



**2009 Albemarle County Board of Supervisors Candidate Interview
September 2009**

Candidate: John Lowry (I)

On November 3, 2009, voters in the Samuel Miller Magisterial District go to the polls to elect their representative on the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors. This recording is Brian Wheeler's September 1, 2009 interview with John Lowry (I). Mr. Lowry's opponents are Madison Cummings (D) and Duane Snow (R).

*The audio of this interview is available online in the
Charlottesville Tomorrow News Center*

http://cvilletomorrow.typepad.com/charlottesville_tomorrow_/2009/09/lowry-1.html

Complete election coverage is available on the Charlottesville Tomorrow website

<http://www.cvilletomorrow.org/elections>

INTERVIEW

Mr. Lowry, thank you for participating in this interview with Charlottesville Tomorrow.

Thank you for inviting me, Mr. Wheeler.

The complete audio and written transcript for this interview will be available on the Internet. Information from this interview will be used in the compilation of Charlottesville Tomorrow's non-partisan voter guide. Charlottesville Tomorrow does not endorse any candidates and our goal is to provide information to the public so they can make an informed vote on issues related to land use, transportation and community design. As you are aware, some of the questions you will be asked, have been provided in advance, others have not, all supervisor candidates will be asked the same questions. Are you ready to start?

Yes I am.

1. Please describe your past experience that qualifies you to be on the Board of Supervisors.

Well thank you, I think that's a very great question to start off with because the reason why one runs for Board of Supervisors constantly comes up and past experience is one of the best guides that a voter can use to choose a candidate they would vote for. My past experience, I have just retired after a 35 year work career in finance and also management, I managed an office of 18 people at one point with \$5 million revenue and I worked business all my life, so I have experience in the work area that gives me knowledge and skills for a business like the County of Albemarle.

Then I do have volunteer experience ever since I moved to town and my family has participated in volunteer things in the communities beginning with March of Dimes and Boy Scouts and church. I was chair of the board of deacons and started the adult soccer league for SOCA and so forth.

And then I have also done government things. I have been on the airport board, the joint airport board and was chair of that board as we moved to a brand new airport in the late 1980s and into 1991, and then I also most recently have been working with the Economic Development Authority and I am chair presently of the Economic Development Authority. And so by virtue of those three areas, I believe I do have good experience that qualifies me to be considered in the voters' minds.

2. Do you support the formation of a Regional Transit Authority with the City of Charlottesville ? What are your regional transit priorities and how do you recommend we fund them in the absence of new state funding and without the ability to raise a local sales tax?

The question about Regional Transit Authority is timely and appropriate. In this most recent session of the Virginia legislature, Albemarle County was allowed to create a transit authority, however a twin bill that would have allowed funding for that authority was not passed, but the County is already working with the City discussing having joint things in a joint transit authority and really it's a seamless sort of merger because Albemarle residents do use CTS and so we probably should be working together so more Albemarle citizens use transit service.

Well the question is about funding, there is a set of high priorities that the Board of Supervisors reviews each year and it's a pecking order and it doesn't change much over the years, but what has changed is we don't have any funding to do these projects. And that goes hand in hand with the transit authority, it really becomes then a euphemism for transportation authority and more probably there does need to be City and County working together in some means to fund what needs to be done for transportation.

My specific priority for Samuel Miller District, in which I live and where I am running for office, is that we need to have a Fontaine Avenue-Sunset Extended connector. There is a huge new neighborhood in the urban ring just south of the City of Charlottesville and it only has one exit. It's really quite dangerous because in case of a hurricane or something, there is not an alternative way out of there plus the means to move from the south of City over toward the University and then out to [Route] 29 conveniently mostly in the County next to the University. The University is willing to pay for some of that road as I understand it. So that would be my most significant priority in Samuel Miller.

3. The next Board of Supervisors will review the Places29 Master Plan, what do you think are the key ingredients that needs to be in that plan to gain your support?

Well Places29 is one of four growth areas and each of these growth areas by virtue of the County's thoughtful forward thinking has a master plan associated with it and that's periodically reviewed. And Places29 is the one that's currently up for review. It's based on the neighborhood model, the neighborhood model being that our comprehensive plan, the master master document says that we should have neighborhoods in our growth area, a balance of different services and business and living places and transportation through those different growth areas.

So what I would need to have my support is having the balance of interests properly mixed together, it is not in the Samuel Miller District, but it is part of the County, so it is very significant. Mr. Wheeler, I would offer a couple of specific suggestions to move the discussion on, Places29 is a lot of good planning, but the next step is funding, we are back to funding and we could consider, if the state does not fulfill its traditional funding role having a CDA which is a Community Development Authority or we could have a service district. The service district would be unique to the Places29 area. Within that context, then there could be a funding mechanism and this is a long-term solution, but I think we need to take the agenda on from just planning to reality.

4. In what circumstances would you support an expansion of Albemarle County's designated growth areas?

The growth area has been conceived as a way for our county to stay, basically rural in character, but allow for economic activity, but have it only in areas that are deemed appropriate. So basically my answer to that question is I don't see any circumstances where that growth area would be expanded. I think it is a matter of policy that's the way the attitude needs to be, it's set up and defined with break lines, so hypotheticals of how you might change that, I think are inappropriate, you need to have a policy that is very firmly set that

doesn't exclude, you never say never, but as a matter of policy, no expansion of the growth area.

5. If you were to provide direction today to the County Executive on development of the next Albemarle county annual budget, what would you tell him?

I had answered that in the spring when I announced my candidacy by saying it wasn't my budget, so I didn't feel it was appropriate for me to comment, but if I am elected in November it will be my budget and I basically feel that what was done this past year is exactly appropriate. We faced a very large speed bump and with the shrinking revenues the County faced reality and cut employment by about 9%, high 50s almost 60 jobs and that's very significant, it's only had a little over 600 jobs to begin with and also cut the capital improvements budget by a \$100 million. That's very large and that I think is exactly what was needed to be done.

If we don't have revenues again this year that are anticipated to grow than we need to find a way to cut our budget, but without cutting the most basic services which are safety, fire and rescue, police and so forth, but it's going to hurt and I think that's appropriate until the economy turns again and I am an optimist and times will be better in the future.

6. In August 2009, Advocates for a Sustainable Albemarle Population (ASAP) released the first report in their research seeking to identify an optimal sustainable population for the community. Should the Board of Supervisors explore policies that would cap the County's population growth at a number below the potential build-out population? Why or why not?

This was most recently discussed because ASAP did release their first study and the question of is there an optimum sustainable population is fine to discuss, fine to talk about, it's a good concept, but it's practicality is limited by the fact that after any study on any subject after about 20 years, the assumptions that underlie that study can get woefully out of date.

For instance just with technology, technology is wonderful for all of us that it makes our lives better, but it also changes our lives a lot and technology in living in Albemarle was going to change and so 20 years from now who knows what things will be present that we don't even know about now and so trying to anticipate what a perfect population figure would be seems very impractical to me. It doesn't hurt to study it, but it gets increasingly speculative after a number of years go by. I don't think there should be an ultimate cap.

7. Should the community invest in repairing or enlarging the existing Lower Ragged Mountain Dam built around 1908 as part of the 50 year community water supply plan? Why or why not?

Well, I would be representing Samuel Miller District and the Ragged Mountain Dam is in Samuel Miller District and I am in favor of the plan, the 50 year water supply plan as voted upon by the four Boards in 2006. I think we need to have a plan in order to work a plan and that doesn't mean that we can't take into account other things. And those two other things that brings to mind are conservation and dredging. We could use both of those.

The fact of the matter is we are required by the state to have a long term plan, if we come to a period of time or several periods of time in the next 50 years when we have severe ground water depletion, we need to have a reservoir and the best estimate at this time is 18 million [gallons per day] plus and we do not have that capacity with the present South Fork Rivanna Reservoir and conservation and dredging. So it's the plan, I am in favor of the plan, it doesn't mean that it can't change even up until the time that dam is built, but that dam will be large and it will fill up big reservoir and the Ragged Mountain is a perfect receptacle for that water.

8. If you could focus on one area for improved partnership with the City of Charlottesville during the next two years, what area would that be?

Well I did think about this and there are so many things that you can work with the City and these two questions were provided to us in advance and I am going to go right back to the water plan because it is an area that has much discussion right now and what we need really is leadership both in the City and the County to move us forward.

I can see the City who has not grown in population significantly in the 40 years almost that I have been here can balk at having to pay for a huge new reservoir. The fact of the matter is the County is going to experience the natural growth, I am not saying rapid growth, but it will be growth in the area, even [Advocates for a Sustainable Albemarle Population] (ASAP) would admit that and it's going to be in the County, so those are going to be largely in the growth area and those are going to be water and sewer hookups, so what we need is a way to be equitable and I think we can be equitable.

The City and the County have their own separate authorities for water and sewer, thereby they can have their own separate rates. So I think this is the highest priority because 2011 is a drop dead date, we have to not only begin to execute the plan, but the state authorities have the ability to pull the Ragged Mountain Reservoir plug because it is flawed and they might deem it dangerous to stay as it is, so we have got a deadline coming, that's my first priority.

9. What are your priorities for economic development and workforce development in Albemarle? Do we have sufficient land for office, commercial and industrial development within the designated growth areas?

This question comes right to my uniqueness as a candidate. I am chair of the Economic Development Authority of the County, I am sitting chair, we are having a meeting this afternoon.

We have done \$500 million in bonds in the last six or seven years since I have been chair and those bonds with the County's name on it have created jobs and its capital and it's good for this community. Now the authority is not an economic development office, the County does not have an economic development office, we don't have a telephone listing in the telephone directory, we don't have a website.

Every other City and County, any consequence in this state has an office and we need a director and a small staff and they don't have to be new people, they can be people that are cross-trained, and I can already think who the director would be for the County although that's not my call. But it's someone who is already working for the County and this could create jobs.

So that's the answer really, we need to have economic activity in the growth area and it's a tax base that's waiting to happen. We are a wonderful place to live and why shouldn't we invite businesses here that would provide jobs and revenue?

But the question also is about planning those who are unemployed and are partner our economic development office, it would, is already Thomas Jefferson [Partnership for Economic Development] (TJPED), which is the economic partnership authority of the different counties including Albemarle County and they do a wonderful job already. They get significant money including federal money to retrain people that they have lost their jobs and our County needs to work with TJPED.

Follow up: And then a follow-up question was do we have sufficient land for office, commercial and industrial development within the designated growth areas?

Yeah and my answer is yes. We have lots of good places that are basically sitting there and not being used. The University research park is less than half full. We have a partner with the University and the University is a great partner to have, but we can also create ways to have businesses move into the growth area and there is plenty of space there already for us to fill with new businesses.

10. Do you support the Three Party Agreement reached in 1990 between Albemarle, Charlottesville, and the University of Virginia which identified a sequence of transportation projects to be completed before the construction of a Western Bypass of U.S. Route 29?

The Three Party Agreement envisions Places29 being complete before the Western Bypass and [the existence of] intolerable traffic. I think that vision is fine and we are still working on that vision.

The Places29 includes mechanisms for handling traffic, overpasses, and those still have not been done, so I think that the question is basically asking is that appropriate to talk about the Western Bypass at the same time.

I think it is appropriate to talk about at least alternative routes to transportation and the reason it's appropriate now is the 29 corridor study is undergoing its final wrap-up phases paid for by the state of Virginia and they are going to have suggestions for this community about Route 29 North.

And I think that we should have an open mind to hear what the corridor people say. We should not reject out of hand until there has been good discussion and communication in what is suggested as we are not the only community on Route 29, we need to work with our neighbors. So the answer is, the vision is fine, but I think you can have corollary work paths going on at the same time.

11. Given the long funding and implementation period for multi-jurisdictional projects like the Meadowcreek Parkway and the community water supply plan, what are the advantages and disadvantages to the current Board of Supervisors revisiting previous Boards' decisions regarding such projects?

The question is should a newly elected Board discuss what's been decided, significant issues in the past? And one can take a line of reasoning that you shouldn't open up a box that's been closed because it had a good idea and as a solution you should leave it alone, but I think that does not be respectful of human nature and human nature is to discuss things right up until they are done.

So yes I think the Supervisors should be respectful of what has been decided, but yes there should also be good discussion until it's done. And there is a flipside to this that I have thought about recently, not only should the Board of Supervisors discuss major decisions that have been made, continuing to discuss things, not necessarily changing them, but also the Board of Supervisors when there is a major policies situation going on with inside the county and the school board, they should due process work through before making their opinions known. That's the flipside, I don't think candidates

should talk about what subsidiary boards might make as a recommendation what they feel like they think it should be until there has been fair due process.

12. Should Albemarle County officials be able to revisit or renegotiate their past decision on the 1982 revenue sharing agreement with the City of Charlottesville? Why or why not?

The revenue sharing agreement was passed by a referendum and that referendum made it law and it cannot be revisited unless one of three different ways allows it to be undone and frankly simply those three ways are not going to happen. But there is an inherent inequity in the revenue sharing, it doesn't have a sunset, so it can't be changed. The value of land in the County is taken as if it were at assessed value and in fact for the County it's a very large item that their land is under land use, two-thirds the land in the county is under land use. So City of Charlottesville has got a very sweet deal and basically I don't think it's going to be undone. I don't think the City or the County should try to get an advantage over each other on revenue sharing, it's reality.

I wouldn't say as a foot note, I don't see any reason why the law couldn't change, if both houses and legislature and the governor were to sign a bill say for instance on a situation that does have a sunset which is the moratorium on annexation. Well when that would come up, there could be a rider attached to that and both houses legislature and the governor could sign it and it would change the revenue sharing agreement and the City would probably sue the County and I think the City would lose, but you know what? It's not worth it, we need to go ahead and work together, not try to get the better part of each other on a deal, it's already a fact and so I think revenue sharing is part of our lives and the City of Charlottesville's got a sweet deal and my hat is off to them.

13. In June 2006 the City and County signed off on a 50 year water supply plan that includes a new Dam at the Ragged Mountain Reservoir and a new pipeline connecting it to the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir. Do you support this plan? Why or why not?

We have already discussed the dam and we already had the question about the 50 year supply, so maybe what's different here is the new pipeline and the pipeline is part of the plan and it goes from the South Fork Rivanna to the Ragged Mountain instead of coming from Sugar Hollow and we need to have a new pipeline too because it's almost a 100 years old and it leaks. So, yes we need to have that and I do support it, it is very logical and it would keep the supply at Ragged Mountain silt free and that still is dredging as an issue in the South Fork Rivanna [Reservoir], but that needs to be addressed separately.

14. What is your top priority for action by the Board of Supervisors if you are elected?

My top priorities as I announced my candidacy were quality of life and education and transportation. But my single top priority, would be that we need the creation of an economic development department. The Board of Supervisors and the administration, staff work together, presently what the staff and administration doesn't see from the Supervisors in a mirroring sort of way is direction to create a way to capture economic activity in the County of Albemarle. I think the administration and staff would be very willing to create such a department and have more activity and therefore more tax revenues. But what they are not seeing from the supervisory is the will or desire to have such a thing, so that's my single top priority and I am a natural person to fill that void that needs filling. It means jobs for the County and more business dollars which is really tax revenue which would take the pressure off of raising property taxes.

15. Do we have appropriate resources in County government to achieve the objectives in the County's strategic plan? And a follow-up, in what way if any do we need to make changes and what impact will your recommendations have on staffing and the annual budget?

The answer to the question is fitting right in with the last question, we do have lots of resources with which the County government works. We are a wonderful place to live and work and raise a family and we have a AAA [bond] rating in this County, we are smallest County in the nation with a AAA rating. I think that really speaks well for us, but it shows that we are fiscally well-run, you don't get a AAA rating unless you are.

But we need to expand on that and I am very fiscally-conservative. I believe that we should shape our expenses to fit our revenues and I think the current staff and administration of the Albemarle County is that way also, that's exactly what they have done this past year when we had a significant economic downturn. So does this question also talk about the strategic plan here?

There are strategic objectives, this County is very well run, it has a wonderful reputation and part of the reason is that this administration has conceived a strategic plan, five or six different bullet points that we work by as a blueprint and it's not the Board of Supervisors as much it's the administration and they have to work with resources that they have and they do a wonderful job which include by the way social services, we haven't talked about social services... but the County does a wonderful job there and I think these strategic objectives address the quality of life, quality of education, the quality of our roads, quality of our services including water and sewer and so forth. Our administration is doing a very fine job and I think that needs to continue, but I

would like to help in my being on the board to help in the mirroring process to give them direction, give them leadership.

16. What do you see as the primary responsibilities of the Board of Supervisors?

A Board of Supervisors member is a Supervisor, he is a member of a Board and basically one of the things that a Supervisor does is say "no." There are lots of request to do things that are deviating from plan or past action or being an exception for certain circumstances and sometimes there are wonderful reasons to do things and you need to say "yes," but many times you need to say "no." A Board of Supervisors is supervisory.

Beyond that if I am elected I would pledge absolutely from my heart and soul to stay in touch with my district. I would like to go out and do things and make sure that I am getting good communication from those whom I represent and I will represent my people's wishes.

Beyond that, that's the microcosm of going to see things happening in the County and I am retired now and I have the desire to do this job and planning for several years to position myself so that I could do a good job, but finally Mr. Wheeler I would like to go down to Richmond from time to time because I think the action is in Richmond since we're a Dillon Rule county, all of the counties of Virginia are only given permission to do things if the state allows them...so somebody needs to go down to Richmond and keep their finger on the pulse of what's happening down there and occasionally be an advocate so that if change is needed to help our County, we can make the change and thank you.

Thank you very much.