

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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ERL -1
See America First !
Reston Va., Inc.

32 West 73rd Street
New York, New York 10023
7 February 1967

Mr. R.H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte,

In the past few years the phrase "New Town" has become very popular in the disorganized but trend conscious American construction industry. The phrase is used with semantic abandon to describe an increasing number of projects that are, at best, enormous subdivisions. The bandwagon debate of the "shelter mags" - trade journals like "House and Home", and "Practical Builder" centers on acreage and cost and makes only incidental reference to planning. If a large new tract includes a few stores and an industrial site or two, the builder will want it to be called a "New Town."

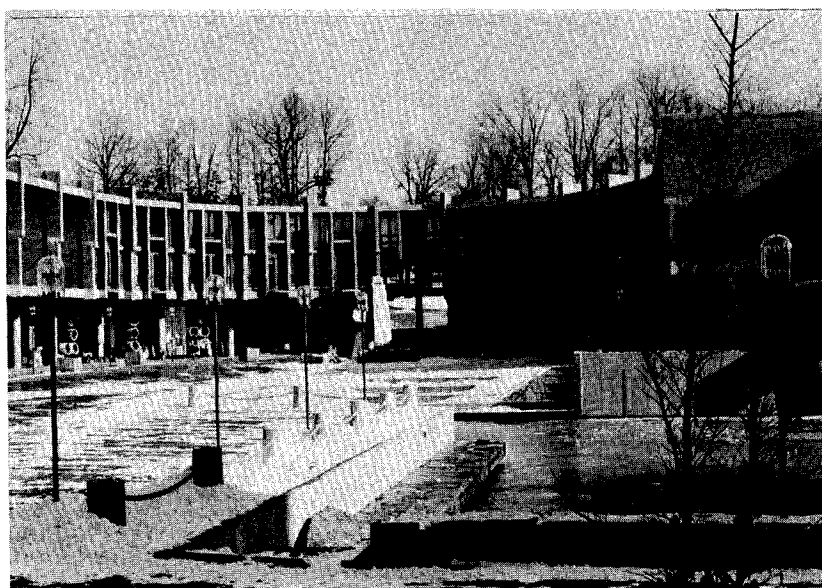
Reston, however, is a new kind of town for America. It is not a New Town according to the primary European criterion - that is, it is not being built with government sponsorship as a matter of public policy. Reston is Inc. It is being privately developed for (ultimate) profit by Robert E. Simon with the financial backing of the Gulf Oil Co. and John Hancock Insurance Company.

Reston and Columbia, the as yet unbuilt new city in Maryland, both pass the second, and perhaps most important test of a real New Town. They both began with comprehensive, carefully reasoned Master Plans that were finished before any construction or land development took place. A Master Plan deals basically with land use, but in doing so it describes the kinds of housing, recreational & community facilities, schools, commercial and industrial sites to be developed as well as outlining the distribution of open space. Thus a Master Plan has social implications.

European New Towns fall roughly into two categories - the English model combines housing facilities and open space with enough prime employment so the resultant towns are economically self-contained. In Scandinavia the trend is toward residential satellite communities. The bulk of primary employment opportunities remains downtown in the center city. The success of the satellite towns depends in large measure on efficient transportation systems. At this point it is unclear which way Reston will veer. Originally it was supposed to be self-supporting, thus, more or less, in the British mold. It is probably going to end up an intriguingly American mixture.

Reston occupies a 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ square mile tract of Virginia countryside 18 miles from Washington, D.C. As they say in the construction business, it is partially "on the ground." Almost 1500 people are living there. By 1980 the number should be closer to 75,000. Last month I went to explore an American style New Town in its infancy.

It was close to noon on a very bright, cold day when I noticed a herd of teenagers swarming across the Washington Plaza in Reston's Lake Anne Village Center. (Note: Everything has a Name - Reston itself is an acronym of the founder's initials, Lake Anne is named for his wife and the streets in one future housing cluster will be named for other famous New Towns. Taploa Road, Cumbernauld Drive, etc.)



By the stairs (no shores) of Lake Anne.
The Washington Plaza of the Lake Anne Village Center.

Retracing their path across the snow covered Plaza, I learned that they were students from nearby high schools who had come to Reston for a special showing of Olivier's "Hamlet," in the Community Center. Inside, Liza Jackman, the young woman working in the Center office, politely agreed to show me around. (The people who live and work in Reston are used to strangers poking around and asking questions. In some of the shops clerks volunteer their opinions.) The Center includes gallery space for exhibitions, a kitchen fully equipped with Reston china, an all purpose room that is used for dance classes, religious services, movies, meetings, private parties, also a tiny post office and a separate "Rathskeller" for Reston's teenagers.

Liza Jackman, her husband and their two small children were living in an apartment in Falls Church when the first townhouses were offered for sale in Reston. They knew that Reston was not going to be just another suburb, but the real reason they came was the excellent financing they were able to get for a house. Last year, just before the money market tightened, the Jackmans sold it and moved into one of the 2 story apartments above the Village Center shops. Like just about everyone else in Reston Liza speaks rather proudly about the architects and the architecture. The town house was by Cloethiel Woodard Smith, the apartment by Whittlesey, Conklin & Rossant. To me, a stranger, Liza merely says that the townhouse didn't suit their needs, and besides, it was sold within a week. The wistful tone says what words do not; the Jackmans bought the most house they thought they could afford without anticipating the hidden expenses of home ownership. The important thing is that they didn't have to leave Reston. "The apartment is a little cramped sometimes," she says, "but it's fun."

Liza's husband is a salesman and he uses the family car to commute into the District. Because his schedule is flexible he misses the rush hour traffic so it's just a half hour drive each way. Life in Reston, even without a car, has a degree of mobility and a diversity of choices that can only be called urban. Liza is free to hold a part time job in the Community Center. The children, who are now 5 and 4, go to the Lake Anne Nursery-Kindergarten school above the Safeway in the mornings. In the afternoon they play with the children of a woman who lives in the Hickory Cluster of townhouses up the hill. They walk home by themselves without ever crossing the main road. Liza does all her basic shopping right in the Washington Plaza. The Safeway, drug store, a card shop, library and several boutiques are quite literally at her doorstep.

To fit in everything she wants to do, Liza starts her day at six a.m. and occasionally takes time off from work to catch up on the ironing. "You can get day workers from Herndon. White women come and clean too, because the pay is so good. They get about \$12 a day including transportation." Herndon is a small town about 4 miles from Reston. "But I can't afford it," Liza says, "besides, I'm from the South - why my relatives in South Carolina can still get a live-in maid for that much money a week."

Reston is integrated. Liza honestly remembered, "I didn't know what it was going to mean. I just never thought about it. The first family that came built their own house with a swimming pool and a fence. They didn't integrate at all." But things are moving quickly. "The others that have come get along real well, after all they can afford to live here. One of my son's playmates is a nice little Negro boy, in fact he's going to his birthday part on Saturday. His mother is especially popular, a lot of my friends are just crazy about her. Of course, I don't really know how to say much to her. She's from Greensboro and so am I. I can't say 'where did you live' or things like that because I know where she lived, and she knows where I lived. In that way, you see, things are a lot harder for me than for the kids. They just get along fine. I never expected to live near Negroes, but times have changed."

"A lot of amateurs came to Reston in the beginning. Arty people - they came here because they like to paint and sing and dance and that kind of stuff. There are a lot of old ladies too, whose husbands always had to drive them everywhere. They get around here by themselves and seem to like it. Mostly it's younger people like us - you know - with little kids and all. I feel sort of sorry for the teenagers. They're outnumbered, only 88 of them, and they're having a hard time getting organized. Oh sure, the babysitting business is good at night, but most of the women here need someone to watch out for the kids during the day, that's when it's hard. Reston's growing fast now, you can't know everybody anymore." Perhaps because she does work in the Community Center Liza does know a good many of the Restonians. "There is a big difference," she noted "between the people who live here, around the Village Center, and the families that live out in Hunter's Woods. They bought lots and built their own houses. We bought townhouses, or got apartments from Reston Inc., so we got to know the executives, the people from the executive offices. They are far away from everything and they complain a lot."

The 1 to 3 acre lots in the area called Hunter's Woods were sold at a time when Reston Inc. needed cash to finish the Village Center. It was an economic decision to sell then; the planners knew that the families in Hunter's Woods were going to be isolated and possibly alienated from the rest of the community for the first few years, until their Village Center is built. Eventually Reston will have seven Village Centers and one Town Center for department stores etc. It's rural suburbia out there now and the Hunter's Woods folk are prey to suburbia's most vexing problem - auto dependence. "The woods are lovely, dark and deep," but it's miles to go for eggs, milk and other essentials. (By the way, despite the fact that there is a reputable distillery on the property, there is no liquor store in Reston and probably will not be one until the Town Center is built. The package store in Herndon provides those essential commodities. I'm told the store is crowded on Saturdays.)

Most of the people who work in Reston don't live there. Some are planning to move into the garden apartments on Vantage Hill when they are finished this spring, but the rents there begin at \$125, still too high for most service employees.

I met Peggy when I was looking at model homes one afternoon. She is a young Negro girl who cleans six model homes every day, five days a week. She spends her days alone in the quiet and sparsely furnished houses, going from one to the next with her mops and brooms. It's an easy job once you get used to the silence that is broken only by the sounds of small children playing outside. A team of boys comes to do the heavy work like washing windows. Peggy makes \$60 a week.

She was born and raised in Herndon. In high school she thought briefly about becoming a secretary, but she never mastered typing, and preferred home economics anyway. Before coming to Reston Peggy worked in the kitchen of the Fairfax Country Club. "It was awful hot in that kitchen." Her husband is working in Reston as a carpenter.

Would Peggy like to live in Reston? "Mmm" she says "I'd like it all right, but I couldn't bring my trailer." Peggy speaks very slowly and softly, but when she talks about her trailer her eyes brighten. "Bought it six months ago down at Virginia Mobile Homes in Fairfax, \$400 down and \$58 a month." Over and over she told me how pretty it is. It's big, and new - it's 55 feet long about 18 feet wide, has two bedrooms bath, kitchen and living room, and, I gather, came furnished as well. "All I had to buy, all I needed besides, was a TV and a phonograph."

Peggy wanted a home of her own but she didn't want to move far away from her mother and grandmother. It was her own idea to buy the trailer, she didn't tell anyone, not even her husband who was rather startled at first. The trailer was moved into Peggy's grandmother's back yard where it sits on cement blocks. Last fall they planted grass seed and flowers so it would look nice in the spring. But it no longer matters how it looks because in June Peggy wants to trade this trailer in for a three bedroom model that will cost only \$10 more a month. "People come to visit and like to stay over," she explained, "my mother comes a lot."

Peggy likes Reston for approximately the same reasons she likes her trailer; it's pretty and it works. Weekends she enjoys coming back and walking around Reston. Herndon, she allows, "is mostly just houses and there's nothing to see." One day, she fatalistically expects, Reston will look just the same. But she has thought about how nice her trailer would look on a hill surrounded by trees.



Peggy's view.



Chloethiel Woodard Smith designed the townhouse in the foreground. The high rise apartment building, called Heron House, faces onto Lake Anne and the Village Center.

This is phase one in Reston's development. It shouldn't be surprising that right now Reston is exclusively middle class. Most new housing is bought by the "get set" - youngish couples with small children. Currently most of the men work outside Reston. At the very beginning the only employers in Reston were Reston Inc., and the A. Smith Bowman Distillery; the rest was open land.

Piet Hein, the Danish mathematician who writes small poems called Grooks, summarized the fact of the matter in one verse called "T.T.T." - Things take Time." After almost five years of planning and development Reston is really just beginning. At the same time that it appears to have become a middle class nirvana, a number of elements are at work to change Reston into a real New Town. The press, after heaping praise on Reston's architecture and design, noticed that the first residents were comfortably bourgeois and dismissed hopes that Reston might be able, even with its Master Plan, to diversify itself into becoming a New Town. Because construction at Columbia, Md. has not yet begun the fickle critics are able to lavish pure praise on its social planning; praise undefiled by the first visible evidence of the housing market. Its a long way from paper plans to a New Town.

Reston has established itself; visitors have seen its style and envied its facilities. It has established, using high architectural standards, a pattern of mixed housing (townhouses, garden apartments, high rise apartments and detached single family units). The casual visitor can see that cluster zoning generally produces woods, not lawn. The swimming pools, golf course, tennis courts, and Village Center itself, not only exist, they are obviously used. Reston's first elementary school opened just a few weeks ago. The absence of a nearby elementary school deterred many buyers at first. Indeed, the small number of teenagers partially reflects the fact that the location of good schools nearby is a critical, sometimes crucial, factor in home buying.

Still Reston has proved that it is an attractive place where it is possible to live in a most civilized, yet sylvan, fashion. As a result, businessmen are thinking about locating in Reston's industrial areas. A few research and development firms are up and open. Signs or construction announce the future homes of nearly a dozen more firms. Admittedly the kind of industry Reston attracts (and seeks) is white collar. That doesn't necessarily indicate overt discrimination on the part of Reston against steel mills or auto factories - they are hardly indigenous to the Washington area anyway. The only things produced in bulk by the District of Columbia and its environs are verbiage and paper.

White collar in American terms covers a relatively wide income spread. Reston is determined to develop housing for employees as well as employers and executives. That good intention should be made visible by the time the headquarters of the United States Geological Survey (which has 2400 low and middle range civil service employees) are ready for occupancy, in about two years. If, as promised, suitable housing is available, most of the USGS people probably will live, as well as work, in Reston.

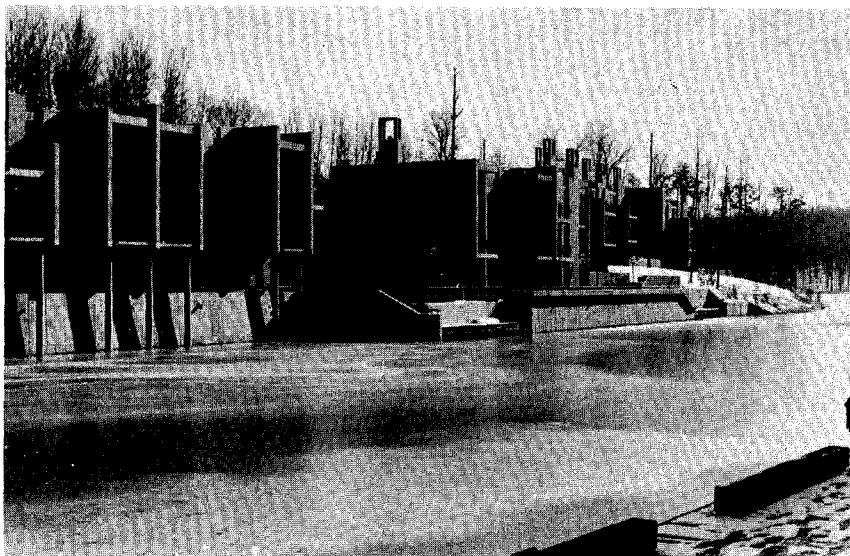
The Lutheran Church is building 200 units of housing for the aged near the Lake Anne Village Center. The apartment buildings will include some recreation facilities the community can share in addition to special medical services for the residents. Last month Reston was given a grant by the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs for an experiment in the integration of low cost housing into a planned residential community. Using conventional methods and materials, it is impossible, without subsidies, to build decent housing for sale or rent by low income families. Pre-fabricated housing however, need not look like trailers. The technology that built Peggy's trailer, Reston and HUD think, can be adapted to row houses, garden apartments and possibly high rise dwellings that will blend into Reston.

The social integration will be more difficult. Modern Americans are unused to living in heterogeneous communities and Reston's social planning will be challenged in the critical period when people with different backgrounds, different income levels, as well as different needs and purposes begin to share facilities ranging from schools and child care centers to swimming pools, open woodland and the community center. That will be the real test of a New Town.

Sincerely,

Eden Ross Lipson

Eden Ross Lipson



- Midwinter-

This time it's
the sides of
Lake Anne.

Right - a map showing what you can see in Reston today.

The maps are both from Reston Va., Inc. handouts.

Bottom - an answer to the question "where is Reston?"

