

North Charlottesville Business Council 2011 Candidate Forum Questions

1. The North Charlottesville Business Council has long been an advocate for the US 29 Western Bypass. Albemarle County and the MPO have now approved the project. Considering where we are today, what is your position on the Commonwealth Transportation Board approved (and funded) Western Bypass and widening of US 29 from Polo Grounds Road to Hollymead? And as a Supervisor would you vote to reconsider the project?

I want to begin with the widening of Route 29, which is not tied to the construction of the Bypass.

The widening of Route 29 from the Rivanna River to the airport has been on the long range plan since about 2002. It was suggested by VDOT to the CHART committee of which I was chair. The committee agreed, especially since the extra lane could someday evolve into a bus rapid transit lane. In my opinion, our desperation over funds has been created intentionally by the state withholding funds for the last two years to projects which have had full city county citizen agreement, such as Hillsdale Drive.

Now the bypass part of the question

I disagree that this bypass is a useful tool to improve local and regional traffic, and I would reconsider it if I could. The Federal Highway Administration may kill it, because of the misuse of their processes. I predict it will be a detriment to the success of our Route 29 businesses. In many other places, the bypasses have killed the retail.

I have been working on transportation options since the 80's and since 2000 on CHART. Real facts and modeling indicate that the best way to reduce traffic on Route 29 is to find options for local travelers, i.e. the parallel road network, Hillsdale, Berkmar and widening 29 to provide lanes for higher speed transit. Remember Pogo. We have met the enemy and it is us.

If we have the road, we need to make sure it is the best road possible with a 45 mph design speed, noise mitigation, environmental protection for the watershed and reservoir, with well designed termini. As proposed in the earlier environmental impact statement, closing the intake for the reservoir when an accident involving hazardous chemicals is not a sufficient mitigation plan.

2. The Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority is seeking a revised permit for a 30 foot earthen dam at Ragged Mountain Reservoir. What is your position on the community water supply and other RWSA infrastructure needs (sewer, treatment plants, etc.)

I support the current community plan. I would prefer the construction of the 42 foot earthen dam now since it is clearly the most cost effective and most environmentally sensitive approach. Do the job once and do it right. In 1962, our parents' generation planned for water supplies for our grandchildren. It is time for us to step up and do the same.

We have had historically low water rates for generations. These rates have artificially suppressed the cost of water. In the last five years the AC Service Authority has addressed the infrastructure deficits and raised fees and the four tier water rates to address over consumption and raise money for capital investment.

The resiliency of the current plan is a huge asset, with redundant systems to deliver water throughout the community. The reservoir is a small part of the overall plan, as the improvements to the treatment plant, pump stations, and pipeline improvements make up the huge majority of the \$140M. Both city and county have agreed on all these other parts.

A study is needed to determine why there is a huge loss of water in the Sugar Hollow Pipeline, from the flow leaving the reservoir there is a huge loss to the treatment plant. Our community should not put its emphasis on a part of the water supply which is diminishing.

3. In January 2010, the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors passed an economic action plan (4-2). What are your thoughts on this action plan? Has it been successful? Should the plan be renewed? Are there elements that should be added? What, if anything, should local government do to increase the economic vitality of the region?

I was not happy with the first draft of the plan, as it was sprung on the board with a plan to pass it that day with four votes. It called for reduction of process and performance requirements and attempted to avoid any input from citizens.

At the end of the process, however, this benchmark plan is based in the comprehensive plan and designed to focus on locally owned businesses, to perform a target study to determine our assets and what kind of industries would best match our potential employees and our resources, and to enhance the success of rural area enterprises, agriculture and small rural businesses. It was a good result that ended in a 6-0 vote in support.

I have been building support for the last year to change our zoning requirements regarding rural enterprise, especially farm based food service such as small restaurants and bed and breakfasts. Albemarle has a few and Nelson County has more than twenty, because we won't allow rooms in a cottage or restored barn. With the possibility of a bed and breakfast, a landowner would have a reason to restore an old barn, rather than just burn it up and lose the history which makes us unique.

I have been told over and over that the reason people come here with their businesses is because of our community values, with which people want to associate. They want their logo to be associated with ours. It makes a difference. Negative connotations repel investors. I am trying to protect what the realtors are working to sell, and the economic development folks are trying to advertise.

We need to advertise our vision – "Albemarle is a thriving county, anchored by a strong economy and excellent education system, respecting its rural heritage, scenic beauty and natural resources, with attractive and vibrant communities." Our mission values our rural character, quality of life, top performance of county staff and wise use of tax dollars. We work to keep our processes clear and defined.

Investors come to our area to stay because owners want to live here with their families. We should remember our assets and focus our business efforts on companies who want to identify themselves with our strengths, great workers and a beautiful and healthy environment.

We have a great future if we are brave and invest ourselves to build our communities.