Telosa

Building a World-Class City:
The Importance of Community Connections

Best practices from around the world

Telosa Community Foundation
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Excerpt

Case Study: Reston, Virginia - Social Capital and Belonging



“Live, Work, Play” - Robert E. Simon, Jr., Founder

Vision/Goals

- **Vision:** Reston's vision, summarized in its motto "Live, Work, Play," is to create a balanced and sustainable community where residents can enjoy a high quality of life while living, working, and recreating within the same community. The community values diversity, inclusivity, environmental stewardship, and a strong sense of place.
- Build a new town that was not characterized by the suburban sprawl that was typical of post-WWII development.

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- Walkability, accessible amenities, and the idea of living and working in the same area.
- Open to everyone of all ages, incomes, and ethnicities. It became the first open community in Virginia, well before the Fair Housing Act of 1968 made housing discrimination illegal.
- Reston's Founding Principles directly informed the town's design:
    - Reston would have **housing** for all
    - Reston would allow residents to **"Live, Work & Play"** in the same community
    - Reston would put the i**mportance and dignity of each individual** as the focal point of planning
    - Reston would be **beautiful** - nature would be fostered
    - Reston would accommodate **leisure time**
    - Reston would have **amenities** from the outset including a library, golf courses, art, and more
    - Reston would be **financially successful**

Background

- Reston, Virginia's history is rooted in a vision of creating a planned community that prioritized community interaction, inclusivity, and a high quality of life. Its founder, Robert E. Simon Jr., purchased the land in the early 1960s with the intention of developing a new kind of suburban environment
- Robert E. Simon Jr. created the community's motto: "Live, Work, Play."
- Founded on April 10, 1964. The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors approved RPC zoning and the Reston Master Plan on July 18, 1962
- Reston required a Residential Planned Community (RPC) zoning that would allow for mixed-use, mixed-density flexible development. Housing would be constructed in tightly knit groupings called clusters, which allowed for woodland conservation and recreational areas.
- Gulf Oil Corp. was an early investor. Three years after Reston's founding, struggles over home sales and development costs culminated; Simon was forced out by the Gulf Oil board of directors.
- Gulf created a subsidiary, Gulf Reston Inc., to manage the project. Gulf prioritized profitability but also largely followed the master plan. Central plazas remained a fixture of the villages, but Gulf emphasized they needed to be profitable.
- Gulf Reston later divested its holdings to an investment firm and transferred title of many of its recreational facilities which protected them from overdevelopment.
- Despite the management shift, Reston's community values held and became an integral part of the town's culture.

Facts and Figures

- An unincorporated community in Fairfax County

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- Population: 63,226 (2020 Census)
- Area: 15.7 Square Miles
- 2002 Reston received the American Institute of Certified Planners Landmark Award
- Reston Town Center, with restaurants, shopping, offices, and residences opened in 1990.
- In 2014, Metro Silver Line came to Wiehle Avenue in Reston with another station opened in Reston Town Center in November 2022.
- Ranked 29th Best Place to Live in America by Money Magazine, 2017
- Reston is an official Biophilic “City,” 2017
- Lake Anne Village Center listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2017

Social Capital and Belonging

- At the outset, the developers in cooperation with the Welfare and Health Council of Fairfax County made efforts for advance planning of physical facilities for social organizations and cultural and educational programs to facilitate the best and earliest development of such programs. They noted that ultimately it would be dependent on the interests and leadership of the residents.
- **Neighborhood Identity:** Besides community space in the Town Center, community facilities were planned for each neighborhood. Reston's design incorporated different neighborhoods, each with its own unique character and amenities. This allowed residents to identify strongly with their immediate community while still being part of the larger Reston whole.
- In the Master Plan, space for a conference facility and hotel was reserved in Reston, close to the golf course. This met a need in the Washington Metropolitan Area.
- There was planning for places of worship. The idea was to locate them along busy walkways of the community and in village centers. The developers recognized the value of church sponsorship of community activity programs and planned to assist in the design of buildings and program facilities.
- Reston’s “early pioneers” were quick to contribute to the town’s founding principles by, for example: establishing a neighborhood day care system and contributing to weekly meetings on artistic and cultural programming.
- **Community Centers:** Reston was designed with community centers that serve as hubs for social activities, classes, and events. These centers facilitate interaction among residents and provide spaces for communal gatherings.
- Reston Strong started as a grassroots movement by a few volunteer leaders and has grown into a community action group - “We Change the World One Neighbor at a Time” - https://www.restonstrong.com/

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- Today, there is still deep civic engagement in the arts and faith communities, a passion for living among nature, and a commitment to a community that offers chances to “Live, Work, Play”.

Access to Effective Government and Services

- **Civic Organizations**: Simon helped establish various civic organizations that focused on community building, environmental stewardship, and social engagement.
- The county’s homeless shelter for northwestern Fairfax County, the Embry Rucker Community Shelter, was intentionally invited by the Reston civic and faith community 30+ years ago and supported by volunteers from the community.
- The Reston Association, the overall homeowner association that provides the unincorporated community’s public-facing services, supports a range of civic needs from pools to summer camps to vast public natural areas.
- Reston is part of Fairfax County and benefits from the resources, infrastructure and services provided by this prospering county.

High Quality Jobs and Economic Opportunity

- **Proximity to Jobs and Services:** Reston's strategic location within the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area provides residents with access to a wide range of job opportunities, services, and cultural attractions.
- Over the years, it has been home to a large number of international firms, including: Rolls-Royce, General Dynamics, Leidos, Learning Tree International, and many others because of Reston’s location in the Dulles Technology Corridor.
- Reston is home to the “East Coast Headquarters” of numerous technology and government contracting firms including: Google, Microsoft, Oracle, and Meta.
- Reston is now widely recognized as one of the best places in Northern Virginia to dine and shop. The Reston Town Center is home to over 50 shops, restaurants, and services, including an Apple Store, J.Crew, Anthropologie, South Moon Under, and many more upscale establishments.
- There are 35 dining options, ranging from fast food (like Chipotle) to upscale casual (like Ted’s Bulletin, a DC institution) to international fare (like BarTaco and Mon Ami Gabi). Reston Station, Lake Anne, South Lakes, and other areas also include clusters of restaurants outside of the Reston Town Center.
- Reston was ranked as the #1 place to live if you work from home by Money Magazine in 2021.

Education and Lifelong Learning

- Reston Association (www.reston.org) , the community's homeowners association, offers a range of environmental education programs. These

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programs include nature hikes, wildlife education, and environmental stewardship workshops. They provide residents of all ages with opportunities to learn about and connect with the natural world around them.

- RCC (Reston Community Center) offers a wide array of educational and cultural programs for all ages. They provide classes in the arts, fitness, personal enrichment, and more. RCC also hosts cultural events, performances, and exhibitions that contribute to lifelong learning and cultural enrichment.
- Reston is served by Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), offering quality education for students. In addition, there are community organizations and tutoring services that provide educational support and resources to students and families.
- The Reston Regional Library hosts events such as author talks, workshops, and book clubs that promote lifelong learning and literacy.

Arts, Culture, and Recreation

- **Public Art and Culture:** Simon believed that art and culture were vital to community development. He ensured that public art installations, cultural events, and performance spaces were integral to Reston's design, fostering a sense of cultural enrichment.
- **Natural Spaces:** Reston's planning emphasized the preservation of open spaces, parks, and trails. These green areas not only provided recreational opportunities but also promoted a healthier lifestyle and opportunities for community interaction.
- The Reston Association’s Walker Nature Center is a 72-acre woodland providing environmental education for all ages and 99% of the site is conserved as forested open space.
- Outdoor spots like Lake Anne, and many more. 16 tennis courts, 15 swimming pools, and over 55 miles of biking and jogging paths and numerous athletic fields provide recreational opportunities.
- League of Reston Artists - https://www.leagueofrestonartists.org
    - Provide members with opportunities to grow, learn, and exhibit their creative accomplishments.
    - Provide the local community with opportunities to experience and appreciate a wide range of visual art and acquire insight into the creative process.
- Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art - https://www.tephraica.org
    - A non-profit, non-collecting institution committed to promoting innovative contemporary art and thinking. They work with artists, galleries, institutions, universities, thought leaders, and collectors globally.

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Design and Environmental Stewardship

- The master plan established seven villages, each with a distinct architectural style and built for 10,000 residents. Each village was centered on a plaza that provided walkable access to stores and restaurants, created jobs, generated revenue through commercial leasing, and had designated space for educational, recreational, and cultural programming.
- Surrounding each plaza was an assortment of housing types meant to cater to different life stages and income levels — from more affordable apartments and condominiums to single-family homes. Schools, churches, job centers, and parks were interspersed throughout the villages.
- Reston was influenced by the Garden City movement that emphasized planned, self-contained communities that intermingled green space, residential neighborhoods, and commercial development.
- Reston promotes multi-modal transportation by maintaining 55 miles of pathways and trails.
- The Reston Association uses several energy efficient and renewable technologies throughout Reston, including smart thermostats and LED lighting. Other energy-saving strategies have reduced energy costs at the Nature House by 37%.
- To improve water quality in Reston and Fairfax County, measures have been implemented to monitor water quality and promote water conservation efforts.

Success/Failure Factors

- By living by its motto, "Live, Work, Play," Reston has become a **balanced and sustainable community** where residents can enjoy a high quality of life while living, working, and recreating within the same community. The community values diversity, inclusivity, environmental stewardship, and a strong sense of place.
- **Mixed-Use Development:** Reston was one of the pioneers of mixed-use development, where residential, commercial, and recreational spaces coexist in close proximity. The goal is to provide residents with convenient access to essential services, shopping, dining, and job opportunities.
- **Integrated with Nature** - Green areas not only provided recreational opportunities but also promoted a healthier lifestyle and opportunities for community interaction.
- Reston has a great deal to offer its residents:
    - A thriving economy and hub for employment
    - An exciting destination filled with fun things to do: performing arts, dining, shopping, and more

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    - Outdoor spots like Lake Anne (one of several man-made lakes) and the Reston Association's Walker Nature Center, a 72-acre woodland, provides environmental education for all ages; 99% of the site is conserved as forested open space.
- Reston also has drawbacks:
    - The current market is failing to produce Simon's vision of a mixture of housing types.
    - The design and architecture of new development is below the early ambition of Reston, with none coming close to the clear sense of place achieved at Lake Anne Plaza - Reston's first village center. It features a mix of commercial and residential buildings around a plaza and inlet of Lake Anne, a man-made reservoir.
    - The high price tag to live in Reston - cost of living is higher than the national average
    - Traffic throughout the region. The infrastructure in Northern Virginia has not kept up with the region's rapid expansion. As a major job center, Reston attracts workers from as far as several counties away.
    - The never-ending construction.

Best Practices for Telosa

- **Legacy of Values:** Simon's vision and principles left a lasting impact on Reston's identity. Even as the community evolved, the emphasis on diversity, inclusivity, and a strong sense of belonging has persisted.
- **Master Planning:** Reston was carefully planned from the start with a focus on creating a balanced community that integrated residential, commercial, and recreational spaces. The "Village Concept" emphasized mixed-use neighborhoods, green spaces, and local amenities within walking distance.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** One of Reston's founding principles was to create a diverse and inclusive community. Simon was committed to selling homes to people of all races and backgrounds, which set a precedent for an integrated community from the beginning.
- **Emphasis on Walkability:** Reston's pedestrian-friendly design makes it easy for residents to walk or bike to various destinations, promoting a healthy lifestyle and increasing opportunities for social interaction.
- **Commitment to Sustainability:** Reston has embraced sustainability practices, including green building design and conservation efforts. This commitment to environmental responsibility resonates with residents who value a sustainable way of living.
- **Public Art and Culture:** Simon believed that art and culture were vital to community development. He ensured that public art installations, cultural events,

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and performance spaces were integral to Reston's design, fostering a sense of cultural enrichment.

- Overall, the combination of thoughtful planning, diverse housing options (which continues to be a focus), green spaces, cultural activities, and community engagement has contributed to Reston's reputation as a livable city with a strong sense of community.

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