

RCA's Role for 1989-90 and Beyond

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Nancy Larsoy

RCA was founded to insure, when Robert Simon was forced to abdicate control of Reston, that his idealism would endure about what made our New Town special. His vision was expressed in seven goals, which RCA adopted as its rationale/creed. Now RCA should take the lead in design of future programs that carry those goals into the next quarter century.

Since 1967 -- for 22 years -- RCA's initiatives had added meat to the bones of those ideals. Our success as a community has won international acclaim. In candor, RCA's contributions to that success have been significant -- perhaps, critical. RCA's activities have enhanced concerns of both residential and commercial aspects of Reston, a community which today includes nearly 54,000 residents and over 1,500 firms employing more than 32,000 persons. Planning & Zoning (P&Z), chaired by eight exceptional persons since RCA began, has been the association's most noted committee, among the several where volunteer effort has meant preservation of Simon's dream.

Now, in 1989-90, Reston completes its first quarter century. Now is the time to assess where the community has come, and where it should go, in terms of initial aspirations.

Most important, now is the time to plan for the next 25 years. We have achieved much, dependent upon those first plans, a visionary County Board and a creative developer. But for the next 25 years, we will not be able to depend on Robert Simon's genius; we may find future Boards less visionary and, certainly, preoccupied with needs from other parts of the County; the developer soon will be gone.

It is up to citizens to create the new dreams, and to plan for Reston's next stage and the years to come. Some of this already is being done, but we are getting it in bits and pieces, from organizations and groups formed around single purposes. Most of these plans do not address larger concepts. Many of them reflect state-of-the-art thinking, but lack the trail-blazing for which Reston has been noted. And, all too often, persons dedicated to a special cause are disillusioned because they find too few enlist in their parade. Out of this grows the contention that Reston now is too big, too diverse, to operate as it once did, which too often has been fed by the local media.

Proposed: RCA take the leadership role in a community-wide assessment of where we have been, what we are doing now, where we should go, and how we might get there. For starters, each existing organization would be asked to address those questions in terms of its own activities, and to match its program to one or more of Simon's goals. We especially would concentrate on desires for the future, and means for accomplishment. We then would "educate" various groups about what others have said, especially concentrating on where their programs collide or overlap. Next, would come an effort to identify and/or nurture new and creative thinking to describe our condition as a community and to design programs that solve our problems.

I have talked about this concept with some other community leaders, particularly from the business community, but not limited to it, all of whom have vested interests, asking if they would be comfortable with RCA leading such a program, and if they would participate within it. The response has been enthusiastic.

Issues which brought us together include Governance, Redevelopment, Health Care, Transportation and Affordable Housing. But, for the RCA Board, I chose to explore the validity of the idea by assessing recreation/arts/leisure-time programs.

This is just a first step. If the program excites wide response, we will need money and professional help at future stages. Given what I've heard, I think we can get them.