

THE CONTEXT

a cultural landscape

“Robert Simon and Reston proved to be the most exhilarating and psychically rewarding work experience of my lifetime. Forget the frequent necessary decisions about which of our creditors were to be paid; forget the regular trips to the money-lenders at 14% interest; forget the shocking turndown for financing by a major life insurance company in New York because Bob insisted on building an integrated community in Virginia...”

—James Selonick

Executive Vice President
Reston, VA, Inc., 1963-1968

Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky tacky,
Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes all the same.
There's a green one and a pink one
And a blue one and a yellow one,
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.

—from “Little Boxes” by
songwriter Malvina Reynolds, 1961

In the 1950's professional planners decried the stereotypical “faceless anonymity” of American suburban housing developments.

Unlike the experience of urban living, suburbanites couldn't walk down the sidewalk to the corner store, exchanging greetings with neighbors along the way. They had to drive to shopping and meetings with friends, and were more likely to sit down in front of the TV in their living room. In requiring residential areas to be separated from commercial properties, traditional zoning laws reinforced this suburban isolation.

And in the 1950's most of America was racially segregated. Reston sought to change the isolation and segregation of suburban America.



“He launched his development project at a time when the commonwealth of Virginia still was segregated; nonetheless, Simon bravely fought for a community in which people of all backgrounds could live peacefully together... Many investors turned away from Simon's concept, yet Gulf Oil accepted, providing critical resources and support for the project.”

—Jim Moran and Tom Davis,
Congressional Record, April 2004

