



2007 City of Charlottesville City Council Candidate Interview August 2007

Candidate: Satyendra Huja (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' August 31, 2007 interview with Satyendra Huja, a Democratic candidate in the race. The other candidates in this race are David Brown (D), Barbara Haskins (I), Peter Kleeman (I) and Holly Edwards (D).

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

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

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 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.

First of all, I think it would be a great honor and privilege to serve my community where I live. I've been living here for 34 years. I believe I can make a contribution, a significant contribution, to the improvement of the City of Charlottesville because I have the experience, I have the creative skills, and I care for this community a great deal, and I have a proven record of

service to this community for the last 34 years. I also have served on a number of boards and commissions over the years and provided, to non-profit agencies like the Piedmont Housing Alliance, Jefferson Board of Aging, Art in Place. The most rewarding job I had was at the soup kitchen, running the soup kitchen.

- 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?**

First of all, I think I want to say that water is definitely important, in quantity as well as quality. Both have to be taken care of. And not only the current needs but also the future needs of our community. So we need to think ahead and not just deal with the current situation. On the other hand, I do support the City-County agreement, because I feel it will provide a most economical way to meet our water needs. It will first of all serve the City needs because the reservoir has silted and it needs to be, capacity needs to be increased. So I think that [replacement] needs as well as the new needs that will be met with this agreement. I feel this is the most reasonable solution to this problem as we know it.

- 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?**

If you're going to have good quality utility system, the sewer system is a very important part of that for our growth as well as for our maintenance of our existing development. I support the idea of improving infrastructure, and I think that we'll have to work out a system of— As you know, it is required not only for sewer but also for Chesapeake Bay water quality standards have to be met by our locality, which we do not meet. And we need to increase the capacity and the condition of the sewer lines. And I think that they may be improved in a sort of phased manner and we need to have equitable sharing of the cost. Because as you may know, the City has already developed and most of the growth is coming in the County now, and the University.

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

Growth which is sustainable, which can be sustained for the long run, and not just for today, which is harmonious with existing development. We live in, especially in the City of Charlottesville, we live in an old community, so when you do a new development it has to fit in. You have to think of Charlottesville

as a quilt, and we need to fit each new patch into the quilt in a harmonious way and quality way, and not just dump in some new development. Also, I think we need to protect new development and natural and manmade environment, and development needs to be affordable. We need to have development which will meet the needs of all our residents, not just the richest of our residents, so that kind of development I will promote, and I will support that kind of development.

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

Yes, I do support the Meadowcreek Parkway, two-lane parkway, with pedestrian and bicycle and transit access to the parkway. Because, I think it provides good access to our downtown, which is an important part of our economy and the heart of our community. We need to be able to get to that. It also provides access to northern parts of the City. I also support the replacement of open space lost due to parkway, so that it's truly a parkway, and not just a road through the heart.

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

My most important priority is to improve the transit system. We are not going to be able to build, or want to build, too many new roads in the City of Charlottesville. So, the alternative is, how do you handle the traffic situation? Transit, in my mind, is a good way to deal with it. But it needs to be very efficient, frequent, every 15 minutes or so, so it can be predictable and customer friendly. So we can use it, accessible throughout the City. For example, right now, in the northern part of the City it has no transit service. So if I want to go somewhere, I get into my car, so do many other people. It needs to be, I wouldn't even mind the transit system to be free, if possible. But more important is the frequency and the dependability and the accessibility. Another thing I also support is a streetcar on the corridor from downtown to the [Route] 29 North through University and Barracks Roads, because I think it will provide a good way for high-density corridor development. Another area of transportation which are important to me are interconnected network of bikeways. Right now you have pieces of bikeways but they are not connected, and they are not available and they are not safe. So, it is important that they are interconnected. I would also like to see a very good pedestrian network especially in residential neighborhoods. I would urge there be sidewalks on at least one side of every street, or at least main streets in neighborhoods and major streets. Besides that, I would like to see if we could do some traffic management on existing streets so that you improve the quality of transportation and access and movement on existing right of ways, and I think there are things that can be done through traffic management. The other thing which is important to me in transportation is

that the County needs to also build also some roads in surrounding areas, so that traffic that is now going right through the City, for example, the Sunset-Fontaine Connector would be a good example of that connection.

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?

Well, we are one community in many ways, so I think a joint transit system would be very useful and very good, because then you don't have to have three systems running around, and it can be one community. But a joint system needs to be a system in which each jurisdiction has an equitable share of revenues and costs for operation. There is a major expense, and we can get a lot of money from capital equipment, but not for operations, so we need to share equitably, and if that is done, I would promote a regional transit system where all of us could be together.

As to the bike and trails and sidewalks, I support those also, but also not only support in philosophy and principle, but also in support of the funding for those facilities so that we could have a network, an interconnected network, of bikeways and sidewalks.

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?

Well, I'll encourage commercial development and the entrance corridors. The City can provide quality infrastructure to support this kind of development, and we want quality development, so quality development requires good reviews also. I'll encourage mixed use in downtown area. At Water Street, also, I think that lots could be developed for mixed use including retail, office, housing, maybe farmers market, maybe even hopefully some parking. But it is a heart of our community, and it needs to be healthy heart, and a very important part of the economy so we need to support that development, but it needs to be harmonious and a quality development.

Follow up: Do you think that anything is missing from downtown?

Well, there are things missing. For example, we don't have a grocery store in downtown, but it's not going to happen until we have a critical mass of population downtown. I think it is going to come, most likely we will have grocery stores, not with huge department-store kind of grocery stores. I don't think we need those, the big ones. We do need some small grocery stores, small specialty stores, where you can go walk and go shopping.

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?

Well, promote workforce training, and job creation activities. Especially growth of new small businesses and expansion of existing businesses. As you may know, most development, economic development, comes from expanding existing businesses. So, I will try to see what their needs are and try to meet those needs for them. Also, the City can provide utility capacity, for example, sewer and water, for without that, you cannot have development.

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?

I believe the city does have enough resources to meet its strategic plan goals. We can't meet them all over night. I think it will take some time and we need to phase the most important priorities. I do support funding for environmental sustainability, affordable housing, and recreational facilities. I think we can use our resources effectively in meeting strategic goals.

Follow up: What impact will your recommendations have on staffing and the annual budget?

I don't think it will have significant impact on the budget or staffing, because I think that we have an adequate staff right now to deal with problems and issues and needs of the community. We are a small community. We are not growing in population. We are going quite a bit staffing wise. And so, especially, I would focus more on service provider staff than administrative staff.

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?

Well, first of all, it's a large development, so I'm concerned about it in the sense that it has an impact on the City of Charlottesville, especially the southern part of the City of Charlottesville, the Fry's Spring neighborhood. And, I want to make sure that the transportation access is provided. It could be a good development if they provide first for appropriate amenities for the area, and most importantly, that they provide transportation improvements like east-west Sunset-Fontaine Connector, and those kind of improvements, so traffic is not going through the City of Charlottesville.

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

There are two areas of concern to me, one is the environment. And to deal with the environment, many things can be done. The most important thing I'd work on is the transit system, because I think it has an impact on the traffic, an impact on the environment, quality of our air, and so, I feel that if you can improve a good transit system, it would be a good way to improve the quality of life in our community.

Follow up: What was the second area of concern?

The other thing I mentioned was that I would like to work on environmental issues also, because for example, energy conservation. I would like to see energy conserved, up to 25 percent reduction in energy used in the City. As you know, 30 to 40 percent of the energy is used in buildings, and we can set a good example with our own fleet, our own buildings, and provide incentives. For example, we could give free audits to residents so they could know where their energy is being wasted and how they can improve that.

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?

From what I understand, state has been trying to raise transportation funds with not a great deal of success. I want to talk to our delegates to see if they can help in that area. I think, plus, we can ask for funding, but the important thing is to not only have funding, but also to how we use the funding so that if we focus our funding on priority issues, instead of just building projects just because they're on the books for a long time. And, they need to be phased properly. I think we need to think of transportation not only in terms of highways, but also a balanced transportation system, with transit, sidewalks, bicycles, and those other modes of transportation also, and my priority would be to spend more money on those areas than the highways.

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?

Well, as you know, the University of Virginia is a major asset to our community, and it is here to stay. Every time it moves, we can feel it, just like sleeping with an elephant. Like it or not, if it moves, you feel it. The question is, how do we communicate with each other? I think that we can meet more. There is a City-County-University committee right now, and I think they need

to meet more often. We should start talking about projects in development from the start and not the end so that we are all part of the planning process, so that development can fit well in our community. And I think we can work with the University, and I look forward to that.

Follow up: How would you characterize the existing level of cooperation between the City and the University?

I do not know the level, but I presume it is okay.

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?

Well I think I would support those changes. I'm not opposed to nine-story buildings, some of them, but I think there can be too many of them. And also, the reason why it's important to have special permits for those kind of things is that you want to make sure that it fits into our fabric of downtown, and that the scale is compatible, that the fit is compatible, that it doesn't block the light and air. It depends on the orientation, the solar orientation. So, I think some nine story buildings can fit into the City of Charlottesville, downtown especially, but I think they need to be reviewed very well, qualitatively and sustainability-wise, to be sure that it fits into the fabric of the community.

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

Well, I think it is important to augment and increase spaces for recreation, open spaces are like breathing rooms for our community, and we need to have good spaces like that. It adds to our community. It's a more pleasant community to live in if you have good spaces. Plus, there's a need for health purposes also, to recreational activities. I would first of all encourage acquisition of land in the flood plain so that we can protect the open space around the river, around other areas, and would also like to see that some of the open spaces are well scattered throughout the city. I would also promote a lot of tree-planting, tree cover in the parks rather than the streets, because I think that would improve the quality of life, quality of our environment for us. And I think that we have a very good parks and recreation department, and I think that we need to maintain our facilities so that the facilities could be improved upon for example, the swimming pools, at the Buford site, or the Crowe site.

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

I think City Council can provide to set the tone and the leadership for the development and growth of our community, as well as the maintenance and protection of our neighborhoods, because our neighborhoods are an integral part of our community, and we need to maintain their integrity and their quality, because this is where we live. Other things that are important for City Council are listening. Listening skills are crucial because there are citizens who have ideas, who have concerns, and City Council needs to listen to them and try to respond to them in a positive and meaningful way. And I think most importantly, I think I can provide some leadership because of my experience and because I feel public service is an honorable duty for each citizen.

Well, thank you Mr. Huja for agreeing to our interview.