



2005 Board of Supervisors Candidate Interview October 2005

Candidate: Gary Grant (R), Rio District

Complete election coverage is available on the Charlottesville Tomorrow [website](#).

INTRODUCTION

This is Charlottesville Tomorrow. An Advocate for Our Future Today. Charlottesville Tomorrow is a non-partisan community organization working on land use, transportation, and community design issues. Visit us on the web at cvilletomorrow.org.

On November 8, 2005, Albemarle County voters in 3 magisterial districts will be electing members to four-year terms on the Board of Supervisors.

This recording is Brian Wheeler's interview of Gary Grant, candidate for the Rio seat on the Board of Supervisors. Mr. Grant is running as a Republican. His opponents for this seat are David Slutzky and Thomas Jakubowski.

INTERVIEW

Gary, thank you for participating in this interview with Charlottesville Tomorrow. The complete audio and written transcript for this interview will be available on the Internet. Information from this interview, from some of the candidate forums, and from your campaign materials, will be used in the compilation of Charlottesville Tomorrow's non-partisan voter guide. As you know, 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.

Also, as you are aware, some of the questions you will be asked have been provided in advance and others have not. All candidates will be asked the same questions. Are you ready to start?

Gary Grant: Sure, certainly.

1. Please describe your past political experience.

Ninth grade in high school, won ninth grade president, mainly because no one wanted to run the magazine drive, it's a lot of work. Junior year in high school, won the junior year class presidency because no one wanted to have to lead the junior-senior prom. Then in 1999 I ran successfully for the Board of Supervisors—the school board in Albemarle County, against two other opponents. And now I guess two years after coming off the school board I'm running for election in the Rio District. So other than that, my only connection with politics is having been a reporter in the past. I've covered political figures and political news, so that's it.

2. What makes you better qualified than your opponent(s)?

You know, I thought about this question since you gave us this one in advance, and this is one that I'm going to let the voters decide, who's the most qualified and why. It's not something that I want to talk about because it sounds a little egocentric to do that. That said, the one thing I will note is that I believe I am strong on my constituents' service, when I was on the school board. I am committed to this job. Over the last six months, I have been to every board of supervisors meeting without fail, because I think that comes with the territory. The other two men in this race have much worse attendance on that mark. And I think you have to show people that you're committed to them rather than to yourself. So, that's all I'll say about that.

3. What do you think is the best water supply source to meet the community's needs for growth and for drought, and the second part, would you support a pipeline to the James River to address our water supply needs? Please explain why or why not?

I'll take the second part of that first. I do not support a pipeline from the James River to Charlottesville and urban Albemarle county. That seems to me to be a waste of time, money, person power, and potentially damaging to the natural resources which that pipeline would go through. I think we're fine with our reservoir storage system that we have right now. I do favor the connection of the two reservoirs, Ragged Mountain and south reservoir as well. I think we have a storage issue, not a quantity issue, and I think if we do that we'll be fine.

4. The Board of Supervisors will approve ordinances to support recently adopted changes to the rural areas portion of the comprehensive plan. Do you support the rural areas portion of the comprehensive plan and what new zoning ordinance strategies do you think stand the best chance to protect the rural areas for future generations?

I do support the rural preservation plan. I do have, perhaps, a question about clustering and phasing being done at the same time. I believe in the clustering

aspect of this plan, where we group the homes, and have residue (if you will allow me to call it that) that's preserved for the county and hopefully in perpetuity. The phasing bothers me a little bit because as a strong personal property advocate, I feel that that may tend to take away some of those personal property rights. So I'm really hesitant to couple both clustering and phasing at the same time. So, I'd have to look at the phasing idea in the future and see how that fits in.

5. Consider the growth we see in Northern Virginia. What mistakes have local governments made there and, if you are elected, what will you do differently here?

Oh my goodness sakes. Well, not having lived in Northern Virginia, only having driven through it I guess, you can see the mistakes from the roadway. One of them actually is very similar to something that was brought to the Board of Supervisors attention recently. And that is the setting up of houses so, for example the backs of them are to scenic roadways like 250 west. I think out at Cory Farms, it's very obvious to me, as a school bus driver I've seen it a lot and that's not the kind of development that I would prefer from an aesthetic standpoint. And frankly in this county we have to be concerned, or we should be concerned about aesthetics as well as the development issues. You know, I think we have to make sure that as a Board of Supervisors, we help the development come into the designated Growth Areas. That's where it's designed to be as opposed to eating up our Rural Areas. And I've said it before in some other forums, you know, what we have here is what attracts people and what keeps us here, we don't want to kill that. So if we can, you know, use our plans that are on the books to get growth and development in the Growth Areas, that will help us immensely.

6. Goals of the "Neighborhood Model" form of development, a form intended for the County's population centers, include interconnected neighborhoods and more compact, walkable communities with a mix of housing types that allow a larger population to live, work and shop in a smaller area. Do you support these goals of the Neighborhood Model for new development?

I do support the Neighborhood Model, but I support it with a caveat. I support it as a model, not the model. I don't think that we should always rely on one single formula in all situations. Again, I'll go back to my experience as driving a school bus. In going to—as a substitute, I go to all kinds of parts of the county, and I see neighborhoods that seem to be just fine as they are, and they're not Neighborhood Model developments. In the Growth Area, though, recently we had Belvedere approved after a couple years of back and forth on that. That neighborhood model there seems to fit well. We're getting affordable housing out of it. We're getting a nice mix of the categories the Neighborhood Model wants in these neighborhoods. It's going to be walkable. It's going to have pedestrian

access. It's going to have bicycle access. Obviously, vehicles are going to come in and out as well. And it preserves green space.

So yeah, the Neighborhood Model is a good model, I just think it's something that needs to be customized on a case by case basis when it's applied.

7. One example of a significant Neighborhood Model provided is Old Trail Village. Do you think Old Trail will be quality growth for Crozet and Charlottesville-Albemarle? And the second part of that, will it provide affordable living choices for our citizens and how will they remain affordable?

You're asking me to predict the future, and that's something that candidates, politicians, government officials really shouldn't get into too deeply although you have to look out as a government official because your charged, in a sense, to seeing that a county or a city grows the way that constituents want it to grow. Old Trail fits the Neighborhood Model. It was brought before the Board of Supervisors legally, appropriately. It was approved. I would hope that we have the enforcement within our community development office and zoning that make sure it's what it was intended to be. It is going to bring a huge crush of folks in the Crozet community. And I am concerned that it appears that promises that were made to the existing Crozet community have not been brought forward and consummated by the Board of Supervisors, and that bothers me. At the same time, it's difficult in the state of Virginia, under state laws to turn down an Old Trail once they comply with everything it is being asked to comply with. We'll have to make it the best that it can be, as they go forward as individual developers of that, and we as a county overseeing how it proceeds.

8. Our designated growth areas tell developers where we want them to build. Should we also tell developers through zoning what form we want that development to take? Why or why not?

When you say "form", I'm going to assume you're talking about, again something like the Neighborhood Model as opposed to individual homes. We're not looking at an architectural review board for example of individual homes within that development. I think we have the right, as a government, to see that a development that comes in and receives a certain approvals has to pass certain benchmarks. If they're in our ordinances and in our codes and everybody can understand that this is what you have to comply with, then that's what we have to make sure that we're enforcing, that we have the best neighborhoods and the best places for Albemarle County.

9. What types of incentives should exist for developers to build in our population centers or designated growth areas? Can you name some specific regulatory or financial examples? And finally, should the development here be required to conform with the Neighborhood Model?

Well, I don't think they should be required to conform with the Neighborhood Model and I've talked to that already. I think it needs to be customized. In terms of incentives to bring people in, I think you have to make it more market beneficial to develop in the Growth Areas than out in the Rural Areas. In addition, if we can make the permitting process, if you want to call it that, the approval process easier in the sense of it's 'we're trying to work in partnership: government and the people that own this land to develop it so that they can get in there and get it up and running within code,' then I think we're fine. Incentives sometimes can be translated as subsidies and I'm not so sure I'm really interested in government subsidies for private folks to come in and develop a piece of property even though we want it in the designated growth area. I have to say that's something I would have to look at on a case by case basis.

10. Do you support construction of a Western U.S. 29 bypass around Charlottesville on the currently proposed route or some other route? Please explain why or why not and where another route might go.

I don't have a specific route in mind. I leave that to the people that are geologists, hydrologists, civil engineers and that kind of thing. I do support a way around Charlottesville. I have called it a western bypass. I don't call it the Western Bypass as currently configured. But people that I have talked to on my sixteen hundred and forty-eight doors to date in the Rio district, when we talk about roads and that topic comes up, they want a way around Charlottesville. Not only for themselves but for people that are going south or north around Charlottesville. And I support that based on what my evidence is on what people have told me. I guess that's the best I can do.

11. Please describe any other transportation projects on the Route 29 corridor that you would support to reduce congestion.

I would like to see another crossing of the Rivanna River: Berkmar Drive Extended North. I would also like to see us build the Hillsdale Drive Extended, being very mindful and very careful that there is a high density senior citizen population in that area. That road, in my opinion, should come after the Meadowcreek Parkway. The Meadowcreek Parkway is desperately needed, has been needed for a long time, so we can get the traffic, some of the traffic at least off of east Rio Road. In addition, as a recreational bicyclist, we're woefully short of safe bicycle lanes in this area. You know, we're doing a better job, and I applaud the current Board of Supervisors for road plans that ask for and require medians, lanes for vehicles, walkability and bike lanes. I also, actually support

public transportation as well: saving the corridors so that we don't put something in to block public transportation when the time comes for that.

That said, it's very hard to force Americans out of their vehicles. In a recent forum, in a couple of recent forums, where I've come either on my feet or on my bicycle, and I've polled the audience-audiences that are very amenable and very interested in public transportation-and literally less than ten percent of the folks in those audiences who support, you know, anti-pollution measures and environmental measures, and preservation and conservation measures, and public transportation. They're coming in their vehicles and they're parking in the parking lots and most of them are coming one-to-a-vehicle. Well. You know, you have to, in my opinion, you have to walk what you speak, you know. And there are ways to do that and you have to make a personal commitment, instead of just preaching and forcing people to take something that maybe they don't want to be involved in. Public transit is important, it has to be self-sustaining, has to be viable. I'm not so sure we're there yet, I think we need to do more education, set more examples before that is going to be successful here.

12. What are your overall transportation priorities?

I've taken my transportation priorities from what people have told me as I've walked door to door in the five precincts in the Rio district. The number one issue based on my unscientific poll and information from people is the issue of interconnectivity. Right or wrong, people in established neighborhoods, on cul-de-sacs, they do not want their neighborhoods—their term—cut through, broken into, as new subdivisions come in next to them. They try to be good neighbors. They understand that things are going to change. They understand the zoning maps around them. But they don't understand if an intensive development comes in and their neighborhood was there first, in some cases thirty and forty years. They get very, very uptight when lines are drawn on the map that show their neighborhood being opened up to cut-through traffic. They don't want it.

That is my number one priority is making sure as we develop in the growth areas, that we use interconnectivity correctly and not just dump traffic on existing neighborhoods. In addition, I think the other top priority is funding for transportation. We hear the state We hear from some folks the state doesn't have the money, we hear from other folks the state is unwilling to spend the money on transportation and I think there's some of both in that. I would like to find out if we could prime the pump here, so to speak, locally with some local dollars out of our budget, to get ahead of some of the design projects of roadways, or pedestrian pathways, or bicycle ways or public transit. So we can prime that pump and maybe begin these studies and, in a sense, teach VDOT that we're on board, we've invested in this, now come on with us. Let's work with the general assembly for example, the Feds, and get this money in here for these projects that we need. In addition, I would be in favor of going to the voters with a

referendum question about bonding for local road projects and see what they say. And I think we would benefit from that.

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

Oh, I guess I just talked about it. It's transportation. I tell you, transportation is the number one. I talked about connectivity. I talked about the funding for roads. That's number one. From the folks that I've talked to, number two is education funding, number three is taxes. So again, I'm trying to serve them rather than dictate to them what they should be concerned about, and when I hear people talking about education funding, then I want to make sure that we can fund a school system that will be world class. Whether the children that come out of that world class education stay here or actually move out into the great world. I think we can get to that as well by having a manufacturing base here that takes some of the property tax burden off the residential taxes here. I think we can bring in good clean quality career ladder type firms, businesses, manufacturers that can train people that are ready here or that can use people that are underemployed here. And as I've talked to some of the business people here, they're not opposed to paying their fair share and actually a good portion of the tax base, so that we can take this burden off the residential property taxes.

So, those three again. Top priorities: transportation, the funding for education and the taxes. On taxes, people are simply saying we don't mind paying our fair share if you've got a multi-year budget plan and you can justify what you think the needs are for the county, fine if that is a four percent growth rate in the budget, and the assessments come in at eleven percent that year, they don't want you taking the difference away from them. And I agree with them on that.

14. What are the greatest challenges facing the Albemarle County Planning Commission and what type of person will you nominate for a position on the Commission?

Now, that's a hard question. I'm not so sure I would want that job for what the stipend is. Those people meet every Tuesday night. They have to deal with very complex, intricate issues of land use, development, special permits, zoning changes, Comprehensive Plan, that's where it starts. And all these recommendations on these various things come to the Board of Supervisors. They have to be, you know, willing to pore through the details of the county ordinances, obviously with the staff help. I wouldn't expect any, you know, appointed planning commissioner to have to know those documents as if they're knowing a bible or something like that. But that's a thankless, hard job, very complex. The kind of person that I would want in there is someone that is dedicated to the County of Albemarle, is willing to give up part of their life for the hours they're going to have to commit to that. In addition to the Tuesday night meetings, there's a lot of reading and there's a lot of on the phone to staff to get

clarifications, and there ought to be a lot of the planning commissioners talking with their constituents, finding out what different groups think about a certain request, a certain item that comes before them. And not waiting for people to call them or e-mail them, but if they know for example there's something on the agenda in a month that affects the Millington Bridge area or something like that, be proactive enough to get information out to those people so that they can decide 'oh yeah, I do want to be aware of that'. So I would look for someone that is great at research, has a lot of time, commitment to the County, and go from there.

15. Do we have appropriate resources in County government to achieve the objectives in our comprehensive plan? And then 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?

Wow, do we have the resources? Everybody-everybody, that's pretty broad, I guess. It seems to me that most people would always like to have a little bit more in their paycheck. I'd like to have a little bit more in the family budget. Police, fire, and rescue I'm sure would like to have more gear, better pay, better benefits. Teachers, employees, you name it. We have projects that are going underfunded, unfunded, undone in this County. It takes money to do those things. We have to be mindful, we have to be stewards of the county's revenues, because they all come from tax dollars. But as a Supervisor, you also have to realize that at times you have to make those tough decisions on financial matters and say 'this is worth spending our money on' and vote for whatever is needed to fund that item.

It's interesting to me, I'm always kind of tickled when people say the state isn't doing their fair share, or the federal government isn't doing their fair share. I think sometimes, those critics forget that all of us pay taxes to all three of those entities: local, state, and federal. It is our money, it's not like 'oh, we can go to the state and get it, we're getting it from somebody else.' We can go to the federal government, 'it's not really costing us anything, we're getting it from somewhere else, oh it's Utah, you know. It's money coming in from Nevada.' I think we have to stop thinking of 'either-or' or blaming the state. You know: 'the state isn't doing it's share.' We all are taxpayers to all three of these: state, federal, and local. We've got to realize that cooperatively, we've got to come up with financial plans to pay for what we need. Obviously, the heaviest burden, if it's your locality, your local dollars have to pay for it. And I hope I can be a good steward of that.

16. Have you received any endorsements yet that you would like to make the public aware of?

I actually made a point, in May, when I announced my candidacy, that I would not be seeking group endorsements. I would not take PAC money. I did not take

PAC money when I ran for School Board successfully in 1999, and I've upheld that here. I'll give you an example, the Charlottesville Area Association of Realtors asked me to come in for an interview, and I told Dave Philips right up front, the same thing I just mentioned here. I don't seek endorsements from groups and I don't take PAC money. But I said I'd be willing to come in and answer your questions and I did. I did the same thing for APACE which is the political arm of the Albemarle Education Association teachers union here. They wouldn't call themselves a union, they call themselves an association, same difference, basically. I answered their questionnaire, said I wasn't interested in group endorsements or group PAC money. I am proud of the fact that I won the Republican nomination if you can call that an endorsement. I don't know if that's an endorsement or not. It was a competitive match, I don't know what you would call it. I spent the month of May competing against Rodney Thomas for that nomination and won it. So, that endorsement now comes from my hard work.

I also, frankly, have been pleased that Rob Bell, state delegate and Virgil Goode, congressman, actually called my campaign manager and offered their support so I am using their words and their photo with me on some campaign literature. That wasn't an endorsement that I actually sought, but you know to be very frank I would have expected Republicans to back their Republican candidates, so maybe that's a no-brainer.

The endorsements that I'm probably most proud of, that I also did not solicit, are the nine people that are in my testimonial radio commercials. And they include people like Mary Rodriguez, who I served with on the Albemarle County School Board, who is a Democrat and told me that she may face some disagreement from some folks over her endorsement of me, but we have a relationship, and she trusts my ability. And she was willing to come forward and say 'what can I do for you.' And when someone says that to you as a candidate, you have things in mind. Would you put up a yard sign, would you be in a commercial, would you give me fifty bucks, whatever, that kind of thing. And for her, that's what I've responded with. I've had a few other teachers, the same thing. My boss, Goff Transportation, 'what can I do for you, Gary?' Gave me a five hundred dollar in-kind donation for a print ad and said 'what else can I do?' I said 'would you be willing to be in a commercial for me, to tell people that I actually have some jobs other than just running for office?' He said sure.

Those are unsolicited, real people in the Rio District, and that's what I appreciate, those kind of endorsements where they've stepped forward rather than me saying 'oh gosh, you know, I've got to get five people for commercials, or something like that, or I've got to list one hundred people in a print ad, now I've got to get on the phone for two weeks, would you endorse me, would you endorse me?'

No, I'm taking it from them to me, rather than me to them. So, those endorsements mean a lot to me.