

RESTON'S SPECIAL QUALITY AT RISK

By William Nicoson

Among Reston's most distinctive features, adding enormously to the life-style and property values of Restonians, is the Reston Community Center which offers performances by both professional and community groups in music, dance and theater, a 24-meter heated swimming pool and whirlpool, art exhibits and classes, and meeting space for community groups. These activities are managed by a local Board of Governors, assuring their quality and response to local needs. But because RCC activities are financed in part by a tax district, some local residents and businesses, infected with tax-cut fever, are calling for elimination of the district and its Board of Governors.

In the Oct. 17 preference poll for Governors of RCC, opponents of the winning slate argued against expansion of RCC activities into Lake Anne on the grounds that, despite assurances to the contrary in an exhaustive feasibility study, a tax increase might result. Some of these opponents argued that in fact the tax district should be abolished.

After the poll, members of the losing slate published letters claiming that their slate won at all polling places except Lake Anne, vindicating their views. These claims were false. The poll results by percent of ballots tabulated by The League of Women Voters are as follows:

	Hunters Woods	Lake Anne	North Point	Regional Library	South Lakes	Tall Oaks	Absentee	Total
Winners	46.8	74.9	51.2	49.9	44.2	53.8	49.8	53.4
Losers	53.2	25.1	48.8	50.1	55.8	46.2	50.2	46.6

A majority of voters at polling places in North Reston generally welcomed RCC outreach on the north side of the community, while a majority of voters in polling places in South Reston, where the existing RCC facility is located, was understandably content with programs at the existing facility. There is no apparent suggestion in these results of general discontent with RCC or its tax district.

A much more serious threat to RCC as a community institution has been raised by a legislative proposal eliminating the RCC tax district which was placed before the Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce board by John Palatiello, Co-Chairman of its Government Affairs Committee and a Fairfax County Planning Commissioner. He argues that tax district funding required for Dulles corridor rail will not be achieved without eliminating such funding for RCC. The GRCC board deleted the proposal from its 1999 agenda but left open the possibility of future consideration..

How much does a Reston business pay annually to the tax district? It pays, like any resident, \$0.06 per \$100 of assessed value. So a business with real property assessed at \$500,000 loses

\$300 a year from gross income which, adjusted for tax savings by reason of federal deductions for local taxes, costs roughly \$186. For this, should penny-wise businesses seek to deprive their community of management responsibility for programs and facilities which shape the identity of the community and favorably affect property values? The tax funding necessary for rail to Dulles is so far beyond the penny-ante league of RCC that GRCC directors I've talked to wondered how existence of a local district for RCC could foreclose creation of a regional district for rail.

Palatiello argues that RCC should be turned into a County facility and, like other centers in the County, be operated at County expense with an advisory board of local residents. He's right that the County should offer RCC financial support comparable to that offered other similar centers. He's wrong to suggest that the tax district and its local Board of Governors be scrapped to gain that support.

William Nicoson is a former publisher of Connection Newspapers.