

**FAIRFAX COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS HEARING
JULY 26, 2016
MARCEL BREUER API BUILDING, RESTON, VA**

My name is Cheryl Terio-Simon. I am speaking today for the Reston Historic Trust for which I am the Vice Chair. Robert Simon, Reston's Founder, was my husband.

The Reston Historic Trust is a community organization with the mission of preserving the past, informing the present, and influencing the future of Reston through its educational programs. The Trust's museum is located on Washington Plaza in Lake Anne Village Center.

We are well aware of the controversies and concerns surrounding the Marcel Breuer-designed American Press Institute Building. We are aware of the development and financial issues as well as the procedural issues that have brought us to this hearing today. On behalf of the Trust, I would like to spend our time discussing Marcel Breuer the architect and his API Building in the context of Bob Simon's vision and Reston's history.

Many know that Bob Simon articulated seven goals for the new community. One of them is that *beauty – structural and natural – is a necessity of the good life and should be fostered*. From the beginning he engaged prominent planners and architects who responded to this goal with innovative designs.

Those who worked with Marcel Breuer said that the Reston goals and Reston's promise as a new town were reasons Mr. Breuer accepted the relatively small API conference center project in Reston.

In 1972 Marcel Breuer was already an internationally recognized architect. He was born in Hungary and studied and worked with Walter Gropius both at the Bauhaus and later at Harvard. Restonian, Ralph Youngren, a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, studied with Breuer at Harvard. Ralph recalls that Breuer encouraged his students to look at different ways to solve an architectural problem, not just one...a lesson for us today.

Marcel Breuer's work is digitally archived at the Syracuse University Libraries. A search of the archive for "Reston, Virginia" produces 111 documents related to the API Conference Center in Reston. They include surveys done by Gulf Reston, Inc., structural drawings, architectural

drawings, construction drawings, lighting plans, interior elevation details, and drawings for the now historic credit wall plaques of member newspapers.

The American Institute of Architects has written to this Board, “Respectfully, the API building is a gem of a building by Marcel Breuer, an internationally acclaimed 20th Century architect and recipient of the highest architecture prize awarded by the American Institute of Architects, the Gold Medal, in 1968....The API building represents new ideas about community development and suburban planning during the 1960s and 1970s. Reston was envisioned as a self-sufficient village that integrated residential, commercial, schools, cultural institutions and recreation, all in a modernist style. The ‘industrial’ section was planned along Sunrise Drive and included the USGS headquarters designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill and was followed by the API building in 1973-74.”

The Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Historic Resources has written that it “...believes this building to be potentially eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places and strongly encourages its preservation....Reston would lose a building that is part of the community’s distinctive architectural history.”

And your own Fairfax County Architectural Review Board, noting the building’s potential eligibility for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, asked “...that the Planning Commission, the Board of Supervisors, and County agencies request and review adaptive reuse studies to answer some fundamental questions about the building’s feasibility of adaptive reuse, so that informed decisions can be made based on professional analysis.”

Marcel Breuer was famous for some monumental buildings such as the Whitney Museum of Art in New York City, which is now named for him as the Met/Breuer. I M Pei has said that if Breuer’s St. John’s Abby Church weren’t tucked away in rural Minnesota, it would be one of the 20th century’s most famous pieces of architecture. But with the API building Breuer demonstrated that he could do relatively small and gentle as well as bold and monumental. It is sited within the context of the landscape; it almost seems part of the soft roll of the land. And he gave as much attention to the interior as the exterior of the structure. Light is beautifully brought in

from outside; he designed telephone booths and auditoria of various sizes, and it was filled with his furniture.

On behalf of the Reston Historic Trust, I want to sincerely thank Mr. Sekas [the developer] for his generous offer of some of the furniture from the API building. The library tables in particular are beautifully crafted oak. The Trust does not have room for them, is not sure how it would be able to get them out of the building, but would like to see them saved if the building is not saved.

Like Lake Anne Village Center, the API building is set within the context of the landscape and doesn't shout from the curb. Its main entrance does not face Sunrise Valley Drive. Probably thousands of people have driven by it and not paid any attention, as people drive by on Baron Cameron and don't know Lake Anne is there. Like Lake Anne, it is Brutalist architecture, but with a human scale and elegance.

Fortunately for Lake Anne it was designated a Fairfax County Historic Overlay District in 1984 and now is on its way to nomination by the Commonwealth of Virginia's Department of Historic Resources for recognition on the National Register of Historic Places.

Breuer's API building deserves the same recognition. Please, listen to the American Institute of Architects, listen to the Commonwealth's Department of Historic Resources, listen to your own Fairfax County Architectural Review Board. Give our community the process that will determine the historic and architectural significance of Breuer's building and provide a study of alternative, adaptive reuses, and honor Breuer by looking at different ways to solve a problem, not just one.