

INCORPORATING RESTON: TRIUMPH OR FOLLY?

By William Nicoson

Some Restonians have felt slighted when Fairfax County Supervisors appoint Herndon residents to serve as members of a commission or committee but overlook residents of Reston. Why this discrepancy? Herndon is an incorporated town. Reston is not. Celebrated around the world as an extraordinarily successful planned community, Reston remains a municipal nonentity at home.

In the 1970s and 80s, several efforts by community activists were made to incorporate Reston as a town. One effort resulted in a referendum by residents on a town charter adopted by the Virginia House of Delegates. It failed, largely, I believe, because it offered no new powers to the community other than garbage collection.

The powers exercised by Herndon are instructive. Our neighboring town has an elected Mayor and Town Council, a Town Manager, a Planning Commission, a Board of Zoning Appeals, an Architectural Review Board, a Heritage Preservation Review Board, a Building Board of Appeals, a School Board, a Community Cultural Arts Center Citizens' Advisory Committee, a Cemetery Advisory Committee and various other ad hoc committees.

Herndon, with a population of 22,000, is the third largest town in Virginia, though Reston's population far exceeds Herndon's. Town services in Herndon include public works, community development, police, parks and recreation, a golf course, neighborhood resources and a town attorney. A 16 million-dollar municipal center complex was completed in 1995.

These municipal powers, responsibilities and investments are expensive, especially because town residents pay the same real property taxes to Fairfax County as Reston residents (1.00 per \$100 of appraised value). In addition, residents of Herndon pay to the town .25 per \$100 of appraised value. Restonians pay only .052 per \$100 of appraised value to Fairfax County to finance the activities of Reston Community Center and pay to Reston Association, to finance its activities, a flat annual assessment (currently \$425).

In short, it appears that Restonians enjoy many of the benefits of an incorporated town while avoiding much of the expense entailed by incorporation.

But for many town advocates, particularly leaders of Reston Citizens Association's efforts to dignify Reston with legal municipal status, cost is not as significant as having our own mayor and our own municipal bureaucracy. Restonians would serve on county commissions and committees as town representatives and would be consulted by County Supervisors in the same manner as Herndon.

In view of Reston's celebrity around the world as a triumph of sound planning and development

in Fairfax County, why shouldn't Reston's leaders seek sponsorship of a resolution before the County Supervisors which would qualify Restonians to be named to all commissions, committees and similar organizations on which any town within the county would be represented?

Without consulting any of the Supervisors, my guess is that they would all prefer such a resolution to the recognition of Reston as a fully incorporated town, free to plan, zone, and supervise development without County approval or, for that matter, even with County consultation.

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