



2007 City of Charlottesville City Council Candidate Interview September 2007

Candidate: Holly Edwards (D)

On November 6, 2007, voters in the City of Charlottesville go to the polls to elect three members of City Council. This recording is Sean Tubbs' September 4, 2007 interview with Holly Edwards, a Democratic candidate in the race. The other candidates in this race are David Brown (D), Barbara Haskins (I), Peter Kleeman (I) and Satyendra Huja (D).

The audio of this interview is available online on the Charlottesville Tomorrow Weblog http://cvilletomorrow.typepad.com/charlottesville_tomorrow_/2007/09/edwards.html

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

INTERVIEW

Ms. Edwards, 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 City Council candidates will be asked the same questions.

1. Please describe your past political experience and what qualifies you to be on City Council.

I have been on the frontline providing community outreach support and leadership since I arrived in Charlottesville 15 years ago. Currently, I'm the Program Coordinator for PHAR, the Public Housing Association of Residents and I've developed the leadership internship program and I've been providing

public housing residents with life skills so that they will one day be sitting in this same chair. I'm a community activist. I'm a nurse and I've been involved and I really wanted to take my commitment to the community to the next level by running for City Council.

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

The "why" is the dam and the creation of the pipeline is a complex series of plans to increase the storage capacity of water. An alternative to the plan may create pipelines through rural areas and creating the infrastructure that will promote the capacity for more growth. The "why not" is that there will be loss of parkland and natural areas and there has to be adequate compensation for the parkland loss. The City is using natural resources to solve some of the County growth issues. Not expanding as much will put the brakes on the County growth and the bottom line is to fix it for the long-term to avoid a crisis.

Follow up: Do you support the plan?

I do support it because that's a viable plan for— especially in terms of the water shortage and the drought that we're seeing now, I think that's a red flag that we want to avoid in the long term.

- 3. In addition to community concerns about an adequate water supply to accommodate growth and prepare for droughts, recent commercial and residential developments in Albemarle County have had to address inadequate sewer infrastructure. In general, what will the financial impact be on ratepayers for public water and sewer to complete the 50-year water supply plan and update and expand our aging sewer facilities?**

It's hard to predict the financial impact. It is to my understanding that the City is preparing some cost estimates now. The aging sewer lines in the City and the situation at Albemarle Places29 is a good example where the sewer line is not adequate and how the development community can share or assume some of the responsibility of that development.

- 4. How would you define quality growth for our community?**

Quality growth for me means expanding in a way that's healthy for the environment and all of the inhabitants in our community and I'm saying all of the inhabitants because even skunks have moved into the City because they're being moved out of the areas where they usually lived because of the development. I think quality growth means growth that respects the character

and historic value of the community and that lowers the impact on the environment. Growth that welcomes the pedestrian and bike traffic and public transportation. Quality growth means a perceived improvement in the quality of life for the people that live here and that includes affordable housing, better schools, better paying jobs and quality health care.

5. Do you support the Meadowcreek Parkway which VDOT plans to advertise for construction in 2008? Why or why not?

The decision to move forward with the Meadowcreek Parkway will have been decided before the November election but at least it's called a parkway, indicating that it will remain a scenic pathway. This has the opportunity to be a crown jewel for the City if it's done well. If the Parkway's built, the least we can do is spend a small fraction in a parallel effort to improve our public transportation. I believe that the transportation part should include continued promotion of public transportation, employee incentive car pools, community and satellite lots.

6. What are your overall transportation priorities for the City of Charlottesville?

It's my understanding that a consultant is looking at best practices to create a regional transit authority and I just heard on WINA this morning that UVA has decided not to be as active a participant in that process as everyone had hoped. So given that in mind, we need to use the resources that we do have between the City and the County, but the bottom line I think is that the goal should be to revolutionize the transportation system. Reduce the barriers for people that do have cars and increase the incentives. For example, sometimes the scheduling can be a disincentive for people. Create pedestrian pathways, and I like the sound of having biking boulevards and to create commuter lanes.

7. What are your views on working more closely with the County and the University of Virginia to jointly operate a regional transit system? What will you do to promote the use of public transportation, pedestrian trails, and bicycle paths?

As I mentioned in the previous response, a joint transportation [system] ideally will only work if all the key players are at the table. And I think that promoting the use of public transportation, pedestrian trails, bicycle paths, is consistent with the health and wellness message that I like to promote to encourage more physical activity. If people would just get out of their car they would increase the amount of time that they would just be moving which would be a plus. Even if people never change their eating habits, just moving more will make a big difference.

8. What is missing in Downtown's retail sector and what might City Council do about it? What will your priorities be for development in and around the Downtown Mall area, including the city-owned parking lots between Water Street and South Street?

The retail shops on the Mall have become an upper-class boutique experience with high end prices. What's missing on the Mall is stores that cater to an ordinary person with moderate means. Council could be instrumental through the Economic Development Office supporting more businesses by women, African Americans and other minorities. It would be feasible to explore a site for a grocery store and most importantly, provide residential housing and not just high-end condominiums for the people that work on the Mall. I mean, I'm talking about the people that work cleaning the gutters, emptying the trash, serving the food, pouring the coffee, changing the linen on the hotel beds, and that doesn't exclude the people that choose to teach our children and keep our community safe.

9. The City Council's 2025 vision statement identifies economic sustainability as a key objective. What do you think needs to be done to support that objective, and what role should government play to promote economic vitality?

I believe that economic vitality has to be in concert with the same factors that will influence the quality of life for the community. Given the recent news about the mortgage crisis, the goal is to not only move people out of poverty but to provide training opportunities for economic security. The vitality must include collaborating with the academic and business communities, for workforce preparedness and service learning or internship programs. Promote minority business development and expanding the City Summer Youth Program. Economic development should also enhance and not degrade the national environment.

10. Do we have appropriate resources in City government to achieve the objectives in our strategic plan? In what way, if any, do we need to make changes? What impact will your recommendations have on staffing and the annual budget?

Do we have the appropriate resources? No, but we certainly have the foundation. More than any community, we have the intellectual resources and the dedication and the talent of the City staff. It's ambitious and the key will be operate smarter with the dollars and leveraging resources from private, state and federal resources and I guess in terms of what recommendations would I have on the staffing and the annual budget, as a new Councilor, I have to be really strategic about following the dollars. And what's going to be different more so about this election is that everything's happening in November whereas before new Councilors had from spring until the end of the year to prepare for the budget, but that budgeting process will happen

right away, so I have to be really strategic about following the numbers from this budget to determine what's going to happen for next year.

Follow up: In what way, if any, do you think we need to make changes to the budget or to the budgeting process?

I think some of the— Just from listening to some of the concerns that people had during the campaign trail, I heard a lot about people wanting more, people feeling that they weren't involved as much as they wanted to be in the budgeting process. It sounded like people wanted to have more information about how the budget process works. There were a lot of concerns about how the budget seemed to be so out of balance with the priorities, as the way they had hoped they were and a lot of it had to do with people not having enough information about the thought process that went into some of the decisions and, granted, everybody's not going to agree with everything that's handled, but I'd like to see a way that people don't feel as if it's the City's budget but it's our budget and that we all feel as if we've taken a part in that plan and I think if I could change any one thing and that is one thing that I've learned over the past few months, that would be one of the things I'd like to see.

11. The County Board of Supervisors is currently reviewing the proposed Biscuit Run development. At 3,100 homes, this would be the largest single development in the County's history. Do you believe Biscuit Run will be quality growth in our community? Why or why not?

I think that it has the opportunity to be quality growth and I think the concerns that I would have would be the same concerns that my friends over in the Fry's Spring neighborhood have had about it: whether or not it will be able to handle the increase in transportation, the increase in the volume of people and whether or not the infrastructure is really there. Does it have the ability to negatively impact? Yes. If it's not done well and if everyone isn't on board with every part of the process and because the development is so large and because it's new, it's really scary because it is a new change but I think we all have to somehow or the other wrap our brains around the idea that change is coming and we may not be able to always control every aspect of that change but we have to be aware and we have to be ready.

12. What is your top priority for action by City Council if you are elected?

I come from an entirely different perspective than my other candidate counterparts in that my orientation will be different as a new Councilor and I think that because I have so much to learn as a freshman Councilor, it's almost a delusion of grandiosity to think that I'm going to come in and create this top priority action plan without the understanding of everything that goes into creating those action plans, and I guess if there's one thing that I'd like to do in that role is to make sure that I create an awareness and appreciation for health and wellness in our community and to really create a culture where

health and wellness is an equation— is part of the equation of every decision that we make, even going back to the Biscuit Run question. How will that development impact the health and wellness of our neighbors? Will people will be able to navigate in the same way? Will the construction change things in the way that the neighborhoods look, you know, so that's what I'd like to be able to do.

13. In your opinion is the state government adequately funding our transportation needs? If not, what steps will you take to ensure priority transportation projects are actually funded and completed in a reasonable timeframe?

And as soon as I saw that question, I immediately wrote [Delegate David] Toscano down because that would be my frontline for information regarding that kind of information and as I've been on this campaign journey, I've been getting information. I've been learning about how other localities in the state like the Tidewater area, even northern Virginia, are able to navigate funds so I'd like to include as part of my learning process how those funds can be acquired for different localities and what it is about Charlottesville that we need to do to be able to put ourselves in line for some of those same transportation funds and to make sure that I keep an open dialogue with Toscano during the whole process.

14. The University of Virginia is moving forward with numerous major construction projects to improve and expand their facilities. In what ways does this impact our community? How would you characterize the level of cooperation between the City and the University and in what way will you seek to make changes?

It impacts our community because it brings more people and the fact that it brings more people, it brings in more resources and other things that are positive and healthy, but, again, going back to the whole development issue, the impact on the community as to whether or not we're able to actually support and handle the new growth even within the University. I think that the cooperation between the City and the University is symbiotic in many ways, but I think that there's always the opportunity for improvement and also always the opportunity to make sure that the dialogue boils down to just "are we being good neighbors?" Bringing it down to the level of making sure that we are both benefiting from all the decisions that are made because there's very little division between the City and the University. Often times the City is the University and the University is the City, and so we just have to make sure that those communications remain open.

15. The City Board of Architectural Review and the City Planning Commission have recommended restrictions on by-right building heights in the Downtown Mall, Water Street, and South Street areas. If elected, would you support ordinance changes that would allow nine-story buildings only with a special use permit? Why or why not?

I guess the “why not” for me would be having the desire to remain consistent with the character and history and the design of the City and it goes back to the one of the questions you asked before about what would be defined as quality growth and that would be my “why not.”

Follow up: So, you would not support ordinance changes that would allow nine-story buildings only with a special use permit?

I’m sorry for the hesitation. No.

16. What are your priorities for improving the City’s public recreational facilities and urban green spaces?

In my priority for the public recreational facilities as we talk about the need to upgrade, the need for creating new facilities is that as we have the conversation about the development of those facilities, there’s also a partnering conversation that about the access and the utilization of all those facilities to make sure that we’re creating public recreation facilities that are going to be inclusive of all our residents. That they have times available and programs available, they’re going to reach a truly diverse population of the City and I think that as we are now in a place where we have to upgrade those facilities, we’re really in a unique place that we should take advantage of all the technology that we have to make sure that we’re doing it in an environmentally responsible way as well and to take advantage of everything that we know now to lessen the impact as much as we can on the environment as all those things are taking place, but I don’t want buildings to take place without the— the building of the programs to take place at the same time.

17. What do you see as the primary responsibilities of City Council?

I think the primary responsibilities of City Council is to guide policy with an open government and then to support the City staff in making sure that it happens.

Well, thank you very much, Holly Edwards, for participating in our interview.