



2006 Charlottesville City Council Candidate Interview April 2006

Candidate: Dave Norris (D)

On May 2, 2006, voters in the City of Charlottesville will be electing candidates to two seats on the Charlottesville City Council. This recording is Brian Wheeler's April 6, 2006 interview of Dave Norris. Mr. Norris is running as a Democrat. The two other candidates in this race are Rob Schilling (R) and Julian Taliaferro (D).

The audio of this interview is available online on the Charlottesville Tomorrow Weblog http://cvilletomorrow.typepad.com/charlottesville_tomorrow_/2006/04/candidate_inter_1.html

Complete election coverage is available on the Charlottesville Tomorrow website <http://action.cvilletomorrow.org/cvilleaction/elections.html>

INTERVIEW

Mr. Norris, 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 after we complete all three candidate interviews. Information from this interview, from some of the candidate forums, and from your campaign materials, may be used as sources 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, eleven of the questions you will be asked have been provided in advance, four other questions have not. All candidates will be asked the same questions.

- 1. Please describe your past experience that qualifies you to be on City Council.**

Before I do that, Brian, I just want to thank you and thank the other good folks of Charlottesville Tomorrow for your role in helping see to it that the voters of

Charlottesville are informed about the issues and the candidates that are running in this election, so thank you and thanks for this opportunity.

I've been an active citizen over the last 10 years here in Charlottesville working on a variety of initiatives to help improve the quality of life in our community and I think I've had leadership roles both in the non-profit sector working with some of the organizations that are really I think doing yeoman's work in harnessing the tremendous resource and civic energy of our community to solve and address and solve some of the problems here such as homelessness, such as affordable housing, getting UVA students involved in the community through Madison House, helping to promote leadership development in our low-income neighborhoods through a group called PHAR, Public Housing Association Residents. I've had a lot of experience working in the civic sector and I look forward to parlaying that experience into my role on Council.

I've also had public sector experience. I was appointed several years ago to the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority Board of Commissioners that's appointed by City Council and in my second year on that Board I was elected by my peers as Chair of that Board, actually elected twice as Chair of that Board which oversees all the public housing and Section 8 programming here in the City. It's a multimillion dollar public sector organization and I'm very proud of the accomplishments that we were able to make during my time as Chair of that Board.

Primarily I think the thing that I'm most proud of was getting the Housing Authority back into the business of affordable housing development and later on I'll talk more about why I feel that's so important, the whole issue of affordable housing, but just in addition to my non-profit leadership experience and public sector roles that I've had, I'm just an active citizen, an interested citizen in the community. I have two kids that go public schools here. I'm just very interested in the quality of life of our community and leaving this City a better place for my children and for everyone else's children.

- 2. Later this month, the Rivanna Water & Sewer Authority will recommend a plan to improve our water supply to handle expected growth and future droughts. Assume that the plan recommends a larger Ragged Mountain Dam and a new pipeline to connect the Ragged Mountain Reservoir to the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir. Will this water supply solution get your support? Why or why not?**

Brian, I think of the two options that seem to be on the table at this point, this certainly is to me the preferable option of keeping our water supply local and not turning to a pipeline from the James River to address our water needs. As I understand it, the costs of the two options are roughly equal, but the idea of building a pipeline from the James River just has— I think it brings up a lot of red flags for people that are concerned about smart growth, people that are

concerned about the safety of the water supply and also in terms of the drought scenario, I'm not sure the James River is our most dependable source of water, so I would certainly, of the two options that are on the table, now prefer the option of expanding the Ragged Mountain Reservoir and promoting more connectivity with the South Fork and it seems to me that it's the scenario that we're most likely to adopt as a region.

3. The County Board of Supervisors will spend considerable time in 2006 looking at new ordinances to protect the fields, farms, forests and mountains in our rural area. They will be looking at the development process in local government and considering phasing of new development in the designated growth areas surrounding the City. They will be reviewing rezonings that could bring thousands of new homes and retail shopping to the County. How do you view these developments in the County and how might they impact your priorities as a City Councilor?

I think we have to be very concerned in the City about the rate of growth that's occurring and that may be occurring in the near future in the County and I've recently spent a good amount of time attending meetings having to do with the Biscuit Run development and talking to residents in the Jefferson Park Avenue area neighborhood, Fry's Spring area, about the impact particularly regarding traffic that that particular development is going to have and I'm not a no-growth kind of guy, but I do think we have to make sure that as we're planning for growth in the urban ring that we do some real planning, particularly with regards to roads, connector roads.

There's a huge concern of City residents and I think a legitimate concern that if we don't build connector roads to help steer some of the traffic away from our residential neighborhoods, you're going to see our neighborhoods just be swamped with new traffic and that's of great concern to the long-time residents of those neighborhoods in terms of impacting their quality of life.

Specifically, with Biscuit Run we want to see a connector road built over to Fontaine Research Park to help steer some of the traffic. A lot of the residents we expect of Biscuit Run will be employees of the University and if there's some way we can get them to their jobs at UVA without having to drive up JPA Extended and some of those roads that really weren't built to handle that level of traffic, so I think working with the County is going to be a real imperative, not just with Biscuit Run but any of the developments that are going on south or north or west or east of the City to make sure we're not dumping a whole lot of new traffic on our residential neighborhoods, make sure we're planning for—

Going back to the water issue, we have to think ahead as a region so that we can avoid another drought scenario like we had a few years ago. I think it was 2002 where I remember quite vividly, you know, are we putting the provisions in place to manage this growth in a way that's not going to overwhelm our resources.

4. What is your top priority for action by City Council should you be elected?

Brian, last fall, fall of 2005, there were two reports that came out almost within a month of each other. One was put out by the Monticello Area Community Action Agency or MACAA and I'm on their Board, which is an agency that works with basically the poorest of the poor here in our community and the other report was put out by the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce which isn't exactly known for working with the poorest of the poor in our community, but does good work advocating for our business sector. Both of these reports, interestingly enough, highlighted affordable housing as the number one issue for our community and I can't think of an issue that affects more people across the board in our community than the issue of affordable housing.

I run a homeless ministry and so every night we house people many of whom who are working, some of them working full-time jobs, who can't afford a place to rent here in our community. We have young families that are on waiting lists for rental assistance that are waiting for years and years to get a rental voucher or to get into public housing. We have other working families that find it unable or find it impossible to buy a home in our community anymore. They can't find— We're not building starter homes anymore the way we used to. Established homeowners are facing double-digit increases in property assessments. The property tax burden is becoming for some quite unbearable.

Long established neighborhoods in our City are facing the real threat of gentrification where long-term residents are being priced out of their neighborhoods. The business sector and local employers are having a hard time attracting and retaining employees because of the high cost of living in our community and a lot of that goes right back to the high cost of housing, so, I would say, across the board, affordable housing and the lack thereof is I think the most pressing issue facing our community. It's going to be my top priority as a City Councilor, in fact, the very first thing that I'm going to do as a City Councilor, if I get elected, is going to be to move forward on creating what I'm calling a Charlottesville Affordable Housing Investment Fund which would be a dedicated pool of revenue from local tax dollars, not a new tax.

We're not having to raise taxes to fund it. It's basically setting aside some money from the existing revenue stream into a dedicated fund that can then be used to leverage financial resources from the state and federal government and private foundation to create flexible pools of financing for affordable housing development. It's good and well to talk about affordable housing, but if you're not going to step up the table and put some dollars into the pot to make it happen, it's very likely not going to happen.

5. What are your overall transportation priorities?

In terms of transportation, I think for me I'm a strong advocate of making sure we're planning for multimodal transportation and not just looking at road building but looking at alternative transportation, community transportation. I want to make sure we have the— If we claim to be a world-class city, we need to have a world-class public transportation system to match that rhetoric and so one of the things— I think it comes up later actually, but one of the things that I've advocated for during the campaign is creating a regional transit authority. It's an idea that's come up recently to try to do a better job of making our transit system, both in the City and the County and the other counties as well possibly, work more effectively and efficiently and be more user friendly so that we're taking some of the cars off the roads and easing the burden on our roadways.

Bicycling, pedestrian activities—we have a wonderful bike ped master plan on the shelf and I don't want to see that plan just sit and gather dust. Committees spent a lot of time researching how our City can do a better job of accommodating and promoting bicycling and pedestrian activity. One of the specific initiatives from that plan that I think we should move on in the very near future is connecting the trails. For instance, the Rivanna Trail with Pen Park and with Darden Towe Park and promoting greater connectivity with our parks and our trails and with the roadways, we want to make sure that we continue the work that's happened recently in terms of smarter regional planning, in identifying transportation needs when it comes to new roads and enhancing existing roads and just looking to moving forward in all these fronts.

6. In what ways should City government be working to reduce traffic congestion at critical road intersections?

Well, Brian, I think goes back to the issue of trying to build a smarter regional system of roadways that eases the traffic burden on the core urban area. In other words, building circumferential roads to steer some of the traffic away from our neighborhoods and our downtown area. We don't want Charlottesville to become a throughway from 29 North down to Biscuit Run, for instance, or from 29 North over to Pantops and if there's some ways— Well, there are ways. We've already starting to identify those ways and how we can steer some of that traffic away from our residential neighborhoods and our downtown area. That's going to have a significant impact on the traffic congestion at the intersections if we can help ease that burden.

Also, of course, anything that we can do to invest in our alternative transportation or public transportation system is going to benefit— Is going to help us to reduce traffic congestion and so I will certainly make that a priority as well.

7. A report was recently submitted to the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) that made recommendations on policies and revenue sources that could be used to fund some or all of the area's \$100 million in transportation project priorities. The report said that if the state is unwilling or unable to act to provide more funding, our region should move forward with implementing several of the recommended solutions. One of the policy recommendations was to create a new transportation district for the City and County which would allow for revenue sharing on cooperative projects and to enable government to create bondable revenue streams. One of the funding options recommended for servicing these bonds is a new local sales tax of 1/2 cent dedicated to transportation. Would you support the creation of a transportation district and a new local sales tax to support funding the area's priority transportation projects? Are there other funding solutions you prefer?

This report— I think one of the things that I found admirable about this report was the fact that they did look at the transportation needs from a multimodal perspective because what you worry about when you start talking about transportation districts and things like that is that it basically can become just a road building empire and that's sort of works outside of the normal channels of public decision-making and so I'm heartened by the fact that this particular report is looking at a variety of transportation needs in our community and looking how to fund them, given the fact that the funding levels from the state and the federal government may not be sufficient to meet our local needs.

I have to say I'm a little bit hesitant to support a sales tax increase as a way of funding some of these road needs, partly because the sales tax by its very nature affects— It hits lower-income residents the hardest and if we're going to see most of these dollars go into funding new roads to support new construction for developers that are not building housing for lower-income workers which generally is not happening, this is basically robbing Paul to pay Peter, so to speak, and so I would want to look at some of the other revenue sources and there are number of them spelled out in that particular report looking at how we can make sure that the development community which is profiting from the new developments, as it should, but is more making sure we're not subsidizing that process and instead we're asking the development community to pony up the dollars and to help us manage the impacts of this new growth, so on the one hand, I think, in general, looking more creatively on a regional basis about how we can meet our needs, whether that's transportation, water supply, housing, what-not, is a very positive development and I just want to make sure that we're looking equitably about how to fund these kinds of initiatives.

8. Do our citizens and government employees have plentiful choices for safe, convenient, affordable, and attractive places to live?

No. I think we are quickly becoming one of those boutique communities where the people that do the hard work of making this city function cannot afford to live anywhere near here and that is one of my great concerns, just as a citizen and as a future City Councilor and certainly when you talk about government employees, I can't tell you how many times I've had teachers and police officers and social service workers and fire fighters come up to me and tell me they can't afford to live anywhere near here anymore and we want to be able to— I want for us to be the kind of community where our teachers and our police officers, oh, and by the way, our retail workers and our service workers, again, all the people that are doing the hard work of making this place the world-class city that it is can afford to live here. And so that takes making affordable housing a priority and as I said before, I'm certainly willing to make it a priority.

When I get elected, I've spelled out some specific things that we can do such as creating a housing investment fund, such as really challenging UVA to step up to the plate and build more housing on Grounds for its students to release some of the pressure on the local housing market, such as revitalizing our public housing neighborhoods, such as expanding the supply of accessory apartments. There's lots of things that we can be doing.

Ultimately, of course, housing prices are dictated by supply and demand in the marketplace and so we have to be cognizant of that reality, but there's certainly a lot more things that we can be doing on the local level and on the regional level to insure that our citizens and our government employees have enough choices here to live and raise their families.

9. The University of Virginia is planning over \$1 billion in construction projects during the next six years. In what ways does this impact our community? And a follow-up—how would you characterize the level of co-operation between the City and the University and in what way will you seek to make changes?

I recently had a conversation with a gentleman who was very active a number of years ago when UVA was planning their giant new parking garage there at the corner of Emmet and Ivy and who was quite disturbed at the time at the lack of cooperation and communication between the University and the Lewis Mountain neighborhood, in particular, and just the City of Charlottesville in general and according to this gentleman, he feels like the situation has improved dramatically in recent years in terms of— And I think partly it's because the University has learned a lesson from that specific experience. They can't just ram a project down a neighborhood's throat but they really need to work collaboratively with the neighborhood and with the City and do some smart planning, think ahead to

the impacts on the neighborhoods, so I think we're seeing better cooperation now than we have in the past and that's certainly a positive development.

The University of Virginia obviously is the economic engine for our community and the fact that they are ever growing is a good thing in some ways in that they're providing more jobs for our residents, they're creating more revenue for our public coffers, they're just attracting talented people and cultural attractions and what-not to the community, but their growth does have impacts and you look at— Going back to the housing issue where the growth of the student body at UVA over the last 20 and 30 years has not been met by an analogous growth in the amount of housing provided for them on Grounds and so students have been gobbling up housing which formerly was working-class blue collar housing all around the— In the neighborhoods all around the University which is putting pretty severe impacts on quality of life in those neighborhoods.

I'd like to see that one billion dollars in construction projects that UVA is planning for the next six years, unfortunately does not include a whole lot of new housing and I know they're including some and they're renovating some and I'd just like to see us as a community work with UVA to incorporate more housing in their construction plans and also just continue the recent progress in making sure there's good communication and collaboration when they do further development work.

10. What are your views on working more closely with the County and UVA to jointly operate a regional transit system?

As I mentioned earlier, I have advocated and endorsed the idea of creating a regional transit authority which I believe will help us to create a transit system that is more user friendly, that is more cost effective and so I think this is a— In terms of bringing the partners together, not just the County and UVA but JAUNT, CTS, all those transit players and seeing where we can maybe reduce some duplication, seeing where we can jointly apply for further grants to improve the system, increase ridership on the system and do everything we can to make sure the system works for the residents of this region.

11. What will your priorities be for further development in and around the Downtown Mall area? And a couple of follow-ups—how should public transit and parking needs be addressed? And what distinctive characteristics of the Downtown Mall area do you value the most?

Well, I think the Downtown Mall in many ways serves as the heart of our community and it's for many years has been the gathering point for residents of our community who are attracted to the shops there, to the cultural activities there, to the public events that happen there. My concern for— My concern about the Downtown Mall is it's quickly losing that sort of that— The melting pot feel that it maybe used to have and it's quickly becoming, again, sort of this

boutique neighborhood. I was just in a meeting earlier today where some long-time residents of Charlottesville told me they don't ever go downtown anymore because they don't feel like there's anything for them down there anymore and I think that's a sad development.

I myself, I'm a bit of a cheapskate and I buy all my clothes at A&N and I used to shop at Woolworth's and for some people, they really relied on those kinds of stores for their own shopping and for some of them they're on a limited income and forget about trying to buy— Forget about patronizing any of these boutique stores down there on the Mall, so I don't know that there's a whole lot necessarily that government can do about that but it is I think— I think I'd like to see us engage in a conversation with the Downtown business owners and with the Downtown advocates about how can we make the Mall more of a gathering point again so that all sectors of our community feel like the Mall belongs to them, as it does.

In terms of public transit and parking, I think part of the reason why it's hard for people to utilize the Mall is there's a perception that the parking is limited downtown. Partly that's just information, getting the information out there that there are parking spaces available and you may not be able to park right in front of your favorite store, you may have to walk a couple of blocks, but I'm told there are on any given day quite a few vacant spaces in the parking garages around the Downtown Mall and I think improving signage in terms of access to the Mall, both signage from the Interstate and signage in the Mall area itself to help people navigate the Mall area.

I'm not in favor of bringing more vehicles onto the Mall because I think one of the things that makes the Mall as attractive and as a special place that it is is because of its pedestrian nature and I'd like to see us do some other things first. That was recommended by the Planning Commission to improve the accessibility to the Mall before we talk about bringing more cars onto the Mall.

I think I'm optimistic about the Downtown Mall and despite everything I've just said, it's still one of my favorite things about Charlottesville.

- 12. In December 2005, a study was presented to City Council indicating our city parks were outdated and needed significant improvements. The report detailed \$33 million in improvements to parks, pools, and trail systems. If elected, what will you do to address our park facilities and urban green spaces?**

I'm a strong proponent of the parks and the trails and the urban green spaces. For a quite a time, there was this prevailing idea of the City as a park. I'd like to see us revive that idea. The parks really contribute enormously to the quality of life in our community and for our families. I certainly spend a good amount of time in our parks with my kids, but there are certain parks that are showing signs

of age and could use some reinvestment. I certainly will be an advocate for investing in our parks. I'm not prepared yet to say if \$33 million is the magic figure or if it's something less or maybe it's something more, but I certainly want to see us make sure that we have the best quality parks for our community.

13. Do we have the necessary human and financial resources in City government to achieve the objectives in our comprehensive plan? In what way, if any, do we need to make changes?

I think we have the necessary financial resources certainly. If anything, we have too many human resources. I hate to say that, but our City hasn't grown in any substantial way since 1971 and certainly not in population or in size very much and yet our City government is over twice as big if not bigger than that than it was in 1971, so I think the resources are there. We just want to make sure we're utilizing them as effectively as possible and I think there's probably some areas of City government where we can trim some fat and look at really investing more in the front line service positions and whenever anybody talks about cutting the City budget, I want to look at the central office first and the general administration first and not look at cutting police officers.

Our Police Chief has been doing an admirable job in trying to expand community policing initiatives in our community so that's one thing I think we probably should be doing more of is community policing and yet he can't get his budget approved to add more community police officers. There's a strategy, a proven strategy for building better relations between the community and the police. I think we need to invest in that, so I'm going to take a hard look at our budget. It's something that I did when I chaired the Board at the Housing Authority was to take a hard look at that budget and find where some cost savings could be realized and I'll certainly be doing the same with the City's budget.

14. One of the items in the Council's 2020 Vision states that the City will work to "sustain our natural resources and enhance the quality of our natural and built environment." It indicates that "new development must be high quality and sustainable." Do you agree with that goal? If so, how will you work to realize that vision? And a follow-up—how does recent in-fill development in the City measures up?

I absolutely do support that goal. I think I've made environmental sustainability one of the four key planks in my platform in my campaign for City Council and that includes promoting sustainable development and design, including in-fill development as opposed to suburban sprawl development and so I want to see us do everything we can in that regard and specifically, I've called for the creation of a voluntary set of green building and design standards for the City of Charlottesville. This would be something that we would partner with local design professionals, development professionals. You know, we have in our community here some of the world's most visionary thinkers on issues of environmental

sustainability and yet they're doing projects in China and they're doing projects in Detroit and they're doing projects all over the world and we've got to tap into some of that expertise here and make Charlottesville the greenest city it can be.

So, create a set of design and development standards for our new developments and that's everything from improving energy efficiency in the appliances to making sure we're building in a pedestrian-friendly manner, reducing our impact on the natural environment. There's a lot more that we can be doing and we can be a real leader and advocate. We don't want to get government in the business of mandating these sorts of things, but government with—

One small example with Albemarle County with the green roof on the County Office Building. I think that's a brilliant project. It didn't cost a whole lot of resources, but again, it's government leading the way, showing how to model some of these approaches. The City of Charlottesville in its development work can certainly be a model, a good model, for how to build in a more sustainable way and I will certainly champion that if I get elected.

Then a follow-up there if you want to comment on it. It was how do you think you recent in-fill development has measured up.

Well, I think we have a mixed track record honestly, and I think some of the new developments that are going in now are trying to model maybe some higher-density pedestrian orientation. One of the things that we're seeing a lot more of, particularly around the University area now, is because of some zoning changes developers are allowed to create higher-density developments and also to reduce the number of parking spaces required per unit which I think is a good thing and anything we can do to encourage, in this case students, but in general, new residents to reduce their reliance on the automobile is a good thing.

But we're still seeing a number of sort of suburban cul-de-sacs, subdivisions going in in the City and certainly in the County. I think the County's, the neighborhood model even though it needs to be tweaked but I think that's a good direction to be heading is trying to create mixed use communities that are accessible by transit, that encourage pedestrian accessibility, that are mixed income, include commercial and public space. I think these are all the directions we need to be heading in.

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

A number of the organizations that do official endorsements have yet to announce their endorsements, so we're waiting to hear on some of those. I was very pleased during my nominating campaign to receive the endorsement of about two dozen local leaders in the local environmental community in Charlottesville, sort of a loose-knit group that called themselves Enviros for Dave

who stood up for me and endorsed my environmental— My platform for environmental sustainability, smart growth, alternative transportation and some of the names on that list are names that are well known to— Rich Collins, Stratton Salidis, Eric Gilchrist who's a leader in the green building movement here locally. A number of people, Peter Kleeman has been working on alternative transportation. A number of people that have been really involved in efforts to improve the quality of life in our community through smarter growth, through green design, green development. I was very pleased to get that endorsement, but this will sound sort of trite but the endorsement that matters most to me is the one on May 2nd when the voters go to the polls and I hope that they'll come out and support me and support Julian Taliaferro as well.

Thank you.

Thank you.