



**2011 Albemarle County Board of Supervisors Candidate Interview
September 2011**

Candidate: Ann H. Mallek (D)

On November 8, 2011, voters in the White Hall Magisterial District go to the polls to elect their representative on the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors. This recording is Brian Wheeler's September 21, 2011 interview with Ann Mallek (D). Mallek is running unopposed.

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

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

Complete election coverage is available on the Charlottesville Tomorrow website

<http://www.cvilletomorrow.org/elections>

INTERVIEW

Ms. Mallek, 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 Supervisor 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 Albemarle Board of Supervisors?

Thank you. As a native of Albemarle and a 1967 graduate of Albemarle High School, I have a perspective of our collective history and how we ended up here. This is an important asset when dealing with issues which have recurred many times over the last 50 years. Luckily my parents encouraged me and my siblings to see other parts of the country.

I achieved a degree in biology at Connecticut College and worked in the university research lab in Boston. Residing in Boston taught me about some successful ways that urban areas handle population density, parks and green spaces, traffic and transit. Despite our smaller Albemarle population, we have many opportunities to plan ahead, to save financial and natural resources as we grow. There is no need to reinvent the wheel.

Another experience from living in New England was participating in town meeting. I saw firsthand the strengthening of community when large numbers of citizens gathered to discuss, debate and decide issues. While our representative form of government in Albemarle restricts the voting members to six, I know that to represent, I must communicate with and understand the concerns of the people in the White Hall district.

Other supervisors criticize my town hall meetings as unnecessary, but I know meetings are essential to the voters' sense of engagement and confidence, and the many contributions of ideas from our citizens. I've been in the audience for 17 years in Board of Supervisors meetings before I decided to run for office. The Daily Progress four years ago described me as a citizen-activist and I take that as a great kudo because I am loyal to the citizens and to the community. I don't feel like I'm anchored to any particular special interest group. I've been particularly focused on the environment and land use and transportation for more than 20 years.

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

Transportation has been an issue I've been involved in for many years. I'm going to give a little history first before I answer your question. So I was appointed to the Charlottesville Albemarle Long Range Transportation Advisory Committee, or CHART in 2000. CHART was founded to comply with federal regulations that local citizens adopt long range local transportation plans and the transportation improvement plan, or TIP.

Created by federal government, the local metropolitan planning organization, or MPO, may modify and then adopt the CHART's plan and forward it to the state for aggregation into the state program or STIP. The Commonwealth

Transportation Board, or CTB, divides the federal funds and chooses which projects in the STIP to carry forward.

During the eight years I participated in the CHART committee – six years as chair – the focus was finding the most effective parallel road network to carry local and through traffic on Route 29 while following closely the progress of other roads and the bypass at the time.

In addition, transportation as an issue should emphasize a multi-modal approach where we are enhancing facilities for people to choose the bus, bicycle, walking, carpooling, RideShare, as well as being a solo driver in their auto for mobility. CHART approved the early widening of Route 29 from the Rivanna Bridge to the Airport Road as a way to have cars now and a bus rapid transit lane at some point in the future when the population density made that a viable alternative. I support extension of the bus to the airport and vehemently support the northeast regional train service to continue.

Now to your questions. For funding, the CHART and also the transportation working group which worked for several years in the early 2000s to look for local funds, ways to find funds to do our local projects, a discussion of a service district that would provide extra revenue for transit was one that was adopted, supported by this very diverse group of individuals. The bus to me and the train should be more considered as a utility rather than a commercial enterprise that has to be self-sufficient. Roads and airports all receive federal subsidies or user subsidies from our gasoline taxes and our airport taxes. There's no reason to me why our community should not be supporting in a greater way the development of our bus system and also support our trains. It will reduce our costs in road building and improve our health if we do find ways to encourage people to get out of their cars.

Let's see. I do expect it will require more money and so the service district is one way to fund that. We went to Richmond a year and a half ago requesting the right to have a referendum to ask our citizens if they would support increasing a property tax or having a tax of a certain small percentage to sales tax – that's what it was. Let me start again. Members of the Board of Supervisors went to Richmond to the transportation committee more than two years ago to request the right to have a referendum so that our citizens could tell us if they approved of the idea of an increase in the sales tax to be spent specifically on local projects and on transit. We received a hostile reaction from the transportation committee. The chair set us packing, saying "build a certain local road and then come back and talk to us, but we're not interested in transit and those kinds of investments." So I guess I've guessed the implementation phase alright.

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

I have been a supporter with the city on many projects and I know that our area is known throughout the state for our projects such as fire and rescue, solid waste, water and sewer, libraries and the [Charlottesville Albemarle Technical Education Center] (CATEC). Most citizens think of us as one community and some wonder why we have two governments. I do not support any new initiatives until our water and solid waste issues are resolved.

In 2010, after the failed attempt by the General Assembly – at the General Assembly to change the formula for school aid based upon the transfer of revenue from the county to the city in revenue sharing, Delegate Toscano challenged local governments to study issues on which we might increase the level of cooperation. I participated on the fire and rescue committee. Other committees studied schools and social services. Meetings were held over a year. The fire and rescue committee gained an understanding of the ongoing joint planning efforts of the two fire chiefs, the capacities and efficiencies of the two individual and the combined systems and the goals of the overall community system. We determined that there was no financial or operational advantage to both jurisdictions to combine efforts at this time, but we do support the continued working together to have a functional unified system.

One large success in cooperation has been the planning and coordination council, or PAC. The PAC meets quarterly with representatives of the city, county and university and discusses a wide range of topics as decided by the group. Hosting and chairing of the meeting rotates among the three members. PAC has contributed to the strengthening of bonds of the three members and improving the planning efforts of the overall community.

One success story of the PAC is the recently adopted final report of the LCAPP, or Local Climate Action Planning Process. This 18 month long planning investigation focused on ways in which our communities can reduce our carbon footprint and increase our energy efficiency. It was supported by a steering committee of local business, university and local government participants and a working group of over 50 experts in a wide range of fields. All members stayed with the project throughout the process even as several changed jobs. The report was presented to PAC, the city council, and the Board of Supervisors and was accepted by each. Staff at each – all of the entities will now develop ways to implement the recommendations of the report and bring their suggestions to their elected officials.

I eagerly await the final resolution of the outstanding water supply decisions. The implementation of the water supply plan will be another success in inter-jurisdictional cooperation.

Regarding the community's unique character and economic vitality, we have a far better chance of success at achieving those goals if we work together, because we weaken ourselves as a community if the jurisdictions are competing with each other for business projects and losing the sight of the long range goal of working together.

4. Should the board consider boundary adjustments for Albemarle County's designated growth areas to create new locations for business on land currently zoned as rural areas? Does it matter if the land is in the watershed of the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir?

The short answer to your question is no. And the short answer to the question does it matter if land is in the South Fork Rivanna watershed, the answer is yes it matters – tremendously – because that is the reason why we plan the way we have in the last 30 years.

I'm not in favor of expanding the growth area at this time. This Comprehensive Plan-level decision must be based on need for the community and the benefit to the entire community and not limited to the potential profit of one applicant. The Comprehensive Plan changes adopted in 1980 created a growth area of 5% of the county's acres, reserving the remaining 95% as rural area devoted primarily to agriculture and forestry with incidental or accessory residential development and associated small businesses. The rural economy has grown with the success of our wineries and the local food movement, both contributing to the development of the county's niche in food production.

The growth area designation is a contract with our citizens as are our master plans. The boundary is the predictor of future development and is relied upon by the citizens as they invest in new homes and businesses. Our growth area is so large already that leapfrog development has already occurred. Rather than growing concentrically from the inside, projects have hopped over open land and sprung up at the remote areas of the designated growth area, increasing traffic demands on the corridors between these urban density areas.

5. What role should local government play to stimulate economic vitality? Do you support Albemarle's economic vitality plan and are there areas you recommend for improvement?

Well the role that local government should play is to find ways to emphasize Albemarle County's strengths. Because our strengths, our current quality of life, is what will attract future business investment to our area and bring future residents.

Essential to our success with the economic vitality plan is the active participation of citizens. Facing a redirection of regulations in the proposed January, 2010 economic development plan, citizens and board debate changed the plan to one based on the Comprehensive Plan with existing zoning. The adopted economic vitality plan encourages our local entrepreneurial, agricultural and artisan businesses – rather than focusing on more big boxes – within the existing regulations and guidelines for natural resource protection. This is a way to continue our quality of life and what people have come to rely on as what we expect in Albemarle County. The emphasis on our long-held values of the Comprehensive Plan and the inclusion of rural area enterprises made the plan supportable by me and a wide range of other citizens. The board did not endorse a race to the lowest cost but to work to our strengths as a county: our values of education, natural resource protection and attracting high quality career ladder jobs for all skill levels.

We can no longer rely on the University for our economic development. We must encourage the community to support our startups and our longtime local businesses and keep our dollars local. Saving a few cents at a national chain sends all that revenue away to other places. We must also address the workforce mismatch between workers and available work. According to a study by the Thomas Jefferson Partnership for Economic Development, over 30,000 people exit the county for work daily, while another 30,000 enter. The county suffered hyper-inflation of housing prices during the mid-2000s, which has added to this mismatch. As the available housing stock achieves a more reasonable price, living locally may become more of a possibility for our teachers, police, firefighters and other employees who currently reside in neighboring counties.

6. What is the top priority in your personal strategic plan for action by the board of supervisors if you are elected?

I'll get to my priority in a minute, but let me put some background in there first.

On the strategic plan, planning ahead is critically important for local government. I applaud the work begun approximately eight years ago under the leadership of Tom Foley who is now our County Executive. The reason to plan is to analyze the best time to make investments in capital projects based on need and the ability to pay. Using the five year planning horizon allows the county to anticipate costs and even out expenses over several years. When planning to build a facility, spreading the cost over these several years makes less impact on the annual budget than borrowing the total all at once.

As our county financial advisers have suggested, there is extra borrowing capacity within our budget and our current tax rate. We should take this opportunity to construct the Crozet library now, while we can take advantage of the remaining bid of reduced project costs and the extremely low borrowing costs at half of the rate of several years ago. Before making this decision, we must be assured that our revenue values are within the anticipated range. The only good reason to postpone would be to prevent the county to entering debt it could not pay back.

As financial stability returns, I support restoring the appropriate portion of tourism money to the ACE program to resume purchasing conservation easements from willing landowners. This program had a goal of 10,000 acres under easement in ten years but the economy halted the funding after almost 9,000 acres have been put under easement. As the economy begins to pick up speed, the county staff must grow to provide prompt and careful oversight of development projects – to maintain the valued high performance of projects here in Albemarle. Looking forward to plan for these staff increases will be important in the next budget year. We have all seen the delays involved with the processes of VDOT because the consequences of them shrinking their staff by 700 people over the last several years is now becoming critical. For our traffic plans of our local projects to disappear for three and a half months into the Culpeper office just to get an evaluation of a traffic study is an unacceptable delay. And they need to address that.

Investments to comply with the Chesapeake Bay cleanup efforts will take larger chunks of staff time and money. Storm water regulations recently adopted will also require capital improvements to our systems. The results of these efforts will benefit local residents, however, and also the Chesapeake Bay as improvements of our impaired waterways and reductions in erosion and sedimentation will increase the recreational and ecological health of our rivers and streams.

7. Do you believe the Western Bypass project is consistent with the character of our community and the public's vision for transportation in Albemarle County?

I do not support construction of the currently designed Western Bypass for the reasons you say. It is not helpful and it certainly does not fit in with the Comprehensive Plan. But if the road is going to be built, we must work to make sure it is the road we can get. I've been a student of land use and transportation since 1978. My learning began as part of the national land use study with the League of Women Voters. I've followed the history of the bypass since it was proposed many years ago. Many different governors, secretaries of transportation, and commonwealth transportation board members have supported the road in concept until they study it in detail, when they change their mind.

We have had a long series of meetings this summer that have thrown the confidence of our citizens into disarray regarding the way local government has operated with this project. It certainly is not the community vision to have decisions made without input. It is not the community vision for a small number of people to ignore the clear wishes of a huge majority, both in the meetings and in writing who have addressed their concerns about the enormous environmental impact that this design will have on our community.

A huge number of citizens are continually concerned about this project, about the lack of transparency in the state-level decisions, the rapid change, rapid escalation of the cost, the misrepresentation of that cost before the Commonwealth Transportation Board, so I believe it is inconsistent in every way with our operations both our protection of the environment, our protection of our school facilities and our desire for open government. And we will see how it all turns out.

8. In recent budgets, the board of supervisors has chosen not to raise taxes to provide additional funds for capital budget needs such that the current capital budget primarily supports only maintenance projects. How will you address capital funding needs as part of the next county budget?

I would continue with the same effort that I have carried on in the last three years, which is to develop a consensus among the citizens of the White Hall district about the finances and make sure that I understand their concerns. But I will reiterate what I said in the budget meetings every year. I have talked to the residents. They are unhappy about the necessity for more – a higher tax rate. But they understand the consequences if we do not and they are willing [to support and equalized tax rate] – especially last year when I was just focused on the equalized tax rate as a goal. And they understood that how that extra – if each person is able to put in the same amount of

money as they put in the year before with the higher values then that would supply an extra four or five million dollars, which we could have been leveraged into ten times that amount for construction projects. So the citizens understand this and I'm sure that there – if similar conversations were held in the other five districts, those supervisors would understand that their citizens understand the same thing.

The process to plan for capital investment in needed facilities is careful and thorough and recognizes the strength of the county and a factor in our AAA bond rating. But if we never use that AAA bond rating, what good is it doing? We have been hoarding our funds and been almost mired in inertia because the fallen economy is such a great excuse to not do anything. And there are some residents of our county who don't want to do anything. They don't believe in government. But I do believe that there is an essential responsibility of government to provide for school facilities, provide for recreational facilities, do our very best to have careful use of our water and our resources and recycling facilities. There is tremendous support in the community for all of these things.

Our planning, though, is a good one. Needed projects are identified at departmental levels throughout local government and the school division. These projects are analyzed for design and cost and added to a list of prioritization – for prioritization by the capital improvement program. That committee – these are added to a list for prioritization by the Capital Improvement Committee, or CIP. This committee recommends the priorities to Board of Supervisors and the School Board, who then collaborate on the budget. The economic downturn and its resulting fall in residential and commercial real estate values brought about a shrinkage of revenue to the county from property taxes. In order to avoid raising tax burdens on citizens, the Board of Supervisors over the last three years has taken money away from the capital program. And during the last two budget years, we have spent nothing on new projects.

The community and staff have anticipated the construction of the Crozet library for many years. It entered the need list in 1988 when the library was found to be below state standards for the population then. It has survived 23 more years in a tiny facility due to the effectiveness of the staff and it enjoys the support and loyalty of the residents of western Albemarle due to its wonderful programs. This library is now shovel-ready. The plans are done. It was number one on the capital list just before the economic downturn and has safety issues which place it in the emergency category. The School Board – on the school side, the School Board has the challenging task of anticipating and planning for the students of the future. This is important because of the many years it takes to bring additional facilities into use. It is challenging because the schools are often the last to know when people move into or out of the system. The School Board will study all the

alternatives to new building, including understanding capacity for each of its current facilities and the districts that the schools currently serve. These studies will provide information before new investments are planned.

The hardest challenge is going to be moving out of our state of inertia and taking that first step to get back to the program that our citizens have relied upon for 30 years.

[Brian Wheeler] And a question for clarity: In the beginning you said in your speaking with residents, part of the sentence was “they are willing,” and they’re willing to what?

Oh they were willing to support an equalized tax rate.

9. How will you support preserving the rich agrarian tradition and texture of our rural areas?

Well that is something we have – rural area protection has had some successes and some... sidesteps. Put it that way. The 1980 downzoning changed lot sizes in Albemarle County – the minimums – from two-acre lots to 20 acre minimums in the rural area, with five two-acre lot exceptions per parcel. The reasoning was to reduce the numbers of homes and their associated impacts in the watershed of the South Fork Rivanna reservoir. This admirable goal was to prevent erosion and pollution, which would degrade and shorten the life of the reservoir.

The agricultural character and the scenic beauty of Albemarle County have been important values for the huge majority of county residents for generations. The county has protected this character more from encouraging successful farming than it has with regulation changes. The land use program and the acquisition of conservation easements, or ACE program, are two of those tools. Improvements to the driveway regulations were passed to require more careful design of roads on steep slopes. Increases in the stream buffer and stream crossing requirements also reduced permanent cover disturbance and erosion.

The decisions of the Board of Supervisors on rural area protection over the last four years have been moderate, taking into consideration the effects of proposed changes on the rural land owners, new and longtime, those with small holdings and those with large ones. So we did not take dramatic steps to make sweeping changes but have been working on baby steps as a way to keep that – make changes that will stick.

10. Will you consider raising the real estate property tax rate in the next county budget to invest in capital funding priorities? Why or why not?

Well I would – I doubt that I will hear a tremendous sea change from my citizens at the winter town halls, but there will be more information that will come forward with our county finances and also with the state of the economy nationally and internationally. And the national and international part has been the most alarming, because we can't control it at all and yet it has tremendous consequences for us locally. So it has given us pause about making some of these investments that I feel are essential to our longtime success.

But I'm – have no reason to think that – start that again. I hope that we can get the board to at the very least vote for an equalized tax rate. It is long overdue and there have been some improvements in our local economy to suggest that we are still – we are level rather than continuing to descend into the pit of economic failure. So I would like to capitalize on that optimism that our local citizens have and ask them to at the very least have an equalized tax rate. We have – we were close in discussions last spring and actually had gained one more vote to actually raise the rate by a penny to put whole into capital. But we weren't able to get that one extra vote to make it 4-2. So I will continue to work on that issue.

11. Should the board of supervisors 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 support the efforts of the Albemarle County Service Authority to proactively budget for annual improvements to infrastructure. Aging pipes allow rainwater to enter, which increases the volume of water we must treat in the most expensive location, at Moore's Creek plant. We will be well-served by the methodical assessment of our pipes and continued upgrading. As we develop the pump station issue, it is a great example about how we have to work with another community and we have to build consensus and we have to gain support of a people in that neighborhood who've certainly have the ear of city council to move forward.

I've been disappointed in the attitude of many in the press who think it's just fine to have the county – the Albemarle County Service Authority spend \$10 million more for an aesthetic difference in this location. The – I have not heard the latest information about the underground pipe, which was a new idea that came at the end of this earlier discussion, so I do hope that will be our solution if it isn't ten times more than the other alternatives. But it is a way to I think bring everybody back to the table.

I have heard suggestions about improving the site in its current location, but also building a community center there as something that would be an amenity to the local residents. It might help them to appreciate its presence more. But that is really for others to do. We can support them and encourage them. But I'm very appreciative of the work that our service authority is doing in dealing with this issue.

Ann Mallek, thank you very much for speaking with us and answering these questions.