



## **2015 Albemarle Board of Supervisors Candidate Interview**

*Candidate: Earl Smith (R)*

On November 3, 2015, voters in the Scottsville Magisterial District go to the polls to elect their representative on the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors. This recording is Brian Wheeler's August 27, 2015 interview with Earl Smith (R). Smith's opponent is Rick Randolph (D).

*The audio recording of this interview and complete election coverage is available on Charlottesville Tomorrow's website:*

[http://www.cvilletomorrow.org/topics/county\\_elections/](http://www.cvilletomorrow.org/topics/county_elections/)

## **INTERVIEW**

**Mr. Smith, thank you for participating in this interview with Charlottesville Tomorrow. The complete audio recording and written transcript for this interview will be available online.**

**Information from this interview will be used in the compilation of the non-partisan voter guide being co-produced by Charlottesville Tomorrow, The Daily Progress, and the League of Women Voters. 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 primarily related to land use, transportation, public education and community design.**

**As you are aware, the first two questions you will be asked have been provided in advance, for the others you have been provided only the topic in advance. All Albemarle Supervisor candidates will be asked the same questions. We ask that you keep these questions confidential until all candidates have been interviewed.**

**Each candidate will be provided an opportunity to review the excerpts selected for the voter guide before its publication. Are you ready to start?**

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

The most important qualifications are honesty and integrity and I will match mine against anyone's. I have lived in this area most of my life and I am sure you can folks who think I am a little outspoken. I don't think anybody would challenge my honesty and my integrity.

As to my abilities, I feel like I possess good judgement, common sense and compassion and I intend to listen to the opinions of others around me no matter who they are, or what they represented or what letter they may have behind their name.

I already work with all sides and different points of views in my daily life to accomplish goals. I fix problems, I create new ideas to better my surroundings. And I have been a successful business owner, retail and restaurant. I worked as a field consultant for a national franchise responsible for over 40 stores here in Virginia.

I was lucky enough to have parents who value hard work and the knowledge to be self-sufficient. I have learned trade skills like plumbing, electricity, carpentry and mechanics from my father that I still use today. I am not afraid to get my hands dirty or sweat and that is what we need now more than ever.

I don't pretend to know all the answers, but you better believe I am not afraid to ask the proper questions in my search for those answers. What I am asking for today is an opportunity, an opportunity to put my heart, my soul, my integrity and my decades of experience as a resident, a business owner, a rural land owner and a person who wants to make sure we have the best county that reasonable taxes can buy.

**2. PRIORITIES: What is your top priority for action by the board of supervisors if you are elected?**

My top priority? I have to just refer to a quick theory a wise man once told me, it's like a bar stool. A bar stool has four legs and on top of that bar stool is a bowling ball delicately balanced. In all those things you have to look at each leg as: a taxpayer; infrastructure; today's needs; and tomorrow's needs. When you take something away, or add to any of those four legs, what happens? The bowling ball moves and you don't want it to fall. You have to precariously keep that thing on there.

So what does that mean? I think my top priority is to understand how everything works here which I am doing now as a new person. I am going through and trying to read the Comprehensive Plan and all the other things that are popping up. One of the biggest concerns in all of Albemarle is Internet access. I think I have been asked that by teachers and business people. Even in my particular area [around Cale Elementary], there are 5,000-6,000 homes they have fast Internet. Where I live out Route 20 South in Woodridge and all those areas I had to get HughesNet [satellite Internet] so my son could go on Blackboard at school and it cost me \$90 a month to get school lessons that he could have gotten at school.

Something else...is that we are ranked 126 out of 133 for public safety in the state of Virginia. That's just ridiculous. That's something else that is totally unacceptable to me and if I am elected I am going to make sure that I am on top of that the whole time that I am on the board.

**3. BUDGET: Name one specific area of the county budget that you are concerned about and tell us why.**

Being new to this again, I am going to refer back to being a regular citizen and the things I think about. Of course the public safety thing again, that comes back up. I really do think we need to reexamine our priorities. The budget needs to be examined on a line by line basis. The current situation does not automatically equal higher tax rates—back to the bar stool theory. You have got to find some way to keep that bowling ball on there.

One of my biggest things that I found out, that I don't think a lot of citizens know, is that 10 cents out of every dollar from our [real estate property taxes] goes to the city of Charlottesville. That equals out to 20 percent of our budget. What I also find amazing is they tried to amend our composite index, a formula that's based on what we have in taxes, and we then get money back from the state, our funds, well they don't take into consideration the 20 percent we send [to Charlottesville]. So we miss out on things other counties are getting. That was started back in 1982 when the city wanted to annex over there where the K-Mart is at. It's not working. We always end up being 20-30 percent shy on our budget and this needs to be looked at again. We don't have any say over how the city of Charlottesville is spending the money that we send. Like I said, 10 cents out of every dollar from our property taxes goes to the city.

**4. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: Business leaders and social service agencies have told local government that new investments are sorely needed in the area of early childhood education. Will you make pre-K education and quality childcare a priority and if so how?**

Again from personal experience, both my parents worked. My mother was a nurse. My father was a police officer then he worked for the telephone company. My dad worked overtime constantly. I remember going to Clark school and the kindergarten teacher, my mother and father spent an incredible amount of time with me reading and writing. I had basic skills beyond a [typical kindergartner] and I remember the teacher saying, 'He's going to be a troublemaker' because I already had those skills.

How does that relate to what we are talking about? It is important for parents to be part of this. Now I know in our society we have a big divorce rate and there's a lot of single parents but there's still a way for them to be involved and I am a big proponent of everybody being involved in what their children do and what their children learn.

For the government, for us to say let's mandate things, for the kids to be taken somewhere and dropped off, they learn better from the parental unit, or uncles, or aunts, or brothers and sisters. Now of course for underprivileged children or for the single parent that doesn't have that choice, then certainly we should have a choice. Now should that be a burden on the school? I don't know. Maybe that should be a burden that maybe the businesses should help pick up? When you invest in your employees you've got a good employee for life usually. So maybe we need to look at that side instead of always putting it off on something that's a public sponsored thing. Why can't businesses step forward? The University of Virginia, I don't know if they have a program like that. I don't know if anybody else that is a big player here in Charlottesville-Albemarle has programs like that, it would be worth finding out. So again not putting it all back on the taxpayer.

**5. STORMWATER: How should Albemarle County fund water resource programs to clean up local streams and comply with state mandates for protection of the Chesapeake Bay watershed? [And a follow up] Would you support creation of a stormwater utility fee, similar to the one enacted by the City of Charlottesville, which is based on the amount of impervious surface on a property?**

I've been to two meetings about this and boy do I have a lot to say about it. I understand that it's a mandated program and I agree that we all should be responsible stewards of our watershed, but I also think there are more solutions than what is being looked at. I also think there are a whole lot more questions to be asked. We are getting the hurry, hurry, hurry version because all of a sudden we are playing catch up because this is something that was mandated federally down to the state level -- back in the 1980s it started. Number one, why are we waiting so long? Number two, when I went to these [meetings] and even in the pamphlets they show you or if you go online to the Albemarle County website and you look at this, they'll show you photos. One photo will be this pristine cute little creek going through the landscape and then the other one is a raging brown inferno that's tearing up the soil. Well if you look at them, that's not the same picture. So why are we using misleading photos? Even the name -- STORM WATER MANAGEMENT -- that's like a movie that you are going to go watch, it's very scary. It's a rain water tax. It's the way that we need to manage the stuff that comes out of the air into our streams.

You know Richard Lloyd who's running for Rivanna Supervisor, he's a retired engineer, and we talk about this extensively. He is so knowledgeable about what is going on. He actually said something, and I told him I would give him props for it, and I hope he says it when he comes in here, he said why are we requiring beyond normal which the plan is calling five steps beyond normal, but they haven't had enough evidence to support where normal begins? So how are we going to go five steps beyond where normal is if we don't know where normal is at?

So there is a mistake right there. How are you going to take money out of somebody's pocket that they have worked hard for to pay for something? I have

looked it up on the Internet, and there is lawsuit after lawsuit about this going on in the whole country, especially when you say 'utility.'

Now I live on 25 acres 10 miles out of town half mile off the road in a 24 by 32 house. My parents live right next door, kind of same house. We have a garage and two houses. One thousand feet each way is woods and bushes and trees and fields. What's happening is people like us are taking, if they decide to do a utility, they are taking their county to court and winning because the judge says they are not part of the utility infrastructure as you are not using any of the county's water or sewer. So how are you charging me a utility fee?

Now [that doesn't] mean I don't think we deserve to have some [part in this]. But when I went and made a suggestion, they told me me that 80 percent of it comes from our vehicles. They gave Barracks Road as a big polluter. The lady in charge was talking about the gas and the oil and the brakes and the brake dust and this and that. I said well I'd rather have a \$15 extra fee on my vehicle than you coming to my house and hiring another 20 people to come and measure impervious surfaces. So we are catching up but we are hiring an incredible amount of people to work. That might be a good thing, but do we need them? Is that a waste of money? The money that we are having to generate is to pay for them.

My other question was on impervious surfaces. I know a little bit about dirt. Even if we have had rain for two weeks solid, the dirt doesn't get soaked any more than about 6-8 inches and that's even after winter and we have red clay. We have land that doesn't perk. Fluvanna is full of it, now again that's another county, but where I live we have red clay. That doesn't soak up the water, it runs on top, that's an impervious surface.

Again I think this needs to be looked at more and I think only having one group that measured the bugs in the stream, which I am not making fun of the scientists, but even when I mentioned we have had heavy rains, that the water goes from barely covering my feet up to my knees, how fast do those bugs procreate to fill back up for you to look at? I got the funny looking face after that. Nobody answered me. I wasn't making fun of it, I really wanted to know. I just think it needs to be looked at more.

**6. DESIGNATED GROWTH AREAS: In the remainder of 2015, or during your first term if you are elected, should the board make boundary adjustments for Albemarle County's designated growth areas to create new locations for business on land that today is in the rural area? Why or why not?**

This designated growth area thing, frankly it's been ignored and now it has become such an issue because of revenue. What does that mean to us? It's a burden on our infrastructure our water supply and our traffic. Again as a person just coming in, and loving information, and I look at the Comprehensive Plan... and I am counting six interchanges off of [Interstate] 64 and not one of those is a designated growth area. But if I go to another county in a part of the state or somewhere else that I

know and you look and everything off of the interstate is full, that's where they grow. I don't understand why we have nothing. There's nothing.

So that brings up the I-64 and [Route] 29 [interchange]. I think that was totally mishandled. I feel that the planning commission overstepped their commitment to the citizens by going 5 to 10 steps beyond what was being asked of them when realistically our county leaders were saying look we have to go somewhere, can we make a small amendment, one time, to possibly use this piece of land for a business. Now what that does, it's just like raising your hand to ask a question. Can I go over here to possibly better myself? So the planning commission just said no. You can't do that.

So what does that mean? It means that our taxes are going to go up because we don't have any light industrial stuff coming in. We are a joke to most of the state. I called a legislator in Richmond and asked if Albemarle County is ever considered when a business calls and says we want to come to the state of Virginia? He said no, we just tell them no. I don't like that. So regardless of whether this "can't be named brewery" can't come there, I think people are missing the fact that all the leaders were asking for was a chance to maybe get this looked at, which number one would put VDOT on notice to fix exit 118B, that's what they said, 'If this is going to happen here we are going to have to fix this.' What if the brewery couldn't come? There will have been a traffic study, a land study, all this other stuff, that maybe another business would [think] maybe they could come in and be a better fit. But the planning commission just said no, so that has to be changed.

**7. CITY-COUNTY-UVA RELATIONS: Describe a part of local government that would benefit from increased cooperation by the city, county and / or the University of Virginia and that you would make a priority.**

I think pretty much that Charlottesville, Albemarle and UVa has a great working relationship and I have lived here my whole life. The only time I have ever heard of anything was if the county was building too close to the city line and the city goes 'boo hoo, I want some money' or something's happened at UVa, and it's just like our family. Anytime money comes up we all get to fussing a little bit. That's really the only thing that I have seen that happens.

One thing to bring up that I don't know about and that I am researching and trying to find out, but I had a friend of mine call [me], and he let me know that one of his best friends went to the hospital where the guy's daughter [was being treated as a rape victim]. And what does that mean here, he said he was incredibly taken back by the fact that he didn't feel the police officer...they sent a woman and she didn't have any compassion he felt and he questioned whether she had been trained to deal with a rape victim. He said when he went to the ER you go in the normal public part of the ER and you are sitting there with the kid that's been hit in the face with the baseball, and somebody that has broken their leg, or somebody that is throwing up from the flu. So how can you imagine this woman, this young girl, that has possibly been raped, has to go in there and say, 'I have been raped and I need a rape kit.' In front of everybody. I wouldn't want to tell either.

One thing that I would make a priority, if it's not there, I think that it ought to be, a hotline that goes to all three entities and those three entities have some kind of trained group of police officers or staff that could work especially on that. I think when you go to the ER, the police could call, they could escort the person. I am not trying to put a whole lot extra on the police, but this is something that is a serious thing, they could follow up, they could call ahead, they could go to the door with the blue dot on it. It doesn't mean to have a special room, it just means give them a different access so they feel safe and they feel like somebody cares because I can't imagine having to go through that or a parent that would have to be there sitting with their son or daughter that has been possibly violated by someone else, and the rape kit is automatically another violation. Now they have got to be touched in the area that they've already been touched in that they didn't want to be to be touched in. So I think there needs to be a little bit more compassion and a little bit more training on that stuff and especially with UVA requiring that of their students, that's the first thing to come to mind when this question was asked.

### **Requiring what of their students?**

The thing that [UVA President] Teresa Sullivan just said making sure we all know what is going on, this is where you go, what you do. I don't know how involved that is so again I am still researching it. If I find that it's not [being done] then I think that would be a great thing for us to do for city, county, and UVA relations because that way our young ladies -- or even young men, there's young men that this happens to, and I found that out when I trained my young men at work. They always think they are safe and then you get robbed, and that's one of the biggest statistics, the sodomy of a young male because they won't tell. So it more of a female issue, but it also happens to males. So there needs to be something in place there. We've had national headlines from the poor girls that were murdered here and then plus the rape cases at UVA. That's a progressive way to look at it and a good solution that I think will help heal the community.

### **8. PLACEMAKING: What improvements could be made to our community's placemaking efforts?**

I had to Google this one. You know I Googled it, and I read it, and I think that placemaking, in layman's terms [means] what do we have in our area that you can build around that is already a draw. Albemarle and Charlottesville are such a diverse thing. You know we have the walk mall, that brings certain people. We have the breweries here, we have all the wine here, we have of course Thomas Jefferson's house, so I don't know specifically what we could build. If you are talking about if you are including something in a subdivision that's really going to bring... but we already have that here. Then I also found an article that broke down stuff. Placemaking is community driven. We already have that. It's visionary. We have a lot of visionary people here. Function before form? Sometimes I don't see that. Is it adaptable? I don't think we have a lot of adaptability here. The things that it is not? It's reactionary. We have a lot of reactionary things here. Design driven? We have a lot of design driven stuff that's being built here. So I don't see a lot of... I mean if

you are saying what is and what is not, if you are saying that's not, we still have a lot of design driven stuff here. So you are not placemaking. One size fits all? That's not done either. Cost-benefit analysis? That's not done.

So I think it's a hard fit. It's easy to say placemaking is a great thing for a larger city that has an incredible amount of citizens. It's like a borough to me, or like when I lived in Pennsylvania, or even New York, the first time I went to New York, every block is its own entity. You have your baker, your butcher and the places you go and its almost self-sustaining kind of thing. We are so spread out here. Like I was explaining to a lady when we were talking about the brewery [proposal] on 29-64. She said 'Are we going to get another brewery?' And I asked her to name a brewery that's really inside of Albemarle County. She said, 'Earl you are right.' So that's how you have to think of that stuff. You have to think of the boundary lines. We are all so used to just getting in our vehicles, or getting with friends and driving somewhere. Drive 20-30 minutes somewhere to get to Nelson County, or to get to Afton, or to go to a destination, that's nothing for most of us that grew up here even come here. That's why people come here because there are so many little quirky things within 20 miles or 30 miles and it doesn't take any time to get there.

So I don't really know if placemaking, again I am not an economic major and I had to look it up, I understand it. I think we already have it here, but it's just so spread out I don't see where it's going to fit.

**9. RURAL AREAS: How would you describe the challenges and opportunities facing Albemarle County's rural farms, fields and forests?**

I think one thing, our taxes are running a lot of people away, like my father. Where we live, we bought that in 1976 and paid an incredible amount in interest rates, 12-17 percent back in '76 it was horrible. But he came out the other day and he goes, 'You know if they keep wanting to raise the rate, and then they want this stormwater [utility fee] thing, then I don't want to live here anymore.' And me, I have lived here since I was 12 years old. I know every blade of grass and every tree, but it's one of those things where you look at it [and ask] if you can afford it? I think our farmers are not utilized enough. We get a lot of land lease stuff, and some of these people do great, but that stuff goes somewhere else. I am glad the land is being used, versus just nobody using it. A perfect example is Viewmont Farm across from my house, you know Charles Hurt, and they lease that and it is a top notch organization compared to when UVa owned it and when Kluge gave it, it was nothing but weeds and the fence was falling down. That's one of the problems I have with UVa, they don't take care of things they get for free. What does that have to do with the rural areas? A lot of it is in the rural areas.

We are getting slammed. What it goes back to is developers are coming in and sucking up that 200 to 300 acre farm and then they go through all the stuff and they divide it up and the next thing you know we got another subdivision, that's eventually going to need an \$80 million high school and a \$20 million elementary school. Regardless of whether they tell you or not, I would say it is going to be there within 10 or 15 years.



I think that we could utilize our rural areas a little bit better. I am really looking into things to help the farmers in my area. I went to an industrial hemp meeting and learned all about it. It's not pot. I learned how well it is doing in other counties. I learned that Virginia Tech is going to be a research school. That's one of our greatest products, the U.S. Constitution is written on hemp. A lot of people don't know that, a lot of people don't know that the products you get out of it, and how fast, I think one acre of hemp does more for paper than like 10 acres of trees. That stuff has got to be pushed through legislation. Does that mean that I am for smoking pot? No. That just means that I am looking at something that was part of the farm life that we could possibly grow again because it has got caught up in regulation because it is associated with something that has nothing to do with it.

The rural area can also be... we have a tremendous amount of retirees, not specifically here, but there's probably 10,000 people a day retiring from the Baby Boomers. We need to make sure, if those people are going to want to retire here and come here, guess what, they don't bring the problems we have, they stay off the road pretty much. They don't bring their children to get in our schools. They hire all our plumbers, electricians, carpenters and roofers. They spend an incredible amount of money, and just the general amount of knowledge that they have -- retired engineers, or school teachers, or mechanics or anybody that you can utilize their brain from something that they are retiring from. We need to also attract more of that. I think some of our rural areas would benefit.

There's a place called leisure world that I learned about. It's on 610 acres in Maryland. It's a 55-year old and over community, it's not a retirement [community], it's a gated thing. They have their own shopping, the grocery store and little stuff there, and they are their own entity and you have to be 55 and older to be there. It's not full of golf courses it's just a community. Wow. I actually showed Wendell Wood that for Somerset....That doesn't add to any of our problems and brings in an incredible amount of revenue.

So the rural areas are important to me. I am an old softy, I'd love to see the old farms stay there and I like all that, but I understand also that it's coming. So you can't fight things all the time.

**10. TRANSPORTATION: What is your top transportation priority and how will it be funded?**

I didn't understand this one, I thought it meant public transportation, but now that I do, I really think that most of our transportation problems again go back to our poor planning of where we put things. You know we overloaded Route 29. We stay away from the [interstate interchanges] that can handle the traffic for on and off. We keep going to a two lane road where we could come off of a major highway and it could be right there. I really believe that our transportation problems have come from that. I'll say again that fiasco on Route 29, that 20 years ago I was working for Miss Utility and I was out marking phone lines when some engineer decided that what we have now at Rio Rd was the be all fix all do all. I remember when there was trees there. I

remember when you got to [Fashion Square] Mall and the Mall was not even there. It took forever to get to Greene County, but I think this [grade-separated] interchange thing I know it's – I don't even like talking about it – to me it is a \$235 million do over from poor planning. To save three and one half minutes, are you kidding me? As a business person if I had an employee come up to me and say, 'You've got to pay me, you know it's going to cost you a set amount of money for us to save us three and one half minutes,' and you can't equate that, and you try and do your little figures and equate that into what your labor cost is going to be for that week. Really? My head would explode.

You can tell I am at a loss for words with this stuff. I had nothing to do with it. Boy if I was there I would still be fighting and kicking and screaming about it. I don't like it now. But I can't do anything about it, really, except maybe next time if I am elected, then my common sense, and my tenacity to fight for what is right, and to tell people, 'That's really stupid.' I am not afraid to say 'stupid.' If I have to stay there until 4:00 in the morning every time we are discussing it they are going to hate me. That's just ridiculous that we as citizens of Albemarle County have to put up with something like that that like I said 20 years ago was the fix, and now it is not.

**11. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: What areas of the current Comprehensive Plan will you concentrate on for implementation, improvement and/ or monitoring?**

You know, the Comprehensive Plan, I have been reading through it, this is probably, again I am honest person, this is probably my weakest thing, because I am playing catch up. I work every day. I take care of my retired parents. That doesn't mean I don't have time to get on this stuff, but reading through it's a thing that... I had a friend, well actually Richard Lloyd printed some of it out, and he brought it in and I was going 'What the heck is that?' I thought it was a new Harry Potter book how thick it was. He said it was only half. Anyway, I have been reading through, and anything that's relevant now to what they are talking about I go to that section. There's no sense in me starting at the beginning and going and trying to understand things. But I do have the ability and I am smart enough to look up something and then I write my questions down, and I call people. And somebody even like you, I'll say, 'Brian what's your opinion or what have you reported on this or where can I look this up?' I am an information junkie, I retain a lot of stuff in my big head.

That's all I can say. I think the growth area would be my main concern because that's what I have been looking at, and I brought up the interchanges off of Interstate 64. You know I have called people that are officials in other counties and I have asked them to look at this and explain how they would deal with this. These are people I know and I trust. They give me a non-biased opinion. 'This is this way, this is where this is at, this would make it better. If I did this, this is what I would look for.' When I get three different opinions, and when I research those three, I pick which one I think is the best and I form my own [opinion].

So in the Comprehensive Plan if we don't want our taxes going through the roof, we are going to have to do something about our growth areas. That's just bottom line. There is no way around it. It's here, and if you don't like it you are going to have to

go after your leaders and say, 'Look let's fix this,' because they are the ones. This plan is not sent down from the heavens and written in stone the way it has been treated. It's a plan. It's a plan on how our future could be. To me that's a hypothetical thing. It's no different than writing a P&L statement for a business. You think this business will be here in five years. I don't know if that makes sense. It makes sense to me. That Comprehensive Plan is no different to me than a P&L statement. So the growth area is what I would look at.