

## **RECORD GROWTH AND RAIL IMPERATIVES**

By William Nicoson

At a time when citizens of neighboring Loudoun County have expressed at the ballot box their overwhelming preference for limited growth, Reston is experiencing a construction explosion highlighted by major office renovation to expand space and employment and accelerated build-out of Reston's master-plan. In other words, major urban renewal has hit Reston well before completion of its planned development.

By the end of 1998, 16 million square feet of office and commercial space had been completed in Reston, and currently 3.3 million additional square feet are under construction. These figures make Reston the fastest growing commercial center in northern Virginia. Yet the vacancy rate in the Reston/Herndon office market remains at a low 3% and, as a result, office construction is being undertaken "on spec" – without tenant commitments.

An example is Koll Metropolitan's \$35 million spec project at 11111 Sunset Hills Road with a ground-breaking set this month. The 5-story, 222,958 square feet office building will be built on the 10-acre site now occupied by the Letters Carriers building. Another example is the planned office renovation in Isaac Newton Square by Peter Lawrence Co. which will expand renovated space by a factor of 10.

Meanwhile Reston's earliest Hotel, the Sheraton, is embarking on a major renovation which will increase occupancy potential, add structured parking and turn its grade-level parking into an old-world plaza with shops, fountains and landscaping to delight its patrons as well as Reston residents.

All this is urban renewal the Reston way: no federal subsidy needed.

Across the Dulles Access Road from the Sheraton, planned construction of office towers has accelerated. The first of two towers at Plaza America has been topped out and the second is well on its way. Next door, Oracle will break ground on its second office building ahead of schedule.

Reston's burgeoning growth contributes to the critical need for rail transit in the Dulles Corridor. Therefore developers situated near sites of future transit stations have an obligation to shape their plans to fit the imperatives of rail connections. Pedestrian links from activity centers to station sites are essential. These links may offer opportunities for mixed commercial and residential uses of considerable value to owners of land near station sites. And pedestrian-generated ridership will greatly improve the cost effectiveness of transit operations.

For example, the Sheraton renovation and the tower projects at Plaza America and Oracle are all neighbors of the designated site of the Reston Parkway transit station. Oracle is a particularly critical neighbor because appropriate pedestrian links to the station over Oracle land would invite

ready access to transit by Town Center residents and visitors using the tunnel planned under Reston Parkway -- and establish a new commercial profit center for Oracle which need interfere in no way with office uses of the land.

The Land Use Committee of the Reston 2000 Task Force recommended “mixed-use higher densities” around Reston transit stations and “pedestrian access to the Reston Parkway station site” in “new development in the Town Center area”. Advising Fairfax County on implementation of land use recommendations in this report are Committee Chairman Charles Veatch, Planning Commission Chairman John Paliatello and Michael Guthrie. Their mission is critical to the quality of Reston’s future.

*William Nicoson is a co-author of “Joint Development: Making The Real Estate-Transit Connection” and a former publisher of Connection Newspapers.*