



2005 Board of Supervisors Candidate Interview October 2005

Candidate: David Slutzky (D), 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 David Slutzky, candidate for the Rio seat on the Board of Supervisors. Mr. Slutzky is running as a Democrat. His opponents for this seat are Gary Grant and Thomas Jakubowski.

INTERVIEW

David, 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?

1. Please describe your past political experience.

Well, since this is my first opportunity to speak, let me, first of all, thank Charlottesville Tomorrow for doing this. I think this is a valuable public service and I appreciate you offering it.

As to your question about my past political experience, when I was in college and graduate school, I was very active in Democratic Party politics in Chicago which is pretty much all politics in Chicago. As I've gotten further along in my career, I served in the Clinton administration as a Senior Policy Advisor at the EPA initially and then later at the White House and my title was Senior Policy Advisor for Environment Issues and I dealt with growth issues and environmental issues when I was there.

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

Well, that's a presumption which hopefully the voters will confirm. I think the main differentiator is the issue of experience. Albemarle County government is a quarter-of-a-billion-dollar business enterprise in some ways and it's important to have its leadership have experience not only with narrow issues, but also with business and I have successfully run a couple of entrepreneurial business enterprises, successfully I might add, in addition to which I have a lot of subject matter expertise on how to manage growth issues and on environment issues and on transportation issues and I think that all of those put together makes me significantly more qualified than either of my opponents albeit that they're both very fine people.

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?

Well, I'll try to answer both of those questions in a conflated way. They're the same question, if you will. Our water should come from the skies above Albemarle County. It's the one water source that we can control, in a sense. If we start piping water through the James River pipeline, we're going to be dependent on a water source that flows from somewhere else where other people have control over it, where other people can contaminate it with industrial pollutants and where other people can divert it in drought times so that we don't have an adequate water supply.

I'm totally against the James River pipeline and I'm completely supportive of the strategy of storing our own water so, in short, there're a number of proposals on the table for capturing Albemarle's rain water and larger reservoir systems and using those as a water source and I'm supportive of the best one of those and there's a couple that would be appropriate.

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?

It's a great question. First of all, I do support the rural areas portion of the comp plan. I think the comp plan as a totality is a brilliant piece of work. What I'm concerned about is that it may not by itself be sufficient to stem the tide of development activity in the rural areas so what the County needs to do is to take the proactive steps necessary to make sure that what development does occur in the County indeed occurs within the designated growth areas which is the intent of the comp plan and it is the will of the residents of Albemarle County. That's clear.

The County has been looking at clustering and phasing as strategies for trying to at least slow down the rural area development and I think they're both excellent strategies. That said, they're not going to work unless we make it a lot easier, if you will, for developers to actually do the development that we want them to do inside the designated growth areas. We need to give clear signals to the developer community about what it is that we want when they come inside the growth areas but then when they do bring proposals that match our requests, we should be much quicker at approving them so that the developers don't feel that they have to flee the growth areas and do by-right development in the rural areas.

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?

That's a tough question from Albemarle County's perspective because we don't live day-to-day in Northern Virginia. We're focused—at least I am—on our local political landscape. You did ask about what local governments have done in Northern Virginia. There's two things that they have done I think that are wrong. One is that they have encouraged unbridled sprawl. It's despicable and I've commuted to Washington over the years and have seen the profound change in the western outside boundary of the Washington metro area. They also in Northern Virginia have not been very articulate in arguing in Richmond about the importance of giving local governments the necessary powers to manage their own growth challenges locally and I think Central Virginia has done a better job of expressing that view but if we also had Northern Virginia more effective in pushing that agenda in Richmond, we probably would have a better outcome.

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?

Absolutely, with a couple of caveats. I think the Neighborhood Model is good design. I think it’s, as an abstract concept, a terrific idea. It has nuances about it, however, that I think are problematic and need to be tweaked. The objective of concentrating a number of different uses into a development does make it possible for people to walk to some of their retail destinations, in some instances, walk to schools and so forth, which does reduce vehicular traffic on our main arteries. That’s clearly a good thing. I also think that it makes for more livable communities to have that kind of mix.

I like the way the Neighborhood Model as applied in Albemarle County is at least by design trying to attract affordable housing units into each of these neighborhoods. I’m not sure we’ve done as good a job as we should be in requiring that that 15% affordable housing goal be met, but at least the intent is there.

The one issue with the Neighborhood Model that concerns me the greatest is the interconnecting roads. I’m recognizing the inevitability of growth coming to Albemarle County and I favor that we would concentrate that growth in the designated growth areas instead of in the rural areas. That said, what I don’t want these new developments to do is to disturb existing communities and as I’ve gone door-to-door and met in a number of neighbor’s homes, I have gotten a strong sense that the folks in existing neighborhoods do not feel comfortable with the interconnecting roads and as an abstract concept, the Neighborhood Model requires those interconnecting roads, but as a practical matter, here in Albemarle County I don’t think they’re welcome and so I don’t think we should build them. We should allow for rights-of-way and easements to exist so that if neighborhoods eventually decide they’re comfortable connecting to each other, they’ll have the ability to do that without having to condemn somebody’s house, but I do not think we should be building all of those interconnecting roads if the neighbors don’t want them.

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?

It’s an interesting question. The answer is yes and no. I think that Old Trail itself is an excellent example of successful Neighborhood Model design and I think the

developer should be commended for trying to do a good job. That said, there's a problem with Old Trail and it's not Old Trail itself. It's that Old Trail represents a significant imposition of new growth into one of our designated growth areas but where there isn't sufficient infrastructure to handle the fact that that development is a good distance away from Charlottesville and probably the majority of people that will move into that development will be commuting to Charlottesville for work. I think that the County needs to tackle this challenge of providing infrastructure to all of the designated growth areas simultaneous with approving a lot of these developments.

I'm concerned about what the County can and cannot do because so much of the road funding and road decision-making seems to reside in the hands of VDOT, but the County needs to do what it can do make sure that infrastructure is indeed being built out along with these growth areas or we're going to have more transportation problems.

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?

I think we should. I think that what Albemarle County's trying to do with Places 29 is a great exercise. It's trying to get active community input from folks impacted by the 29 North growth corridor so that as the County revises its thinking about what that growth pattern will look like, it's reflective of the public will. I think it's imperative that we do what we need to do to get developers to want to develop in the growth area so that they don't develop by right in the rural areas. For the developers to be comfortable coming into the growth areas and to provide the necessary protections for existing neighborhoods, the County Board is going to have to be very clear about giving out signals to the developer community about exactly what we want these new developments to look like, but when those new developments are brought forward to the boards and they look like what we describe, we do need to do a much better job of giving them quicker approval so that in fact the developers will go forward with them. I think if we give clear signals about what the new growth should look like, I think that the marketplace will react and we will have high quality, very livable communities being built where they should be in the growth areas.

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?

I don't have specific proposals to make at this point although I've been looking into the complex legal fabric of what local governments indeed can do since we are fairly limited here in Virginia, but I do think, like I said before, that giving fairly

clear signals to the developers about what we want that new growth to look like is the major first step and the incentive, if you will, would be that if they give us what we ask for, that we give them quick response instead of nit-picking on the edges of their proposals in a way that distracts from the overall importance of getting the work done.

I also think that the idea of the Neighborhood Model is a good one, but as I said before, some neighborhoods don't like some aspects of Neighborhood Model in particular cases so rather than being precise and rigid about saying we have to have all of the components of Neighborhood Model design put in all cases, I'd rather have a little bit of flexibility to allow for the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission to react favorably when a good idea is brought to the table that matches public will and maybe doesn't precisely match the Neighborhood Model.

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.

Well, flat out, I do not support the Western bypass proposal as it exists today. At the very cheapest, it appears to be a quarter of a billion dollars to build 6.1 or .2 miles of road for what may be as much as 10% of the traffic along 29. I think that's a waste of valuable resources. What I'd much rather see the County do is take those resources and concentrate them on a series of alternate transit strategies that I think would have greater impact on relieving the congestion challenge of Route 29. Those would include, at the very least, some meaningful bike and pedestrian walkways and bikeways from various parts along the 29 corridor down to the University area and down to the downtown area. I, for one, live in Northfields and would be happy to ride my bike along the river to my office just south of downtown if it were safe to do so and we need a bikeway for that to happen.

I also think that the County should concentrate a lot more of its resources on preparing for alternative transit technologies along the 29 corridor. I've seen some of these questions, not all of them, and I know we're going to get into transit issues in a minute so I will save that for then.

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

Well, now that we've gotten to the transportation question right away, I think 29 North is basically the main street of Albemarle County. It cuts through the thick of most of our designated growth area and it is what we use as main street today. Main street traditionally is a transportation corridor, not a road by itself. A lot of times when I've raised the issue of some other form of transit, whether it's light rail or whether it's a bus rapid transit system, people kind of turn their heads and

say, oh, Charlottesville's too small for that, we'll never get big enough for that. Well, I've got to tell you—we are big enough for that. We're not, I'm sure, likely to be building some kind of an extensive subway system in the near future, if ever. I kind of hope Albemarle doesn't grow that much, but we are large enough right now to support bus rapid transit.

Bus rapid transit, simply put, is a high-tech bus. It still rolls on wheels and it goes down a dedicated lane at some point along the 29 corridor and if it can get over some of the difficult intersections like the Hydraulic intersection or the Rio intersection and if it can get into the different shopping districts along 29, it could be a much better transit alternative for people to use to go down that corridor and to join up with what the City of Charlottesville should be doing along Main Street.

Now, bus rapid transit to be built is very feasible financially, especially if we took some of the money from the Western bypass and put it to better use. One of the challenges may be that in the near term we can't get bus rapid transit over the Hydraulic intersection, but when we do build an interchange there as it appears we're likely to do, even if people haven't bought onto the idea of bus rapid transit yet, we should still design that interchange so that eventually we can put in a bus rapid transit line over that intersection.

Similarly, the context of Places 29, I hope that what we decide to do is to provide for a right-of-way along the entire 29 corridor for some kind of alternate transit system so that when the time is ripe, we don't have to go back and retrofit the whole city for this purpose.

12. What are your overall transportation priorities?

I think that the Meadowcreek Parkway is a good idea. It also appears to be a done deal so I'm pleased with that. As I've mentioned before, I think bike and pedestrian trails, connecting neighborhoods into the University and into the City are fairly inexpensive to build and very good idea. I think that the Hillsdale Extension troubles me significantly because I think it's going to have a far more serious impact on our senior community than has been recognized and while it appears to be the case that that is also a done deal, I'm going to do anything in my power to insure that at least as the design is fleshed out, that we take appropriate care to provide safety features for the senior community that is going to be impacted by that.

And finally, as I've said, I favor the idea of a bus rapid transit corridor along 29 and over the Hydraulic interchange and I think that if the gas prices continue to soar, as I predict that they will, I think people might have an appetite for alternate transit a lot sooner than maybe we used to think we would.

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

There's a lot of issues that I'm interested in and concerned about, but I'd have to say the most important one in my mind is doing what's necessary to insure that the inevitable growth in Albemarle County does not get spread across the rural areas of the County but instead is concentrated inside the designated growth areas, supported by infrastructure and done in a way that is protective of existing neighborhoods.

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?

Well, I'm glad you didn't ask me who it is that I would like to nominate because I can answer the question what type of person very easily. It needs to be somebody who is sympathetic to the importance of concentrating growth in the rural areas, somebody who is capable of adapting inside the growth areas to the Neighborhood Model to what neighborhoods nearby are concerned about. You need to have somebody who has a deep understanding of sustainable design and livable communities and, also, and this is very important, has the backbone to stand by what they say they believe in.

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?

Well you're asking me to predict the future and that's always difficult to do. I also think you're asking me, in effect, whether or not I think we have adequate staff and adequate money to tackle the challenges that we confront. I think that there's another piece in terms of resources other than money and staff and that's empowerment and I consider it a priority, although a difficult thing for the Board of Supervisors to pursue, but I consider it a priority for us to try and convince the folks in Richmond how important it is for them to give more empowerment to local governments to decide the fate of local communities.

We have an awful lot of difficulty managing our growth challenges when we don't have much say in what VDOT ultimately decides to do with our road infrastructures and we don't have as much say in, if you will, the regulatory tools that governments could use to manage their growth challenges, but having said that, I do think that Albemarle County has an excellent staff. I think that the staff has a culture that maybe is a little bit confused about priorities and I would like to work with the staff to make sure that they value having development occur in the growth areas over having the development occur in the rural areas because I consider that to be a top priority.

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

I imagine the public's already aware of some of them. Albemarle Voters Against Sprawl, no surprise, has supported me because I'm a strident opponent to unbridled sprawl. I spent most of my professional career dealing with the impacts of growth on local communities.

In addition to that, I was pleased to receive the endorsement of the Charlottesville and Albemarle Association of Realtors. I was a little bit surprised, since I'm running as a Democrat, that they chose to support me, but they explained to me as they should—that I am the most qualified candidate based on my experience and they felt comfortable that I had the County's best interests at heart and that I was reasonable and balanced, that I understood the environmentalists' concerns but I also had real world business experience and I think that they made the correct choice in deciding, all in all, that I am an appropriate person to serve on the Board of Supervisors.

In addition to that, the local teachers association has supported me and I consider that to be a very important endorsement because I value education above pretty much everything else.

Thank you very much, David.

Thank you very much for this opportunity. Take care.