

WALKING IN RESTON IN THE NEW YEAR

By William Nicoson

Early every New Year I take a long walk, usually around one of Reston's lakes, for the sheer pleasure of identifying a few of the features of Reston's landscaped walkways which invite me to get around on shoe leather rather than tire treads and which I tend to take for granted the rest of the year.

This New Year I had more to consider than usual because on December 16th I attended the presentation at the Building Museum of the annual Vincent Scully Prize which recognizes exemplary practice, scholarship or criticism in architecture, landscape design, planning or related disciplines. Vincent Scully is the highly regarded Sterling Professor Emeritus of Art History at Yale University. He was the first recipient of the prize in 1999. This year the prize was awarded to his former students, Andr s Duany and his wife, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk.

In the course of elaborating what he called a unified theory of building community, Duany made slighting comments about Reston, as if its planning and architecture were of an old school from which he hoped to save the future. While his complaints were unspecific, Duany spoke in praise of walkable communities as if he had invented the concept.

Duany's projects include Kentlands, near Gaithersburg, MD, a pleasant neighborhood featuring alleys and exclusively Federal-style architecture beside a huge, conventional shopping mall with at-grade parking. It embraces 1,760 residences with an estimated population of 5,000.

Is Kentlands the ideal walkable community? Well, I'm ready to concede it's a walkable neighborhood to minor commercial uses within the neighborhood, though the mall, an obvious destination, is not centered within residential uses but on their outer boundary. But it has to be walkable if Duany's "unified theory" is creditable. Let's be charitable and accept his view.

In any case, there is a vast difference between a walkable neighborhood built at the limited scale of most of Duany's projects and a walkable community of 7,000 acres such as Reston. But Duany publicly seemed to dismiss the notion that Reston was designed to be, and is, a walkable community.

I puzzled about this as I toured the wonders of Lake Anne on foot. By the time I reached home, I was determined to investigate the extent of Reston's walking scale.

On the Reston Association's Map Guide, I drew identical circles around each village center, the town center and Plaza America center. The radius of each circle was the distance of my home from Lake Anne Center, a distance which I walk almost every day at a moderate pace in 20 minutes. For residents living within one or more of these circles, I'm confident this is walking scale.

From this test, I concluded that virtually 80% of north Reston residents and 60% of south Reston residents live within walking distance of one of Reston's animating centers, accessible by foot within 20 minutes.

I also believe that many of those who choose to live in isolated splendor beyond walking distance to these centers would drive to the nearest center around the corner if it existed. And of course there are those with disabilities precluding any walking at all.

Duany's unified theory of walkable communities offers no recognition of such diversity in preference or necessity. I'm not sure, but I hope, that he'll amend his theory to conform with the reality of the market place.

In the meantime, I'll take another walk to celebrate Reston as a walkable community this year, in years past and in years to come.

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