

THE LEADERSHIP OF BOB DIX

By William Nicoson

Leadership is, first, about listening. Leaders advocate and make decisions beneficial to those they lead and supervise how their decisions are carried out. But first they must consult those they lead to understand what will benefit their communities. Fairfax County Supervisor Bob Dix has a strong record as a listening leader.

Dix came to the Board of Supervisors in 1992 aware that Reston teens lacked a focal space where they could gather to gab, listen to music, dance and play games (a "healthy hang-out"). He brought in kids for advice, set up a teen council and raised money from the private sector to renovate space unused during weekends in a senior center to become the teen hang-out. It became an institutional model replicated county-wide and received a national award from the National Association of Counties.

As Reston's growth burgeoned, Dix listened to teens and parents who advised that this initial space was small and the limitation to weekend use restrictive. He approached Reston Community Center's board about collaboration in establishing a full-time, fully equipped recreational center for teens. When the board indicated little interest in recreational expansion of its facilities, Dix took the proposal to YMCA managers then designing its \$8 million Reston facility scheduled to open in September next year. Following recommendations of a Dix task force and its committees, a 10,000 square-foot wing will be dedicated to teen use, with a gymnasium, including stage and screen, a CD library with insulated listening space and a "computer café" offering state-of-the-art technology. No taxpayer dollars will fund construction of the "Y".

Dix used the same consultative process in leading the restoration of Lake Anne Village Center. A task force of interested citizens was active throughout the design and funding process, made possible by a \$1 million HUD loan masterminded by Dix. This was the beginning of the remarkable revitalization of the plaza at Lake Anne which Dix calls "one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen." Reston's first village center, emblematic of Reston's spirit, has now been restored in animation as well as architectural style.

Alerted by citizens and The Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce to the needed expansion of streetlights on major arteries, Dix established a fund for that purpose fed by proffers of developers in the area. The fund stands now at about \$50,000. County staff is reviewing priorities recommended by Dix's Street Light Task Force and determining cost estimates.

The ultimate example of Dix's consultative leadership style was the creation of the Reston 2000 Task Force which has mapped out a plan, both short-term and long-term, for Reston's future after intensive deliberations of committees on land use, transportation, relations among community organizations and other critical issues. Discussions are now underway among local organizations

determined to monitor execution of the Task Force's recommendations.

Dix is standing for reelection on November 2nd. Those who appreciate the benefits conferred by him on their communities by close coordination with citizens and local organizations will push the Dix button in the polling booth – except perhaps those partisans who accord priority to political party or personal animus rather than to community. Let's hope that advocates for community carry the day.

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