

GAINING DENSITIES AT LAKE ANNE

The plaza at Lake Anne, Reston's first village center, is a masterpiece of architectural inspiration and dynamic design. But for many years it has been apparent that its shops and restaurants lack the commercial dynamics of those located in larger shopping centers. In recent years efforts have been made by concerned citizens to address this issue, but some key property owners, particularly Lake Anne Fellowship House, showed no interest.

Last year Fairfax County's Revitalization Committee, chaired by Kurt Pronske, commissioned an economic analysis of this issue by Basil Baumann Prost & Associates, whose report has now been issued (available on the internet at <http://www.fcrevit.org/lakeanne/main.htm>) and discussed at a public forum on March 16. In the report, three concepts involving increased densities ranged from 44 new residential units and 25,000 sq. feet of new office space to 935 new residential units and 105,000 sq. feet of new office space.

Sites indicated for absorption of greater densities were the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church and space adjacent to Reston Association property. For the high scale option, renovation of the low-density Crescent Apartments was discussed

At the forum, Reston's founder, Robert E. Simon, Jr., spoke out against renovation of the Crescent Apartments complex, which offers 181 "affordable" residential units. Perhaps recalling failed efforts in the past to interest diverse property owners in a replanning effort, Simon also urged Fairfax County to use its powers of condemnation to initiate renovation. Fairfax Supervisor Catherine Hudgins indicated that Lake Anne would have priority in County revitalization efforts but showed little enthusiasm for invoking eminent domain.

I have my own preference for location of new densities at Lake Anne. The major portal to this plaza of architectural and design preeminence is through a parking lot that is an eye sore. I would hope we could turn the offensive parking lot and its northern out-buildings into the landscaped base for a tower which would balance in height the existing Heron House and share its graceful architectural elements.

Three levels of structured parking would be sited underground. At least five stories of commercial and office uses, featuring covered outdoor walkways, would rise from ground level. The upper stories would offer residential apartments, with balconies, in a range of sizes and prices. Mid-rise units on the vacant parcels flanking the entrance from Baron Cameron Avenue toward Lake Anne might serve as a portal to the new tower and its landscaped park, visible from the Avenue.

This solution limits the number of property owners involved, though, for reasons lost in time, there are several parking lot owners in addition to the Lake Anne Condominium Association. Units in the new tower could fall within the jurisdiction of the existing condominium, greatly improving its solvency. The existing condominium already has a mix of residential and

commercial members and has found ways to accommodate their disparate objectives.

Best of all, Lake Anne's architectural and design excellence would be enhanced rather than challenged. This should be a welcome outcome for all Restonians as well as the numerous planning and development experts who consistently cite Reston as one of the nation's prime planned communities.

William Nicoson is a founder of Planned Community Archives, Inc., chairman of Reston Historic Trust which operates The Reston Museum in Lake Anne Plaza, and a former director of the Lake Anne Condominium Association.