

## **AMENITIES BEHIND THE EMPLOYEE SURGE: WHO PAYS?**

By William Nicoson

A common theme of discussions at a breakfast forum last Thursday on "Hi-Tech Employee Surge" was reliance on community amenities needed or appreciated by employees of major companies choosing to locate in Reston. In fact speakers at the forum, sponsored by the Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce, made it clear that the critical choice of location ("location, location, location") was motivated in large part by the existence of community amenities.

The forum was facilitated by Paul Lombardi, CEO of DynCorp. Speakers included Roxanne Kerr of DynCorp, Bob Waters of TRW, Terry Mellendorf of Nextel, Janet Sage of Siemens and Tim Hoechst of Oracle. The companies represented will account for most of the anticipated explosion by year end of at least 4,000 new employees in new office space at or near the intersection of Reston Parkway and the Dulles toll-road.

Obviously employees, at lunch-break or after work, will enjoy walking or jogging on Reston's safe and scenic pathways, swimming at a near-by pool, playing tennis or handball at a convenient court or organizing competing teams on an available ballfield. They will have a wide choice of restaurants for lunch at Town Center or readily accessible neighborhood centers. And the existence of quality day-care facilities in Reston is a blessing for employees from two-income families.

In some instances the existence of community amenities will not only serve the interests of employees but actually reduce the capital cost of an employer locating in Reston. Recognizing the quality of Reston restaurants, DynCorp, in its new space at Plaza America, has chosen not to include a full-scale cafeteria for employees. Speakers at the forum gave no indication that new corporate office space in Reston would include the in-house day-care facilities needed in locations without reliable facilities in place. Nor was there any suggestion that recreational amenities might be included in plans for corporate building or landscaping.

Of course saving corporate cafeteria and day-care space is good news for Reston restaurants and high-capacity professional day-care providers who will welcome the prospect of new business. The amenities made available by Reston Community Center to the surge of new employees will be handsomely financed by their corporate employers located within the RCC tax district. The mandatory RCC real estate tax increment is .06 per \$100 of value assessed by Fairfax County.

Compensation for use of amenities owned and maintained by the Reston Association is another matter. The amenities are substantial: 50 miles of pathways, a 73-acre nature center, 4 lakes of 125 acres for boating, 15 swimming pools, 49 tennis and multipurpose courts, and 25 ballfields. All are financed not by user fees but by assessment of home owners outside Town Center. While RA's activities have always benefitted businesses located in the community, RA, unlike RCC, has never received financial support from the business community.

Reston's explosion of economic growth raises the question whether RA's support exclusively by residents can persist without deterioration of RA's ability to conserve and maintain vital community assets. Almost one-third of residential units contributing to RA's finances are capped below the current assessment. The margin between capped and uncapped assessments is expected to grow rapidly in coming years. And at the very time when RA's revenue is threatened, the surge of new employees using RA's paths and facilities will clearly increase clean-up and maintenance costs.

RA directors and leaders of the business community must consider together ways to assure financial support for RA at appropriate levels now and in the future.

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