



2009 Charlottesville City Council Candidate Interview September 2009

Candidate: Paul Long (I)

On November 3, 2009, voters in the City of Charlottesville go to the polls to elect their representatives to two seats on the Charlottesville City Council. This recording is Brian Wheeler's September 1, 2009 interview with Paul Long (I). Mr. Long is being challenged by Bob Fenwick (I), Dave Norris (D), Kristin Szakos (D), and Andrew Williams (I-Write In).

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

http://cvilletomorrow.typepad.com/charlottesville_tomorrow_/2009/10/long.html

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

INTERVIEW

Mr. Long, 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. Are you ready to start?

Yes I am.

1. Please describe your past experience that qualifies you to be on City Council?

Mr. Wheeler, I first want to thank you and Charlottesville Tomorrow for inviting me here to participate. To answer that question, in three weeks, if God allows me to live, I am going to be 60 years old and the reason I say that is because I have been privileged to be a resident of Charlottesville for the past 11 years. I love the City of Charlottesville, it's a great city. I am a native of the City of Philadelphia which is another great city just as historical as the City of Charlottesville.

And in terms of the experience that I have serving City Council, for 14 years I served as an unofficial watchdog for Tincum Township, which borders the City of Philadelphia in fact, half of the Philadelphia International Airport lies in Tincum Township, and I was very active in preserving a bus route that was run by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority and it was the Tincum Township's only access to the public transportation system in Philadelphia. And during those 14 years I had the opportunity to develop and end up knowledge of how urban mass transportation systems work and I received an award for community service from Tincum Township from my service and that explains one of my great interests in an issue that I will be addressing in a question further down.

I also served briefly in the Tincum Township board of health as a secretary and I was a certified addiction counselor in the state of Pennsylvania and served in various counseling capacities and other capacities working with people who had substance abuse problems. I believe that, that gave me an insight into our problem that exist certainly here in the greater Charlottesville area, but it also gave me the opportunity to develop a lot of skills and how to deal with various different people, different ethnic groups and how to be involved in conflict resolution and I think all of these skills would be valuable to a person serving on Charlottesville City Council.

2. Do you support the formation of a Regional Transit Authority with Albemarle County? 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?

I definitely favor the creation of a Regional Transit Authority, but I would even go beyond what the required proposal is--forming that transit authority with Albemarle County--I think the surrounding counties of Nelson, Orange, Fluvanna and Buckingham, Greene Counties should be invited to participate right at the beginning with the formation of this Regional Authority. And I say that because Charlottesville is indeed an urban area and the greater Charlottesville area includes those surrounding counties.

I have had a lot of people when I was going around trying to get signatures for my petition and afterwards told me that they cannot afford to live in Charlottesville on account of the housing cost. Literally hundreds of people who work in UVA Medical Center and other industries throughout the City live in the surrounding counties and I have been told by many that they would certainly consider taking a bus into work if they were available. So that's the reason that I support a vastly extended urban transit authority for the Greater Charlottesville Area.

In terms of regional transportation priorities, I would like to sit a City Council as soon as possible, create a bus route from the Charlottesville Transit Center on Water Street to the Charlottesville Albemarle Regional Jail and also establish a bus route to the Charlottesville Airport. I believe that those are two areas that need immediate service.

And now in terms of the question how to fund this vastly expanded public transportation service and absence of a new state funding and without the ability to raise a local sales tax, I was on a local radio show today and I made the same proposal that I made at Charlottesville City Council. I going to give a brief background. Edward Rendell who is currently the governor of Pennsylvania, in the early 1990's he served as the mayor of Philadelphia. At that time the City of Philadelphia was going through one of its many current financial crisis. Mayor Rendell approached the University of Pennsylvania and he told them, and of course Mr. Rendell was a lawyer and served as District Attorney of the City of Philadelphia, and he told the University of Pennsylvania that even there was a tax exempt educational institution, the University of Pennsylvania as just the University of Virginia was the largest employer in Philadelphia, he said you have thousands of students who use services and thousands of employees many of whom were out of the City, when they come in the City they are using City services, where there is police protection and any number of other services.

And he called upon the University of Pennsylvania to enter into negotiations with the City and make an annual voluntary contributions to the City general fund. I believe that the University of Virginia should do the same. I am proposing a figure, and this is merely for negotiating purposes, that the University of Virginia considers donating \$35 million a year to the general fund of Charlottesville, some of that money which could go into the creation of new and extended bus routes.

Now I was told by the City Manager of the City of Charlottesville, when I proposed that at Council, that even if the University of Virginia was desirous to do that, that it's against the law in Virginia for them to do that. If that is the case, we are having a gubernatorial election and I am calling upon Senator Deeds and Mr. McDonnell if indeed that's the case, to propose a law in the General Assembly to change that, so the University of Virginia would have the

legal authority to enter into negotiations with the City of Charlottesville to make that kind of a contribution. I am merely throwing that \$35 million figure out as a point of discussion, that's not a hard and fast figure on my part.

3. In August 2009, Advocates for a Sustainable Albemarle Population (ASAP) released the first report in their research seeking to identify an optimal sustainable population for the community. Should City Council explore policies that would cap the City's population growth at a number below the potential build-out population? Why or why not?

I am very skeptical of creating an artificial population cap and I say that because I believe that cities are organisms, they grow and their populations expand or contract due to any number of factors. And I don't think that you can just arbitrarily create a certain figure and say well we are not going to allow the City's population to go beyond that. I think there is a variety of things that we can do to control a direct growth in a desirable way and that's the reason we have zoning laws.

I have had many people tell me that they simply cannot afford to live in Charlottesville, but they would like to. The pastor of my church told me that when I asked her to sign my nominating petition, that's why she and her husband live in Albemarle County. I have had people who are struggling--I have a job that's a non professional job and I am grateful for it and I work two jobs like many people do. I am not saying this to be jealous or resentful of people who worked hard to obtain professional status, but Charlottesville's priorities are very much geared towards the upper middle-class and the professional classes and God bless them, they worked hard to get where they are at. But we have a lot of people who work at the University of Virginia Medical Center, at various hotels and non-professional jobs, who maybe their top salary is \$20,000- \$25,000, maybe \$30,000 at the most. Now there is no way that they are going to be able to afford a \$300,000 or \$400,000 house. And many of the houses are much more expensive than that.

I had a young man who lives close to Cherry Avenue take me on a walking tour at Cherry Avenue and pointed out the possible sight of a new redevelopment and--the point I am getting to in terms of population growth, over and above many condominiums that are being built and new developments that are being approached at the upper middle-class and professional classes---We need houses and apartment buildings built for the people who are working here and in support services as well. And I am not talking about Section-8 housing. I think that developers are coming to the City to build new housing and that they want to build half a million dollar condominiums, God bless them, but they should also be as part of the condition we are getting the zoning, we require to build a certain number of units that are a lot cheaper for people that are at the lower end of the

economic spectrum. But to answer the question directly, I don't favor putting a population growth at certain number, I don't think it can be done.

4. Is neighboring Albemarle County's rate of population growth, too much, too little or just the right amount? What in your mind are the advantages and disadvantages to population growth in Albemarle and the operations of the University of Virginia?

The answer to that question is I really don't know if the population growth is too much or too little in Albemarle County. What I would like to say is that--thinking in terms of the City of Charlottesville and we always mention Albemarle County as well, because we don't see the signs that's leaving Charlottesville, you couldn't tell where Charlottesville begins and ends, where Albemarle County begins--I think we have to think in terms of the total metropolitan area. Charlottesville, Albemarle County and the five or six surrounding counties as well because eventually as the growth continues, it's already expanding into those areas, and I think if we want to maintain and not see growth go much higher in Charlottesville and the Albemarle County, we are going to have to think in terms of controlled growth and smart growth in the surrounding counties.

That's one of the reasons that I am proposing a truly regional mass transportation authority. So that when that growth does occur, there can be easy access in and out of the City of Charlottesville in Albemarle County. In connection with that, if you go down to the Downtown Mall here and towards the Pavilion and the post office, we see a lot of vacant stores there. And the reason I am mentioning that, and there maybe a number of reasons why that has happened right now, but when I see the City transit busses, they are not running, very few of them are running on Sunday and none of them will be running on Labor Day, I believe that there are hundreds of people in Albemarle County and the surrounding counties who would love to come in the Downtown area on Sundays and on legal holidays to shop, to go to the movies and the fact that we don't have a truly regional transportation system running 365 days a week, I think it's hurting business in the Downtown Charlottesville area and also in the other commercial areas as well.

5. 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?

I'm going to have to claim ignorance on this and I had the question in front of me, but I didn't do my homework as I should. I promise that I will and that I will be addressing this in a comparatively short period of time.

But one of the things that I would like to mention though is--earlier this morning in that radio show I stated that I was a liberal Democrat and wasn't

ashamed of saying that--and that's in all due respect and deference to somebody who maybe a conservative Republican, but what I am leading up to is this, in order to run government, if people through the democratic process decide a certain thing should be done whether by the local government or a government at the higher level, you have to pay for it. You know and I don't mind paying taxes for police department, God forbid if I should need them, to maintain roads, so in order to truly have a good water system, no matter what kind of a system is agreed upon, the citizens of Charlottesville and Albemarle County, to be responsible, have to be willing to pay for it.

6. If you could focus on one area for improved partnership with Albemarle County during the next two years what area would that be?

That would be affordable housing. I was amazed, when I decided to run for City Council, I had a series of issues that I was concerned about that I wanted to discuss and those are still issues that I will be discussing, but I was amazed at the amount of people who approached me and to express their opinion about the anger and the frustration they have about the lack of affordable housing. And some people were quite angry about it and I wasn't upset that they were angry at me, because I approached them to discuss this.

I think there are a lot of people who are working in these kinds of jobs that I am talking about, whether they are at the various hotels, whether they are service jobs at the UVA Medical Center, wherever. All things being likely, they are not going to be able to afford a \$200,000 house or condo. They are not going to be able to afford the \$1,500 or \$2,000 a month rent. And these people are hard working people, they are not asking for a hand out. They just want an affordable house to buy or an affordable apartment to rent.

I have a young friend of mine who was 28 three years ago and got married, he moved to Richmond, he was working, I won't say in what capacity, at the University of Virginia Medical Center. I am sure that his salary wasn't any higher than \$28,000 a year and he married a young lady in Richmond, he moved to Richmond and I would hate to think of people that are in their early and mid 20s or late 20s getting married for the first time, how they can afford to enter the housing market.

I am of the age bracket that I remember my father's generation, they had the GI Bill of Rights that they could approach, they had the Federal Housing Authority and that explained a lot of the suburban development that occurred in the 50s. Some of what I am saying is above the purview of City Council, but there should be mechanisms that everybody that's working in any capacity should have the funding and the access to mortgages where they can buy a house.

7. What are your priorities for economic development and workforce development in Charlottesville?

I would like to see the City of Charlottesville reinvent itself. Charlottesville is a great city and I have great respect for the University of Virginia, Virginia is a great institution, but I think the City of Charlottesville should be more than just the University of the Virginia. I see the whole warehouse district, I guess that's south of the Downtown Mall--I would like to see the City of Charlottesville actively encourage businesses to move in the City and I am talking about fortune 500 companies moving into the City.

We have a great University that's training brilliant young minds, but I believe young people in the City of Charlottesville and the surrounding counties, if they have the ambition, if they are studious and they go to school, they get admitted to college and they get their degrees and they get post high school training, unless they are interested in academic teaching or going to the medical field, if they get their degrees--if they are interested in say, law or if they are interested in fashion or design or any other numbers of discipline--once they obtain that education, they can't come back to Charlottesville because those kinds of jobs don't exist in this City.

I think that the City of Charlottesville should actively encourage different types of businesses to move in or expand the tax base so that we don't have to go to the General Assembly begging for permission to raise the sales tax. That also will give the young people in the Charlottesville surrounding opportunities if they have the ambition, they have the motivation to continue their education that once they received their degrees or their training and they want to stay in the Charlottesville area. They will have a fair chance of getting a job in their field and be able to stay in the area.

8. What would you like to see happen to the old Martha Jefferson hospital site in Charlottesville?

That would tie into the question I just answered. I would like to see the City of Charlottesville actively promote that site for venture capitalists, for people who are interested in starting new businesses and also in the efforts to encourage fortune 500 and other types companies move into Charlottesville. That's a very readily available site that could [allow] businesses to move into the City.

9. What is your vision for McIntire Park?

I think McIntire Park should be maintained. I don't believe in the [Meadowcreek Parkway] being built there. I don't think the YMCA or even the botanical garden should be built there. Charlottesville is growing and I have talked to people who have lived in Charlottesville all their life and some of them are very disappointed how its grown, it's not like it was 30 or 40 years

ago. I think it's very important that in the area that's growing more urban, we should preserve open park space and it shouldn't be touched at all.

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 U.S. Route 29?

To answer the question directly, no, I don't support it. One of the reasons that I don't support it is the [Meadowcreek Parkway], I am utterly opposed to that.

I want to make a short statement, I hope it's not too drawn out. For various reasons, I have chosen never to own an automobile. Now the point is that over the years that I have worked and all the thousands of dollars I have paid in Federal, state and local taxes, in the political process, people and the representatives of government decide how funds are going to be spent. I know that a lot of my money is being spend for the Virginia highways to maintain them and to provide police protection and that's all well and good because these are decisions that are made at the level of the General Assembly in Richmond.

But I believe also as well that there are other priorities that we should be having including public transportation, including preserving open space that deserves just as much right to public allocation of funds as there is millions and billions of dollars that have been devoted to highway expansion.

If we want to maintain whatever is good in Charlottesville and we cannot stick our head in the mud and say Charlottesville is not going to continue to grow, but to preserve open space, to preserve the green space and the tree lined streets we just cannot afford that to continue to let automobiles dominate the local transportation system and that means allocating funds instead of the [Meadowcreek] Parkway and other expansions of highways devoting some of that money to expanding the local public transportation system.

Former Mayor Maurice Cox had suggested several years ago the development of light rail in the Charlottesville area. I don't know population wise whether Charlottesville is ready for that yet or not, but I do believe that more serious consideration should be [given] to vastly expanding the public transportation system.

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 City Council revisiting previous Council's decisions regarding such projects?

I think City Council should always feel free to revisit agreements that were made in the past. A lot of times things change, outlooks change and very often facts change from what they may have been 10, 15, 20 years ago. And I believe in any representative of government, whether it's City Council or legislative bodies on a higher level, should always have the option of revisiting decisions made in the past if they need revision.

12. Should Albemarle County officials be able to revisit or renegotiate their past decision on the 1982 revenue sharing agreement with the City Charlottesville? Why or why not?

I certainly believe that they should have the right to revisit it, renegotiate it. I am going to plead ignorance on this issue, I am going to have to get a copy of that and read it, but I think that the City of Charlottesville should certainly be willing to sit down and renegotiate with Albemarle County and if I am elected to City Council I would push for that.

I believe there are lot of issues in common that the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County have to work together on--in terms of housing, in terms of public transportation, in terms of traffic control and I am even going to say in terms of traffic control on like Rio Road. I do a lot of walking and if you ever try to cross Rio Road, you are literally taking your life in your hand and unfortunately people have been hurt there.

Now it's not for me as a candidate for City Council who tells the County of Albemarle how to run their police department, but I think there should be policemen on the street there directing traffic. So the answer to this question in terms of revenue sharing, I think it should be revisited and I would be willing if I am elected to City Council to do that.

13. 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?

Okay I am going to hedge on this, I hope that I am not sounding like a politician, I don't know what the specifics of the water supply plan are. But I am going to repeat what I said before, if I do read over and think of something positive that I should support, the residents of the Charlottesville and Albemarle County want a good, clean water supply then no matter what plan

is agreed upon, we have to be going to pay for it. It's not going to come at no cost, but I haven't read the specifics and I need to do that.

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

Top priority is bringing new industry, bringing new businesses into the City, I also believe in the creation of expanded public transportation system, that would be one of my top priorities and I also believe that another one of my top priorities would be the creation of affordable housing for people in the lower economic levels in the City.

15. Do we have appropriate resources in City government to achieve the objectives in the City's 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 don't believe that the City of Charlottesville has the appropriate resources to achieve the objectives and the reason for that is because simply the whole issue about the City of Charlottesville not being able to raise the City sales tax to meet local objectives. This is a problem not only the state of Virginia imposes on this City, many other states are imposing this on their cities.

The City of Philadelphia frequently had problems because that simply weren't allowed to do certain things by state law, and Charlottesville is in a similar circumstance. I believe that if the City of Charlottesville, their duly elected officials, decide to raise the City sales tax, the sales tax collected in the City for local objectives, and if they duly vote on that in favor of it, they should be allowed to do that. I don't think the state of Virginia should say that they don't have the authority to do that, simply for the fact that for many of the problems the state of Virginia isn't coming in and [is not] willing to pay the tab.

If the local residents are willing to pay the tab, and pay increased taxes, by the vote of their City Council, they should be allowed to do that, and of course if the residents disagree they can always vote the Councilmen out in the next election. But I think the City Council should have much more authority in raising taxes, different kinds of taxes and different mixes. Now I am not a lawyer and I don't know whether the City Council has the authority to do it. I do not know whether they would be interested in doing it or not, but I think the City Council should have the authority to impose to wage tax on the City residents.

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

I think the primary responsibilities of the City Council is to be responsive to the public, the residents of Charlottesville and even though I am running against him, I want to commend Mayor Dave Norris for being very fair, being

very objective and allowing people to express opinions and as opposed to some other council members that are currently serving on Council and have served in the past, and I will be a gentleman and not mention any names, but I think Mayor Norris has [gone] over and above, extending himself, to allow people to feel comfortable to express their opinions on any number of issues at City Council and that's the way it should be. That's what responsible government is all about.