



2009 Albemarle County Board of Supervisors Candidate Interview September 2009

Candidate: Madison Cummings (D)

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 Madison Cummings (D). Mr. Cummings' opponents are Duane Snow (R) and John Lowry (I).

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

http://cvilletomorrow.typepad.com/charlottesville_tomorrow_/2009/09/cummings.html

*Complete election coverage is available on the Charlottesville Tomorrow website
<http://www.cvilletomorrow.org/elections>*

INTERVIEW

Mr. Cummings, 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 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.

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

We have lived actually in the central Virginia area for 39 years and have lived in the County for 31 years. I have been a member of the School Board from 1994 to 2001. I was a member of the Charlottesville Albemarle Commission on Children and Families from 2002 to 2008 and chair of that group for the last two years. I have been a member of the Cove Garden Ruritan Club for the last 25 years serving as treasurer and as president. I have served on several boards and I know how board mechanics and board psychodynamics work and I know how to prepare a budget with my colleagues, well at that time it was in the range of a little bit over \$100 million.

On the School Board and the Commission of Children and Families I worked with City residents and board members and that will enhance my ability to work with City Council on joint endeavors in the future. I was on [Charlottesville Albemarle Technical Education Center] (CATEC) while I was on the School Board for seven and a half years and was able to work with City people in that regard too. I was able to keep alive an advisory committee, keep it viable for all eight years of my term on the School Board. I have been a member of the Albemarle County Schools Health Advisory Council. I am the chair this year for four years. I have been on the African American Teaching Fellows Board which helps to enhance teaching careers for African Americans so that we can hire them in our City schools.

Also way back I used to coach soccer and have worked with youth significantly for over 10 or 12 years, soccer and baseball. I was also PTO chair and built playgrounds at Red Hill during the 80s. So I served on the Blue Ribbon Commission for Education in the 21st Century in 1990-91.

So my experience and also the fact that I feel compelled to give back to the County because my family has richly benefited from living in Albemarle County. All three of our children went to school here and finished school here and two still live in the community. Also have two grandchildren who want me to do this. I am kidding.

2. Do you support the formation of a Regional Transit Authority with the City of Charlottesville? What are your regional transportation 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?

Yes, I support the formation of a Regional Transit Authority in which the Board is a co-equal partner and we may consider not just the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County but perhaps even farther I feel. There should be a true regional approach to getting people out of their autos and into public transportation.

My priorities with this were to look at the commuter train which has been discussed that may go to Crozet and the Valley to lessen congestion on [Route] 250 West. Also on 250 West, I have actually researched this and found that there is a roundabout designed for the Owensville Road-250 intersection which is a real problem and a real source of congestion, but that's on the 2015 State Transportation budget.

Also, I think that this has occurred, the lights at Ednam and Farmington entrances have now been coordinated so that may have been resolved. I would like to enhance the mission of JANUT and add funding for the rural areas because I think that has been a real success for folks up in the rural areas. And as much as anything, lobby our legislators not to devolve the state dumping responsibilities on to the localities and both talked with David Blount about this, and the Dillon Rule, and also this is just something that happens, but the Virginia Municipal League and VACO, the Virginia Association of Counties, are trying to get the legislators not to send anymore responsibilities to the localities. There is a discussion of devolving transportation which I can't even imagine the budget that that would need.

Funding, I think that we are able, and this is something we are going to have to try to convince our legislators of, to establish a referendum to make transportation improvements. The General Assembly generally says no new taxes, but it wouldn't be exactly a tax revenue designated referendum, but a public local request to improve options to the automobile and improved transportation in the area. And the state frankly has been irresponsible in the area of transportation and that slows down our ability to get people out of cars in this area.

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

Places29 is, as one of the members of the Planning Commission said to me, is a Transportation Plan. Well it's obviously a lot more than that. He was kidding. But one of the designs of Places29 is to plan transportation as we are planning land use and development. Therefore as developments are made, roads should accommodate them, especially parallel roads like Berkmar to get traffic off 29 and that's one of the parts of the plan.

The problem with transportation funding may slow down development but when it picks up we should have commercial, recreational, jobs near the residential area so that communities are walkable and bikeable. Enhanced public transit should also be part of that plan in an attempt to reduce the local trips and enhance the safety obviously, and [lessen] the congested flow of traffic particularly on 29. We should use whatever makes an alternative means of travel we can employ. So I think that that's a good plan, it is going

to be expensive and I am sure it will be revamped 30 times before the decisions are made but we are not exactly designing the airplane while we are flying it, but I think that there is a significant opposition in the community, for whatever reason, but I believe it's going to go forward.

We should obviously get ready for the onslaught of new [National Ground Intelligence Center] (NGIC) employees that are going to be probably settling in that area. I don't know when that starts but it's imminent. Well, I think this comes up in [question] number 10, but we also need to address the 1990, and I thought it was 1992, Three Party Agreement, UVA, City Council and the Board of Supervisors, the 29 North Corridor Agreement which is in number 10 particularly the grade separated interchanges at Rio and Hydraulic which I think will amazingly affect the traffic, but I think traffic is going to continue to increase, but we are also slowly getting people wised up to the negative aspects of it as far as quality of life and as far as sitting, wasting these hours a day in an automobile.

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

If we hope to encourage workable development, like we have just discussed in Places29, and walkable development as well, we really can't expand the growth areas. I would like to keep the rural area as pristine as possible. Multiple Boards of Supervisors over the last 25 years have tried to maintain the rural area, except for by-right development, which is something you can't stop but have tried to focus the smart growth in the urban ring and it's been zoned that way and I think that their decisions have been correct. Frankly I am in favor of perhaps more.

Therefore, I am not sympathetic to any expansion in the growth area. I am informed by a member of the Board of Supervisors there's still plenty of areas for development in the already-zoned urban ring and I would like to stay with that. I am a strong advocate of reasonable smart growth. Growth is inevitable but it should be smart and it should be targeted to the urban ring. There's plenty of area to focus on there.

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

Well, it will be the same thing I told Bob Tucker several years ago when the Board of Supervisors approved a tax rate that I felt was too low, not just for education but for the social services and the recreation and other areas. I felt then as I did this recent budget cycle for FY2010 budget, that we needed to build an appreciable Rainy Day Fund. In the past Rainy Day Fund, has kind of been the CIP Budget and in interviewing Tom Foley, who is the Assistant

County Executive for budget, that's pretty much been the case. Frankly I know the reason that was down this past year was because of the perilous state of the economy and I can understand that.

Nevertheless, I feel like by being penny wise and pound foolish we have lost the ability to address some of those CIP projects, the Capital Improvements Budget Projects, in what's probably the best bid climate since before we built Monticello High School. You have probably heard me say Brian that I was pestering Carol Hastings and Kevin [Castner] and Al Reaser to build Monticello High School to have it opened an year earlier and as it turned out when we decide to build it, the bid climate was absolutely lousy and I saw Reaser at a fair a month ago and I said what do you recollect about that?

He said I remember you were adamant about that and if we had bid it a year before we would have saved two million dollars. As you recall the School Board was pilloried for the cost of Monticello High School which now looks like not pennies but nevertheless it's, you know the next one, whenever we have to build the next one would be significantly more expensive.

At any rate this budget taking \$100 million off the CIP Budget was just a shame and I actually talked to Bill Letteri in the County and he gave me several examples of things that we could have gotten because of the bid climate being so good, because there is unemployment, so people are looking for jobs and people are looking for work.

One example is the Crozet Library which if we had gotten started on this year, this budget cycle, we would have saved 15% and that is big bucks. So I also feel that there was a short changing of our employees. I know that the school's folks said well if you will save our jobs, we are willing to put up with no salary increase, but I feel like we should have had at least some [increase] maybe even 0.5% to say to folks we appreciate your labors and we appreciate your work.

We have also done a freezing of something like 55 jobs and I don't where that's going to go in our next budget cycle but I am hoping that we will look at that again. Frankly, I mean – I feel like in the eight years I was on the School Board I did responsible budgeting and we did responsible addressing of the needs and occasionally we would have an opportunity to address something that we hadn't addressed and that would be an initiative which we needed to prove to the citizens and also the Board of Supervisors was a reasonable request.

So I am all about responsible budgeting, but at some point we must encourage our citizens to realize that when the State and Federal Revenues are being reduced the way they are to the localities we really need to step up and that even includes when we are in a recession. As I mentioned with the

CIP Budget, sometimes you can help to address a recession by projects and that's of course why some of the stimulus packages for Shovel Ready Projects around the country. So that would be my advice to Bob and my colleagues may not agree.

6. In August 2009, Advocates for a Sustainable Albemarle Population or 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?

As Jack Marshall will tell you I have been a member, or contributor to I guess is the best way to put it, to ASAP for the last couple of years because I think it's reasonable to look at where we are going obviously in the late 80s, early 90s we were terrified that we were Fairfax-ing the County. I don't think that's going to happen. I think everybody is pretty much alert to the fact that we don't want to have a huge onslaught of population.

So I am sympathetic to some of the policies and some of the members of ASAP. I think perhaps, no I won't go there, but actual capping of the county's population sounds too much like locking the doors and I wouldn't agree with that. This is an attractive beautiful as we all know wonderful, the ambiance is delightful here and it's a great place to live. But if we need to address a rapidly growing Albemarle population as a member of the Board to the point where it becomes untenable then "capping" could be achieved through zoning decisions.

If we were to see that there's evidence that we are overwhelming our resources, our infrastructure, our quality of life and also our health because of the numbers of automobiles and toxic stuff coming from those, the Board would address it. If our community senses that we are becoming too crowded or approaching that, they will certainly weigh in on the problem at public hearings and the Board of Supervisors will surely respond to that.

There may have to be mandates as to population per development or some sort of drastic measure like that. I can't imagine that that would happen, but I believe that this community is such that we will wise up before that has to happen and as you know we have multiple public hearings on issues. So I think that that will be addressed.

I think the fact that the County decided to help fund this research that ASAP is doing on sustainable population indicates that the Board of Supervisors is sympathetic to maintaining reasonable population. I don't know where, whether it's in the [200,000] range or the [250,000] range. I know that they have kind of been gobsmacked shall we say by the way the Crozet

development has happened. So that's kind of a wakeup call as far as the rest of the County I think.

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?

Absolutely. I am totally in favor of the Community Water Supply Plan and I will address that [in a later question]. I am persuaded, that, I have actually seen a film of the dam and it sort of looks like that some of the building and the reinforcing and so forth of the dam, not just below the dam to make sure that it would be able to maintain its present damaged [condition] or perilous status, I am persuaded that the dam needs to be replaced. So that being said and that's of course why the four of the six candidates for the Board of Supervisors have stood up and said we are in favor of the Water Plan.

But the biggest problem with the plan is folks are worried about where you stop, do you build at [height increase of] 40 feet? Even people who agree haven't decided exactly to where that happens. But the dam is in terrible shape and since we have discovered the crack in the bedrock ground under the dam. We need to seal that crack. I understand that that can be done. That's interesting that bedrock would be cracked like that but nevertheless we don't want to build a dam and then have the water creek go out of the crack like I think happened in Montgomery County, a lake just lost its water down there.

Anyway I would prefer to go with the 45-foot [higher] dam as a replacement because the cost of the dam is the base in the first 30-40 feet, you get your biggest bang for your buck in the last five feet because of the spread of the water and so you get the largest acre feet of water per dollar if you want to put it that way, so it's efficient economically. Now we may in discussing it with City Council decide not to go with a 45 feet we may drop it, but I doubt that. Right now we are permitted at 45 feet.

The storage because of the possibility of drought is an added advantage of the dam and also the option of being able to draw our public water from our own watershed. We have the good fortune of being able to do that. Those folks at Louisa and Fluvanna do not. I went to several of the discussions of the dam and the water and drawing from the James is not nearly so good a plan. That was one of the options discussed.

I live on a stream in North Garden which feeds the south fork of the Hardware, there's actually a discussion of the health of the Hardware tonight at Walton Middle School. We have lost our stream, which is a good strong stream, twice in this decade. It's actually stopped running and that water goes to the Hardware which feeds the Rivanna and the James. So when my

stream is down during a severe drought, then obviously everything else will be as well down stream. I do as I say feel like we need to replace the dam and do it right and the dredging, I guess I can discuss that later.

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?

Improved partnership with Charlottesville should be several of those projects that have been going on and being discussed for some time. Help them get to the point where they complete the Meadowcreek Parkway with what would be either an efficient grade separated interchange, I guess they probably can't do a roundabout there at McIntire and 250, but that might be... I like roundabouts, once people get used to them, but they may need to do a grade separated there. So that would be one thing.

Proceed with second thing, proceed with vetting, public hearings and trying to use the advantageous bid climate to proceed with the Water Plan and that's another issue. I think the bid climate will be here for a while. I think it's going to take a while for the economy to recover. So let's take advantage of that.

I would love to see schools [in City and County] do more together, I tried to broach the topic of transportation when I was on the School Board and do joint transportation. We looked at it, not in depth, but looked at it and [Superintendent Kevin Castner] was not willing for us to get sidetracked on that when we had a 100 other things to address, but I think that may save money for both school divisions.

And we do some things together, as I mentioned, CATEC, PREP board and other areas and school boards are starting to meet more regularly. I don't know how frequently you folks meet, but that was something that I wanted to do early on when I joined the board, and of course we were dealing with reversion at that time when I first came on the board. So anyway we eventually got to that point.

My experience on CATEC, School Board, CCF and even on the [Democratic] Road Back PAC has provided me with positive experiences in working cooperatively with the City folks and City decision makers and I think the mode I find it's developed during these years will help me in cooperative efforts with City Council.

Revenue sharing I will address [in another question]. I guess when I discussed the Water Plan I meant to mention that there is a significant infrastructure issue when we are addressing the Water Plan as far as the pipes. So that's something that we need to do together, but we need to appreciate that we are one community and we need to take that approach and there always will be rough spots.

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

Well, I served on the [Charlottesville Albemarle Technical Education Center] (CATEC) board as I mentioned for seven and a half years and CATEC's advisory board of businessmen in the trades helped show the way for workforce development and came to the CATEC board when they saw an opportunity to address some of the issues of availability of more workforce opportunities. [Piedmont Virginia Community College] (PVCC) also does an excellent job in this, both school systems contribute talent to developing curriculum. In some cases design to aid development of workforce.

Business community's involvement in the school system, which was spearheaded by Superintendent Kevin Castner, that was not the case before he came, but he got the business community much more involved, it was [Charlottesville Albemarle School Business Alliance] (CASBA) at the time, and I think you have a different name for it, but the schools and the businesses working together helped push this in the right direction for our students. We need to make sure that the business entities that are desiring to establish here in our area are planning to hire locally and should be encouraged in that by both Council and Board of Supervisors to do so.

We should be also encouraging affordable housing for our County workforce and I think we are doing that but we can do a lot more in that area particularly police, fire rescue, and educators.

The land available for office, commercial, and industrial development within the growth areas.... There is available land in the growth areas though not enough land sellers [willing to not] sell it for commercial. They are hoping to find a better deal if they sell it to developers or other entities. The way to encourage this is to take a very strong stand as I just did earlier on not expanding the growth areas boundaries. So once people are convinced that the growth area is going to stay as is, then those areas that are available for commercial will be used.

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 US Route 29?

Yes, in a word. I think the parallel roads and the safer roads and the making [Route] 29 as safe as possible in improvement, even more so, by VDOT after that horrible tragedy for that child way up near the airport.

We are supposed to be moving toward mass transit, but mainly the three party agreement was about the grade separated interchanges. And so I know at least one part of the Chamber is opposed, but I think that if we can find a way to accommodate those businesses that will be imperiled or impacted by building the grade separated interchanges, I think that's going to improve our traffic flows so much as you know those are two real choke points in the 29 North movement of traffic.

As far as the Western Bypass I am totally opposed. I think it was not long enough to begin with. It's now too expensive and would only remove something like 20%, if that, of other traffic flows through. 80% of our traffic on 29 North, as it has been done studies, is local traffic, and I know the people in Danville and Lynchburg would love to have it and they do have some nice bypasses down there, but the bypass should have been designed to go east. It should have gone down [Route] 15 and they dropped the ball on that, the state and the counties as well, I guess.

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?

Every Board of Supervisors should be about analyzing and debating the wisdom of the project. Holding public hearings, vetting various options and finally making a decision. Once a decision is made by the Board, unless new counter evidence is discovered before the decision is to be implemented, that Board even with one or several new members should go forward.

An example is the Water Plan which was agreed upon by the Board of Supervisors and City Council in 2006. Now, two members of the Board of Supervisors and four members of the City Council have changed over since that decision was made. Nevertheless, unless there are drastic differences or radically changed circumstances regarding the project the two government entities should go forward.

The advantages to revisiting are to make sure the right decisions were made. The disadvantages are that nothing gets accomplished. That sometimes has been the case in the City and County and the Meadowcreek Parkway would be a prime example. Nevertheless, I think the responsible thing is to make sure that you have vetted things as carefully and as well you have and that's why I am in favor the Water Plan.

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?

Having talked to County folks, I haven't talked to any City folks about this, but if I were a City Council Member, I don't know whether my constituency would be very happy with me if I were to say we are going to give the County back this money that we made a contract to receive back in the 80s. And the reason for the agreement, Tom Michie was the one who was a wonderful legislator. I think it was called the Michie Package or Michie Bill or whatever, but anyway it's a contract we made and it's something that, I am persuaded the attorneys have said that it's not actionable if you want to use the legal term. It's a deal we made and the deal is there and so we live with it.

Now, as to shared projects I have talked to Lee Catlin about this and she said that there has been some discussion about using those revenue sharing funds for shared projects and I can think of one that's a prime project and that's the Water Plan and particularly addressing the infrastructure, the pipes are in a terrible state probably in as bad a state as the state of the dam and I understand I was not aware of this, but in talking to a member of the Board of Supervisors the sewer pipes which the City has are really in bad shape, so they are not just the clean water pipes coming to the City and some of those pipes were in the county. That's just one of several, the jail, we worked together with them. With the jail, CATEC and a bunch of things, the PDC and those sorts of things, but wherever we can find an area that revenue sharing money can be used for joint projects. That would make the County people who are absolutely adamant that we shouldn't be doing it and that we should be able to sue them and get it back. I don't think it's going to happen. So why not work on shared projects?

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

Yes. Actually I have said it in public. Four of the candidates for the Board of Supervisors have come forward back in the middle of August and said that we are in favor of this plan and one of the other members had already said that on his website back in June or July, but chose not to be part of that, for what reason I can't understand but nevertheless it's a good plan. It's from our own watershed, it saves the Mechums and Moormans rivers.

The storage capacity aspect of it is a smart thing as I have already mentioned in this interview. It's a frightening thing when you think of the situation of severe droughts and so having storage and most of the pipeline goes on UVA property, so it will impact people. The construction of the dam will impact

people. I already have somebody I need to talk to in the Ednam Forest community who is not happy about this and we need as much possible make it with considering what construction does, make it as great a project as it can be.

I attended as I mentioned several of those meetings and discussions and actually spoke out and said that I think that drawing water from the James was not a good idea. So I think it's a great plan and I am fully in support of it. And I think at some future time and probably because we just need to generally, the reservoir has not been dredged and if we are to find a buyer for the dredge or the sludge or whatever you want to call it, then entrepreneurial or PRN dredging should be an option in future. I am not happy about seeing the cost of the study to do the dredging go up and I am hoping that City Council and the Board of Supervisors will try to keep that under control, but they have chosen a firm and so we will see where that goes.

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

Well except for the Water Plan I would say education. Obviously being a member of the School Board, my wife is an educator and I think I did some educating over the years with coaching and so forth. It should be the top priority of the community, educating our youth is the most important responsibility of community. It is 60% of the budget and should be and it's been 60% more or less as you know Brian and that should be our top priority. Obviously all the other things which I will mention in [question] number 16, I will mention later.

15. Do we have appropriate resources in County government to achieve the objectives in the County's Strategic Plan? In what way if any do we need to make changes and what impact will your recommendations have on staffing and the annual budget?

An answer to the first one would be no. I don't feel that we do. The second question we need it as I mentioned earlier in this interview. We needed more this year. I actually went on the record in the newspaper saying at the time, with the proviso that I was not privy to all of the discussions by the members of the Board in setting this 2010 fiscal year budget, but I felt like if they had gone to 77 cents they would at least have addressed these salary issues to some degree. Perhaps not had to freeze the 55 positions and particularly the loss of real opportunities on the CIP Budget, short changes and also what I mentioned earlier the Rainy Day Fund which we should always have when issues arise.

So I am all about fiscally responsible budgeting but you budget for needs. You don't budget for wants. If you are in a flush year you might address

some one or two, but it doesn't look like the revenue situation is going to be very positive for the next few years. Nevertheless I don't think we can short change our employees another year and I don't think we can continue to put things off on the CIP Budget.

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

Well I have five, there are probably six or eight more, but the first one as I mentioned earlier is education. That's got to be number one. Fiscally responsible budgeting, that goes without saying, maintain our rural integrity that's very important while allowing for healthy smart growth in the urban ring. We should maintain our enviable quality of life. We are on any number of lists, this is a wonderful place to live whether it's tennis or books or the fact that we have two wonderful medical facilities that are in our community and it's a great place to retire. The climate is temperate, the air is clean, the transportation is not so great but we should maintain that obviously. And as much as anything I feel like we need to do a better job, as I mentioned earlier again, the municipal league and the Virginia Association of Counties we do need to do a better job of lobbying our legislators for greater consideration of local needs and education, roads, affordable housing and I think that we have been short changed frankly by the state.

I am hoping that will change as a result of this Fall election, we will see. I would like also to see us I mentioned earlier I would like to see us do some more affordable housing, I would like to see more cooperation in moving forward on projects with the City and I would really like to, and I haven't mentioned this, it wasn't asked but you have heard about the localvore movement. I would like to see much more emphasis on local, particularly local foods because that helps to keep the farming community viable and fiscally healthy or financially healthy. I would really like to see us emphasize that more and be more accommodating to small businesses, even home businesses. So anyway that we can enhance the local community as far as buy local, you know not just buy local in food products but any number of things. Frankly I would like to see the Board of Supervisors support the fair. I would like to support the food hub. So those are just some of the things. Those are probably not primary responsibilities. I will stop there.

Thank you very much.

Thanks.