

Robert E. Simon, Jr.

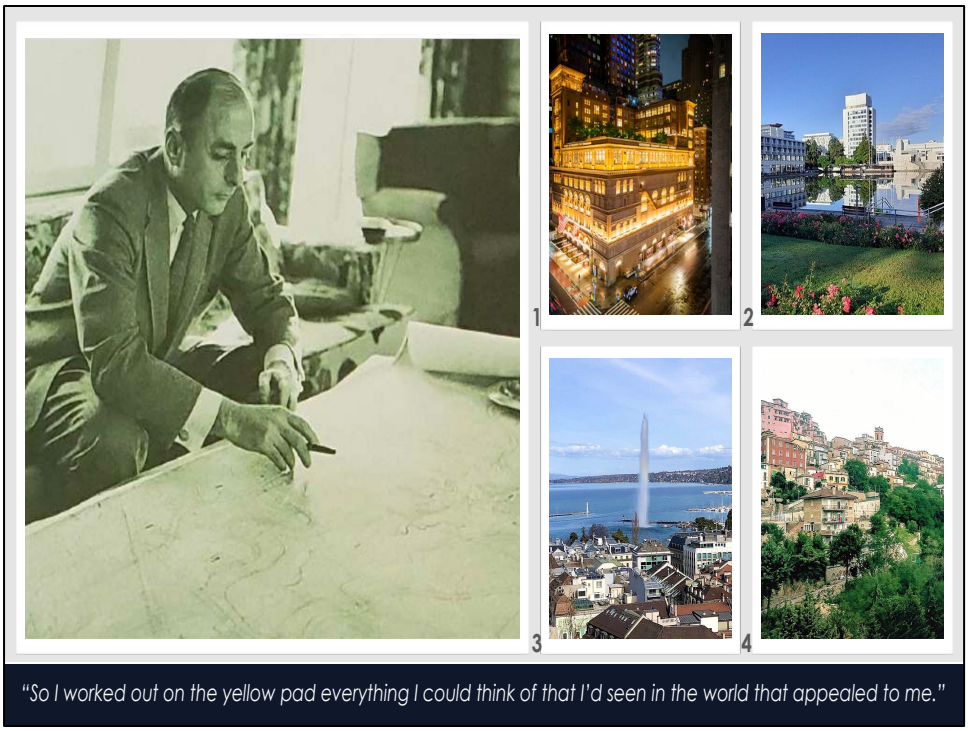
Great Art

PRESENTER NOTES: Allow 10-15 minutes for presentation. Focus on the 3 BIG IDEAS highlighted in yellow. In each slide, the images tell the story and there is a description of each image in the presenter notes.

Great Art: Robert E. Simon, Jr.

BIG IDEA #1: Today we are going to talk about the founder of Reston, Robert E. Simon, Jr. - or as he is affectionately known around here, Bob Simon. His vision for Reston was innovative and he drew on his life story, love of culture, and family heritage to design an entire city as a living work of art. His goal was to build a community that would provide a full life centered around neighborhood living, working, educational and recreational opportunities.

- **Image - "Untold Stories" statue at Lake Anne**: This is a photo of Bob Simon sitting next to the statue of him called "Untold Stories" also nicknamed "Bronze Bob." The statue sits on a bench surveying Washington Plaza at the core of Lake Anne Village Center— the embodiment of his vision for his "New Town."



Designing a New Town with Global Inspiration

Bob Simon approached planning as a creative canvas - He sat down with a yellow legal pad and wrote out a list of everything he could think of that he had seen in the world that appealed to him.

- **Large Image - Bob working on plans:** He combined his list into a master plan for the area and named the town Reston after his initials (R.E.S. + ton).

- **Image 1 - Carnegie Hall**: Bob Simon was born in New York City in 1914. He inherited his father's real estate investment business and managed New York's world-famous Carnegie Hall for 25 years. In 1960, he sold Carnegie Hall and used his family's profits to buy 6,750 acres of Virginia countryside to plan and build a "New Town."

- **Image 2 - Tapiola, Finland:** Tapiola, a community outside of Helsinki in Finland inspired the Heron House high rise building at Lake Anne.

- **Image 3 - Lake Geneva fountain:** A fountain in Lake Geneva inspired the fountain in Lake Anne.

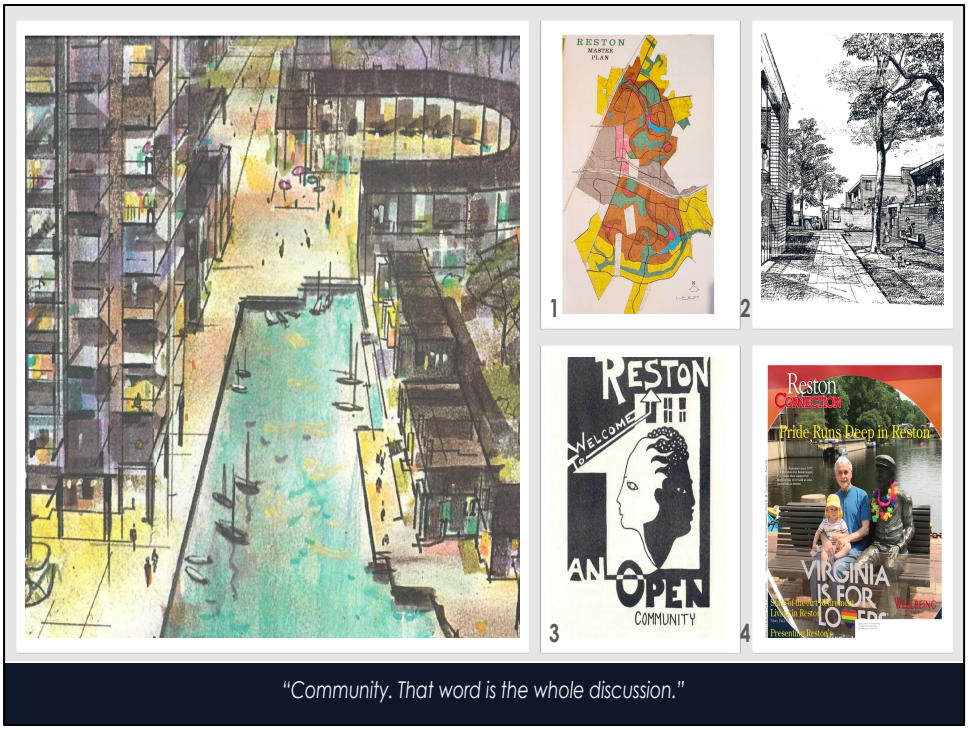
- **Image 4 - Italian hill-town:** Italian hill-towns inspired the idea of plazas in Reston.



Bob Simon on Community

Before he passed away in 2015, Bob Simon was interviewed by the *Washington Post* on his focus for Reston.

Presenter note: Click to play a short video.



A New Town Built for Community

BIG IDEA #2: For **Bob Simon, *community* was the focus.** But when he was planning Reston in 1962, most suburbs split neighborhoods into separate, spread-out blocks where people rarely met. **Bob Simon's plan for Reston was groundbreaking** because it brought neighbors together through vibrant village plazas, shared meeting spaces, and housing for all ages, incomes, and races right from day one.

- **Large Image - Early drawing of Lake Anne:** Bob Simon planned for vibrant village centers with shops, cafes, and apartments grouped together so neighbors could naturally meet during daily errands. Meeting spaces, community centers, and libraries were planned to be built right at the beginning rather than waiting years for the town to grow.

- **Image 1 - Map showing how he carefully planned the area to have a mix of densities:** Single-family homes, townhouses, and high-rise apartments were planned to be built side-by-side so people of different income levels and family sizes lived as neighbors.

- **Image 2 - Drawing from the original master plan showing how the design encourage community:** Neighborhoods were intentionally

- designed to have shared open space to create opportunities to build an nurture community.

- **Image 3 - Vintage advertisement for Reston as an Open Community: His idea of community meant people of all incomes and races living happily together.** Reston was intentionally established as a welcoming, racially integrated town from day one, breaking down postwar suburban exclusion.

- **Image 4 - Reston Connection cover June 2019, photo of a grandfather (Restonian since 1977) with his grandson (current student at SVES!) at Lake Anne Plaza:** The plan called for a variety of housing choices to allow residents to stay in the same town throughout their lives as their family needs changed.



A New Town Built for Living

Bob Simon believed natural and structural beauty were essential for a good life. The plans for Reston put an emphasis on the kind of life to be lived and the visual character of the community. At the time, developers usually bulldozed forests and pushed parks far out to the edges of town, but **Bob Simon's plan for Reston was unprecedented because it protected natural woods and streams, putting lakes, trails, and outdoor fun right outside everyone's front door.**

- **Large Image - Early drawing showing how nature was a focus and recreation was designed directly beside residential clusters :** By clustering neighborhoods and designing buildings to fit the land's natural slopes and hilltops, the plan for Reston saved large areas of existing oak forests and streams while adding new opportunities for recreation.

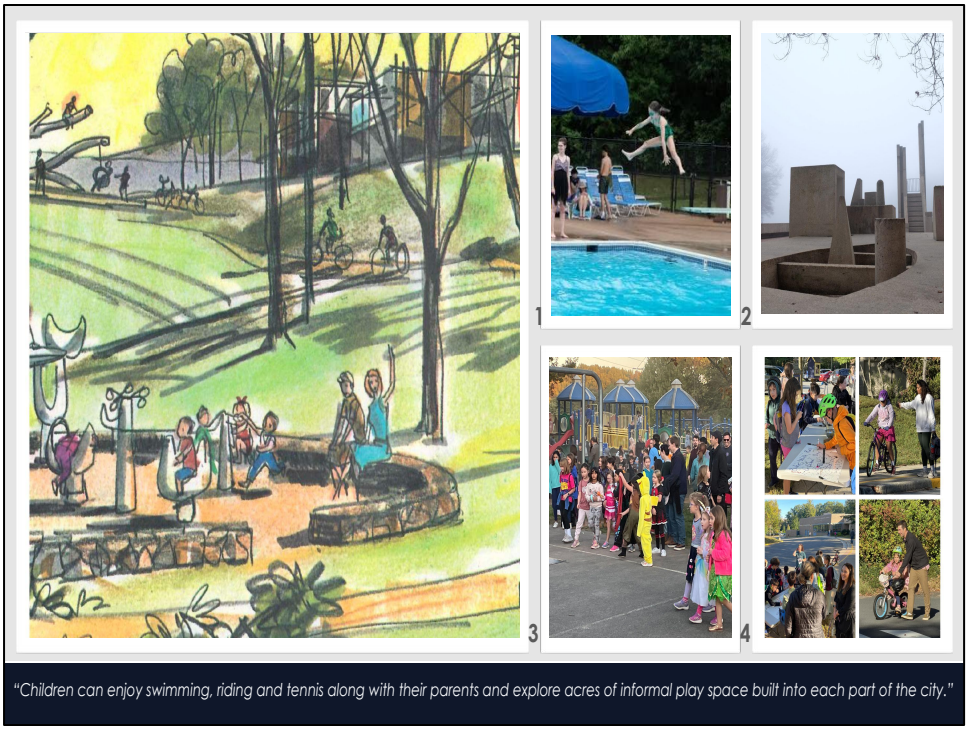
- **Image 1 - Photo of the path, meadow and playground along the Lake Thoreau Loop:** Land was set aside for recreation and public green space, with miles of pathways leading straight from backyards into nature trails.

- **Image 2 - Photo of kayakers on Lake Audubon:** He included lakes in the plan to bring boating, docks, and scenic views into the center of daily life.

- **Image 3 - Bird's eye drawing showing how homes were clustered**

- **together to create the space needed to preserve nature and encourage recreation:** Imagine if we could look down on Reston from an airplane. This shows how planners clustered homes together to create shared living spaces.

- **Image 4 - *The Secret Garden*, South Lakes HS STEAM Team Public Art Program:** This focus beauty, nature, and life in Reston continues today. This sculpture on Lake Thoreau investigates how natural elements interact with the more industrial world we live in today and beauty's importance in all environments.



A New Town Built for Children

In 1962, almost all new neighborhoods were designed only for cars and driving, but **Bob Simon's plan for Reston was radical because it was built with children in mind**—creating safe walking paths, nearby playgrounds, and car-free routes to school.

- **Large Image - Early drawing showing how the plans were designed with children in mind:** Children were a focus in the original master plan for Reston. The plans called for play spaces with sandboxes, pools, and climbing hills built within calling distance of houses.
- **Image 1 - Children and adults playing in a pool:** Active recreation was designed to be in walking distance from homes.
- **Image 2 - Gonzalo Fonseca's concrete boat at Lake Anne Plaza:** The plan called for plazas that featured climbable, interactive sculptures specifically created to ignite imagination and fantasy.
- **Image 3 - Sunrise Valley school playground being used for the community's Fall Festival**: Schools were designed to be the heart of neighborhoods. School grounds and facilities were designed to stay open after classes ended, serving as neighborhood centers for sports,

- recreation, and events.

- **Image 4 - Sunrise Valley Walk, Bike, Roll to School Event:** Bob Simon planned for a connected network of footpaths, bridges, and tunnels beneath roads so children could travel safely to school, parks, and plaza stores on their own.



A New Neighborhood Across the Street?

BIG IDEA #3: Bob Simon believed that there are an awful lot of wonderful things going on here in Reston, but he also knew that **the story of Reston is not yet complete.** Just like Bob Simon looked at thousands of acres of farmland in 1961 and imagined a new town from scratch, **Fairfax County planners are studying what parts of Reston could look like if land use rules changed.** This is happening all over Reston, including right across the street where they are exploring how 119 acres of office parks could become a new residential neighborhood.

- **Large Image - Map of Reston East:** This map shows the area Fairfax County planners are considering called Reston East. It extends from the Lake Thoreau Pool all the way to Hunter Mill Road.
    - The land use laws say that this area is for businesses, industry and commerce.
    - The planners are studying whether they should change the land use rules to allow property owners to replace office buildings with townhomes and apartments.

- The planners are considering what mix of parks, housing, jobs, and stores would be needed to make that a good place to live.

- The planners are also exploring what new sidewalks, bike paths, and street grids would be needed to connect residents to the W&OD Trail, Wiehle Metro station, and schools.



Let’s hear from our Fairfax County Supervisor, Walter Alcorn



<u>It's Your Turn to Plan Like Bob!</u>

Now it is your turn to plan like Bob Simon: by listing everything you find beautiful and want in a community, you can create your own vision for Reston East—and we will give your ideas directly to county planners so they know what students across the street want to see!

- **Grab Your "Yellow Pad" and Dream Big**
  - Think about your favorite playgrounds, ice cream shops, bike trails, splash pads, or climbing sculptures, and write down what makes a neighborhood feel magical to you on the worksheet we give you.
  - Ask yourself what would make kids, families, and neighbors happy when walking around the area right across from our school.
- **Design Your Master Plan for Reston East**
  - Then you get to create! Create your own map showing where new parks, walking paths, streets, and community gathering spots should go.
  - Will you plan like Bob? Will you make sure nature, play, and places for neighbors to meet are built right into your design?

- **Share Your Ideas**
  - We will share photos of your plans, drawings, and ideas directly with the Fairfax County planning team working on the Reston East Study.

  - Just like Bob Simon started Reston over 60 years ago, your creative ideas can help county leaders see what the next generation wants in their community!