



## **2009 Albemarle County Board of Supervisors Candidate Interview September 2009**

*Candidate: Rodney Thomas (R)*

On November 3, 2009, voters in the Rio Magisterial District go to the polls to elect their representative on the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors. This recording is Brian Wheeler's September 10, 2009 interview with Rodney Thomas (R). Mr. Thomas is challenging incumbent David Slutzky (D).

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

*[http://cvilletomorrow.typepad.com/charlottesville\\_tomorrow\\_/2009/09/thomas.html](http://cvilletomorrow.typepad.com/charlottesville_tomorrow_/2009/09/thomas.html)*

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

### **INTERVIEW**

**Mr. Thomas, 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 Supervisor candidates will be asked the same questions. Are you ready to start?**

I am ready.

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

I feel being born and raised in the area, running a successful business, and being on the Planning Commission for 8 years are some of the experiences that equipped me to run for the Board of Supervisors.

Having been the Chairman of the Planning commission has prepared me for many of the tasks I would have to do as Supervisor. All the duties will be stemmed from what I learned as a Commissioner, such as running a public meeting, bringing in public comment, and making tough decisions.

My work locally with the Boys and Girls Club, the YMCA, and the Sorenson Institute and many other organizations has also given me a better sense of the community as a whole. My friends and neighbors have encouraged me to run because they think Rio needs a more responsive Supervisor. I want to bring my 30 years of delivering quality customer service to the Board.

**2. Do you support the formation of a Regional Transit Authority with the City of Charlottesville? 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?**

Before forming any new partnership with the City I would have to have a better picture of how it would affect the people of Rio, the Rio District I mean. Much of the current system has little to do with the residents of the Rio District. For instance, if we provided bus service to Rio road would enough people in places like Dunlora or Stonehenge use the bus to go into the City or UVA instead of driving their cars? **If there was revenue sharing that it already receives from the County to fund it.** We are about to send the City a revenue sharing check for \$18 million dollars next year. Some of that could go, or should go, to shared services like transit.

**3. The next Board of Supervisors will review the Places 29 Master Plan. What do you think are the key ingredients that need to be in that plan to gain your support?**

As I have gone door to door in the Rio District I have asked the people of Rio what they know about Places29. What I have found out is that people know very little about it and those that have heard of it are concerned about committing to a project that will cost between \$300 and \$500 million dollars. Even with all the workshops and meetings the County has already had about Places29, I have found very little public support for the project. I think that for Places29 to go forward it will have to change from something that planners support to something that the public will support. That might mean a ballot referendum to properly measure public support. In these trying economic

times I can't imagine burdening Albemarle taxpayers with such a costly project without greater public support for Places29.

**4. In what circumstances would you support an expansion of Albemarle County's designated growth areas?**

Considering current economic conditions and with Albemarle's [population] growth rate around 1%, I can see very little, if any, demand for the designated growth area to increase for the next four years. There is very little public support for increasing the growth area. We will first have to have major improvements in transportation and water supply in Albemarle before even considering any expansion of the growth area.

The answer is not the use of Transfer of Development Rights. TDR's are not supported by the majority of the board, and should TDR's be approved, they would hurt the Rio District by adding more growth and traffic than Rio would get without TDR's. This would reduce the quality of life in Rio and I'm against that.

**5. If you were to provide direction today to the County Executive on the development of the next Albemarle County annual budget what would you tell him?**

Given the cuts that are coming from the state and lower expected tax revenues, I would hope that the Board of Supervisors would use a zero based budgeting approach. We will make sure that education and public safety are properly funded first. Then we would need to roll up our sleeves and make sure that every penny of tax revenue is going where it is needed and not being wasted.

It's time for every program and line item to be examined and make sure that it is a need and not a want. Only by starting with a blank sheet of paper and rebuilding the budget from zero can we know where the budget can be trimmed. We wouldn't have to do this every year and it would be a great deal of work but, it's the only way the budget can have a realistic chance of being controlled.

**6. 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 the Board of Supervisors explore policies that would cap the County's population growth at a number below the potential build-out population? Why or why not?**

Well again, first and foremost, the only way you could have an Albemarle population cap is to take away people's property rights. I can't even imagine

the red tape and the rules that would have to be created to start such a cap. It is an intrusion of government that I cannot support. What if my grandchild wanted to have a large family. Would he have to move out of Albemarle County? Or would other people not be allowed to move to Albemarle?

We have already created restrictive zoning and other changes that control where people live and the growth rate. This artificial ceiling is just another attempt to take away more rights from the very people who have been shown to be good stewards of the land.

**7. 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?**

The 50 year water plan has already cost Albemarle ratepayers well over a million dollars, has seen the dismissal of the original firm, and the hiring of another consulting firm to give ratepayers the answers about the dam and its cost. Until the current study is finished, it would be difficult to give a credible answer.

I declined to sign a pledge supporting the current 50 year water plan because nobody has all the facts yet. As it stands today the dam must be replaced or repaired, but the information needed to make that decision final is incomplete. Once the study is finished and the cost estimates are delivered then a final decision should definitely be made.

**8. If you could focus on one area for improved partnership with the City of Charlottesville during the next two years, what area would that be?**

It would be the revenue sharing agreement. Albemarle County is about to give the city, again, \$18 million dollars of the taxpayers money and has absolutely no say in how it is used. I would like to designate some of that money for shared services like transportation, [Charlottesville Albemarle Technical Education Center] (CATEC), and other areas we currently cooperate in. I would also work to make sure the City finishes the Meadowcreek Parkway, as they have already promised. There is also much work to be done on sharing of fire services between the County and City.

**Follow up: And CATEC is the Charlottesville Albemarle Technical Education Center.**

Correct.

**9. What are your priorities for economic development and workforce development in Albemarle? In a follow up, do we have sufficient land for office, commercial and industrial development within the designated growth areas?**

I would like to see the expansion of [the Charlottesville Albemarle Technical Education Center] (CATEC) in order to help with workforce development. As I said earlier, for the next 4 years, I see little need for expanding the growth area given Albemarle's low growth rate and current economic conditions. We must keep Albemarle business friendly by keeping taxes low. Higher taxes, crowded roads, and increasing regulations will do little to attract new jobs. I will work to make Albemarle government more business friendly than it is now.

**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?**

With little money for roads from Richmond for the foreseeable future it is probably a good time to reconsider the Three Party Agreement. After 20 years, few roads have been completed. A new agreement would allow for everything from mass transit to new roads to be put on the table and discussed. I would not be in favor of just hiring consultants to tell us what to do or simply study the problem then do nothing.

**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 Board of Supervisors revisiting previous Board's decisions regarding such projects?**

I think that once a project is funded and agreed upon those agreements should be honored. I think the City should honor its agreement and finish its part of the Meadowcreek Parkway. Once the final report on the water supply plan is delivered a decision should be finalized as well. Unless cost estimates increased dramatically or changes in federal or state regulations were drastic, I would avoid revisiting approved multi-jurisdictional projects.

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

If the City would negotiate, I would be all in favor of renegotiating the revenue sharing agreement. Presently we are giving the \$18 million to the City, and as I said earlier, we have absolutely no say so as to what that money is used for. If we could negotiate again, I'll say we could share the money in cooperative programs we are involved with the City right now and then hopefully we could move forward together as an area.

I'd like to see the money used, the revenue sharing money, used in our urban ring that was not annexed. For instance, transit. I'd like to see it used for transit to get the buses to the County.

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

I do support the 50-year water plan, again, with the new facts that are going to be obtained through the new consulting firm. I would support a sustainable water supply for the area rather than having the mystery of not having enough water for the future. Yes, I would support it.

**14. What is your top priority for action by the Board of Supervisors if you are elected?**

The top priority for me would be trying, at least trying, a zero-based budget to try to cut the expenses of the County. I'm not for increasing taxes at all. I'm for keeping our fire and safety, police protection, and education, definitely education, at the top of our list.

**15. Do we have appropriate resources in County government to achieve the objectives in the County's strategic plan? And a follow-up, in what way if any do we need to make changes and what impact will your recommendations have on staffing and the annual budget?**

Well on this particular one, I believe you are asking the wrong question. The Board that's going to push the, not push it, the Board that's going to OK the strategic plan now is going to OK something that a new Board, if it's a new Board that comes in, will have the opportunity to readjust if possible. I don't think that the strategic plan would be, that's there now... it may not be the same after the new Board gets in. It may change. And it's an elective of the new Board to make the changes.

**16. What do you see as the primary responsibilities of the Board of Supervisors?**

Well, I think, the number one thing that I will always, and I should have put it in front a while ago, education has to be the top priority in all we do. But you can't give it all of it. There's got to be some sharing of the revenue down through the ranks. I would say education, and of course health, safety and welfare which is what we're commissioned to do: health, safety and welfare of Albemarle County citizens. I'm seeking votes, and I'm taking it seriously that I'm going to make a commitment to Albemarle County and its citizens to save them as much tax dollars that I can, provide as much service as we can, utilize as much of the dollar that we can without wasting any money.

**Thank you very much.**

Thank you.