



2011 Charlottesville City Council Candidate Interview September 2011

Candidate: Satyendra Huja (D)

On November 8, 2011, voters in the City of Charlottesville go to the polls to elect their representatives to three seats on Charlottesville City Council. This recording is Brian Wheeler's September 22, 2011 interview with Satyendra Huja (D). Other candidates in this race include: Scott Bandy (I), Brandon Collins (I), Bob Fenwick (I), Kathleen M. Galvin (D), Dede Smith (D), and Andrew Williams (I).

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

http://cvilletomorrow.typepad.com/charlottesville_tomorrow_/2011/10/huja.html

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

INTERVIEW

Mr. Huja, thank you for participating in this interview with Charlottesville Tomorrow. The complete audio 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 and The Daily Progress. 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 and community design.

As you are aware, candidates been provided in advance only the general topics for these questions. All City Council 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. Please describe your past experience that qualifies you to be on City Council?

I am a 38-year resident of Charlottesville, Virginia. The first 31 of those were as director of planning and community development, and strategic planning. So I think that provides me with some background in our community. I also have been serving on the city council for the last 4 years. I am adjunct faculty at the University of Virginia School of Architecture. I have expertise and experience in finding creative solutions to the needs of our community, so I think with my background and experience, I should qualify for the position.

2. What is your transportation agenda for the city? Does it require more money? How will you fund AND implement it?

We need to develop a balanced transportation system. Currently there's too much orientation towards the automobile. We need to do other modes of transportation equally well. I'll propose an interconnected network of pedestrian ways and trails with a special emphasis on safe access to schools. I would also propose an interconnected network of bikeways, on and off streets. I plan to propose restructuring our transit system to be more customer friendly and to be more frequent, every 15 minutes. With those initiatives, and other highway improvements, I think we'll have better transportation. I also support the Meadow Creek parkway, Hillsdale Drive [Extension], Belmont Bridge [replacement], and [Route] 250 bypass ramps [at Best Buy]. I feel that if you add good safe pedestrian, transit, and bike [facilities] to the roads you will have a balanced transportation system.

3. How should the city, county and the University of Virginia work together to enhance our community's unique character and economic vitality??

We are basically one community, the city, county, and the University, and we need to work together cooperatively and in a positive manner. I think if you want to have a good community, we need to work together. Currently we have a number of joint facilities in the city and county, the library, tourism and airport [commissions]. In the future we need to cooperate in the area of fire services, parks and recreation, and social services. We also need to work with the University of Virginia to encourage, for example, biotech businesses in the city. We can work with the university to have new businesses which can start in the city. So I think we all need to work together because it is in our own interests to do so.

4. What changes, if any, would you make to the city's Comprehensive Plan?

The city and county are now jointly developing a comprehensive plan for each jurisdiction. As you know, the comprehensive plan is a policy guide for the future of development and the maintenance of our community. I would pay special attention to neighborhood integrity, development of corridors, and mixed-use development, so that we can achieve the density we need as well as have mixed-use in the corridors in the city.

5. Last month the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce reported that Charlottesville lost 3,248 jobs during the years 2000 to 2010. What specifically should city council do to promote employment?

The city can do a number of things. One of the things that we can do is a targeted workforce development programs so the citizens can have qualifications for well-paying jobs in our community. When the jobs come, citizens need to be trained and ready for those jobs. A good job as you know is the most important anti-poverty program there is. We need to work also with the university to locate new technology [businesses] in our community. We can also assist small businesses and minority [owned] businesses because most of the jobs are created by the small businesses and we need to assist them with their venture. We can also provide some financial incentives to locate new businesses [in the city], like tax increment financing, where we can encourage a business to locate in our city. For example, CFA located in the Martha Jefferson [Hospital] property because of tax incentives we provided them.

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

There are three areas of priority which I would like to see happen. First transportation. I would like to see an interconnected network of bicycle lanes built so we can have a safer place to ride. Also, an interconnected network of sidewalks. As you know, every trip begins as a pedestrian, even if you go by car you need to first walk to the car. So a good system of sidewalks, especially to schools. I also would like to see improvement in our transit system. It needs to be restructured and be more frequent, so that we have 15 minute headways [at bus stops]. Right now we have 1 hour headways and most people don't want to wait for an hour and you're going to have an effective transit system it needs to be more frequent and accessible. Right now there is no transit system in the northern part of the city and I think we need to have that there too and that would be good for the environment and good for our transportation.

7. What would you improve with respect to the city's parks and recreational facilities?

The city has a very good park system. There are needs for more planning in terms of, maybe doing more planning for McIntire Park. I would like to see some more open space acquired in the northeast part of the city. [I would like to see] land acquired for trails around the city because we need to have a complete network of trails which could be used by citizens. Acquiring land for those [things] would be very helpful. We also have a Smith Aquatic Center and I think we need to operate it in an effective manner so that it will be a good service for our community.

8. Are you planning to seek a new vote by the council on the previously approved 50-year water supply plan and how would you change the plan, if at all?

No I am not seeking a new vote on the water system because I think we have a very good water plan which includes a new dam, a 30 foot [taller] dam, conservation, and part one of dredging. The combination of this strategy I think will provide water for the future of our community. As you know, water is one of the basic commodities we need to have for the future. When you turn the water on you need water not hot air.

9. Would you support switching from at-large seats to ward-based representation for elections to Charlottesville City Council? Why or why not?

I am satisfied with the at-large system in our community because we are a small community of 10 square miles. All council members think of the well-being of the whole community instead of just a small part of the community. But I am open to exploring a mixed ward and at-large system where you could have some wards and some at-large, but still an emphasis on at-large [representation].

10. If the federal lawsuit opposing the construction of the grade-separated interchange for the Meadow Creek Parkway is unsuccessful, will you support completion of the parkway?

Yes, I would support the completion of the Meadow Creek Parkway because I think it will provide better access to downtown and minimize the impact on residential neighborhoods, like the Park Street neighborhood, and it will provide better access to a park.

11. Should city council support moving the Rivanna Sewer Pump Station from its current location in Woolen Mills even if it will cost city and county ratepayers an additional \$15 million to \$18 million to do so?

I think we should support it because you do not want to have that kind of facility near a residential neighborhood. If you were to live there and had to smell it every day of your life, I think you would appreciate that there ought to be a better location for a pumping station.