanes (known locally as the Reston Expressway) along with a strong economy and a huge demand for properly zoned land in Fairfax County in the early eighties caused an explosion of office building in Reston. While some of the first buildings were visually mediocre, the competition has motivated developers to commission some of the top talent in the field of architecture to create highly imageable (and therefore marketable) buildings for them.

The late eighties and early nineties will see development of the Reston Town Center. This long-planned intensely urban mixed-use center will be the "downtown" for Reston consisting of hotels, offices, shopping, housing, cultural facilities, and urban public spaces. It has the potential for becoming a true architectural landmark.

Open Space / Pathway System

The master plan developed for Reston in the early sixties carefully delineated major areas to be perpetually maintained as unbuilt open space. Over the years the plan has been modified as to the type of open space but the total acreage has remained intact.

The original plan called for one lake in the southern sector.
This was later expanded to the two lakes that now exist. The northern sector was to include two golf courses (very much in vogue at the time) and a lake. Experience showed that the two existing golf courses were the limit that could be supported by the population and the plan was modified to show three lakes (very much in vogue at the time). Further study showed that constructing three lakes in the northern sector was not economically feasible so the plan was further revised to show one lake (recently built 16 acre Lake Newport) and two major open space parcels that will be developed with significant groupings of recreational amenities.

The original goal for Reston to have a total integrated network of pedestrian pathways separated from the vehicular system has been doggedly pursued throughout the development process. Three major variations from the initial Lake Anne area prototype have evolved - routing, lighting, and inclusion of the business sector.

The pathway system in the early years was designed to meander through the heavily wooded open space parcels. It was to be physically as far from the streets and traffic as possible. Observations of usage and a series of rape and robbery incidents in the mid-seventies led to a conceptual shift in pathway plan-
ning policy. Beginning in the South Lakes area and continuing into the currently developing northern sector, Reston planners are now implementing a pathway system that links destination points (e.g. schools, pools, churches, etc.) along routes that are plainly visible from major streets and that provide at least the perception of shorter travel distances than the earlier concept provided. Paths will still meander through wooded open space but they will be secondary "scenic routes" intended mainly for recreational use.

The initial concept for the pedestrian system called for most major paths to be lighted (as opposed to the conventional practice lighting roadways, recognizing that cars have lights, people don't). Early into the experience it was recognized that the practice of lighting miles of pathways with a privately owned system would eventually create onerous costs for the Reston Home Owners Association (RHOA). As a result, most of the pathway network is not lighted continuously and therefore gets little use after dark. Many people feel that lighting of Reston's pathway system should be undertaken by the Fairfax County government but the notion has not been viewed favorably by the political decision makers.

The third major variation in the pedestrian system has evolved
from the fact that early planning did not recognize a need to connect the business development areas with the residential areas. As both businesses and households grew in number it became clear that to be consistent with the Reston concept residents should have the ability to easily walk, run, or bike between home and work. A pathway system is currently being implemented throughout the Business Center with developers of new projects being required to build portions of the system that connect and pass through their properties. The missing links from prior development are slowly being filled in but it will take some time to complete the network.

The Master Plan

Two significant forces have evolved since the early sixties that have strained the validity of the original master plan for Reston. These are elementary schools and grocery stores. The plan initially called for Reston to be composed of seven villages, each containing a commercial village center and at least one elementary school.

As the Lake Anne village was developed the village center included a grocery store sized at 15,000 square feet. This was appropriate in size to service an area that could easily be walked to, promoting
less use of the automobile and encouraging pedestrian interaction that would foster a sense of cohesion and identity within the village.

By the time the second village center was built in Hunters Woods village, the standard size of a viable grocery store had grown to nearly 30,000 square feet. This had the effect of doubling the diameter of the necessary service area and increasing the size of the village to a point where many residents were beyond comfortable walking distance and chose to use the automobile to get back and forth from the center.

A similar situation occurred in the case of elementary schools. At the time Lake Anne village was developed, the Fairfax County School System norm for the size of elementary schools was 550 students. The service area for a school this size permitted most, if not all, students to walk to and from home and class.

By the time the second elementary school was built in Hunters Woods the standard building was required to house 990 students. Again, this had the practical effect of doubling the size of the service area, forcing many of the children to ride a bus to school.

The result of these and other, less significant, forces is that
Reston will now consist of five villages instead of the originally planned seven. The negative effects of enlarging the villages ripples through many of the basic principles of the Reston concept.

One of the most interesting aspects of large-scale development is that as each year goes by the constituency grows. At twenty years into the development of Reston there are now over 40,000 residents and 20,000 workers who are affected by each building that is built, each tree that is cut, each road that is paved, and each decision that is made by the developer.