



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

*Candidate: Christopher J. Dumler (D)*

On November 8, 2011, voters in the Scottsville Magisterial District go to the polls to elect their representative on the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors. This recording is Brian Wheeler's September 28, 2011 interview with Christopher J. Dumler (D). Dumler's opponent is James Norwood (R).

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

[http://cvilletomorrow.typepad.com/charlottesville\\_tomorrow\\_/2011/10/dumler.html](http://cvilletomorrow.typepad.com/charlottesville_tomorrow_/2011/10/dumler.html)

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

### **INTERVIEW**

**Mr. Dumler, 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.?**

First, let me thank you, Brian, and Charlottesville Tomorrow for this opportunity. You guys play a really vital role in the community for informing the public of important local decisions and so thank you very much.

I believe that I'm the best candidate for the Scottsville Board of Supervisors because I think I have the right balance of vision, energy, enthusiasm and sense of service to serve the public well down in Scottsville. I'm originally not from here. I'm originally from Stone Mountain, Georgia which is sort of the poster child for unchecked, unplanned-for sprawl, so I sort of understand what happens when a community doesn't plan for those sort of things, doesn't have the infrastructure in place and the crowded schools and the clogged roads and in the case of Gwinnett County, decaying commercial sector.

I'm the son of two educators. Both my parents are middle school math teachers and so I think I understand. I have a good sense of what works in education on the local level and what doesn't work.

After I graduated from Georgia Tech—I got a degree in engineering—I moved up here for law school and opened my own business down in Scottsville, so I think I understand what it takes to get a small business up and running, what the County has that can help with that, what the County has that occasionally hinders with that sort of thing, and so I think I have the right balance as far as understanding the problems go, but at the same time, I think I bring a sense of fresh energy and enthusiasm to the issues that are facing the County. I've knocked on over 5,000 doors over the last three months. I've talked with voters about what's important to them, what concerns they have with County government and I think that the combination of that fresh sense of enthusiasm, if you will, and my background and in addition, I've served on a number of County boards. The Region 10 Board of Directors, where I'm the chairman of the finance committee. We have a \$33 million budget that I'm responsible for each year. I'm a member of the National Heritage Committee which is a stakeholder in the Biscuit Run Master Planning Process that recently wrapped up and so I think that experience combined with that fresh sense of enthusiasm makes me a good fit for the job.

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

I think my transportation agenda for Albemarle is sort of three-fold. I have sort of three main prongs that I'd like to focus on. The first one is the most important and it's ensuring that we use the Comprehensive Plan to concurrently plan for transportation infrastructure and land use decisions. I think it's absolutely critical that if we're expecting an additional 1,200 homes,

2,000 homes, however many, down on, say, Somerset Farm, that we have a plan for how we're going to widen 20 and maybe that'll cost more money but the plan needs to be in place and we need to make the growth decisions concurrently with the land use decisions.

We had the Western Bypass that we planned for 20 years ago and if it had been 20 years ago with the land use decisions in place at the time, it probably would've been a great road for the County. Unfortunately, with where we're at now, it sort of dumps you off in the middle of the growth area and I don't think it's the best fit and I'm sure that's a follow-up question that's coming later, but for the purpose of safety, for the purposes of efficiency in an era where we have very few state dollars, as you know, for transportation infrastructure, we need to make sure that we're using what money we do have in a way that maximizes its efficiency.

The second thing I think we need to get really serious about is promoting alternatives, alternatives like bus rapid transit, alternatives like enhanced walkability, bicycle friendliness in the growth area in particular. I think we need to be mindful of our growth patterns and maybe prepare for one day the possibility of light rail in Albemarle County. Obviously, the money isn't there now. It'll take a federal grant to do that, but if we don't have the growth patterns to support those sort of possibilities, that money is going to go to Norfolk, it's going to go to Hampton Roads, it's going to go to communities that do have the growth patterns to support it.

And the third thing I think we need to get serious about is ensuring that residents in Scottsville, particularly in the southern end of the district, are getting value for their money. You have things as simple as VDOT's maintenance of the roads, trimming trees, mowing along the right-of-ways, that by failing to do so, you have increased power outages with trees falling on the lines, you have people who can't back out of their driveways and beyond that, you have a lot of road projects that aren't expensive road projects, a lot of maintenance issues that aren't even being addressed right now. They're not in the plan. They're not even in the mix. They're not in the discussion at all and so I think that you have a lot of people down in Scottsville who sort of resent not being paid attention to and I think it's important that some of those projects be addressed. Maybe they'll take more money and maybe it'll require partnering with VDOT. It'll require insuring that they get in the County's transportation maintenance plan, but whatever that mechanism is, it needs to be addressed, so I think that sort of answers the funding question. The answer is maybe to the funding question. It depends on what projects are important to folks and it's all about a conversation.

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

I think that the first thing that the City, the County and University can do is find out what areas of commonality need to be worked on, which problems are regional problems and which problems are jurisdictional-specific problems. Two great examples of regional problems are obviously transportation infrastructure mobility and economic vitality which you just mentioned.

I think the work that [the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission] (TJPDC) is doing with this Livable Communities grant is a great example of incorporating on a regional level Charlottesville, the University, Albemarle County, our transportation planning with what I was just talking about a second ago, our land use decisions, and making sure that that money that we're spending is being spent wisely. It's reflective of the true commuter patterns of people that don't stop at the Albemarle County border, the City of Charlottesville border, and so I think that's one great example of where we can cooperate more.

Economic vitality, of course, sort of ties into that. If you don't have a community where you can move your goods around, where you can move your workers around, businesses aren't going to come here. They aren't going to relocate, but even more important than that, I think that there are a lot of unleveraged opportunities, particularly with the University of Virginia where we need to partner more fully with them.

A great example that I've given a number of times is procurement offers. UVA spends hundreds of millions of dollars a year on procurement and that money, the expenditure of that money, is obviously subject to state bidding rules, federal bidding rules, because a lot of that money is state and federal money but it is money that's coming into the community and that can be spent in the community if we find out what the needs are and then either use local government, city government and county government to sort of grease those skids and help that money get circulating in the community to create jobs and to raise tax revenue or find out how government's standing in the way and remove that barrier. As I understand it, two of the biggest issues, one of them is the complexity of the bidding rules and I think that the County can play a role there in stepping up sort of facilitating that, almost acting like a general contractor to sort of explain to local small businesses this is how you break through, these are the rules and regulations and almost having them act as sort of subcontractors in a way and that can be a public/private partnership. It could be the County itself. It could be a non-profit. It could be something like that.

And, second, identifying those needs and then maybe in the instances where local small businesses can't be the lowest bidder, offering tax incentives,

offering tax breaks, offering credits, whatever it is, that will enable small businesses, local businesses, to come in as the lowest bidder which, of course, is a requirement of most federal bidding and state bidding rules, to enable us to keep those procurement dollars that are coming in from NOVA tuition money or state grants or federal grants here in the community creating jobs.

**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?**

I think the Board should definitely consider it and I think it should be part of the Comprehensive Plan review that's coming up soon. We made a policy decision here in Albemarle County however many years ago that a certain portion of the County is going to be dedicated to growth, 5%, and the remainder of the County should be dedicated towards more rural appropriate activities and when it comes to new locations for business, I think there are lots of opportunities in the current growth area as it's defined for business.

Up 29 the number of vacant impervious surfaces that you have all the way 29, it's getting astounding and so I think one of the things we need to focus on is incentives to encourage redevelopment of existing commercial spaces as opposed to the current incentive system which overwhelmingly encourages paving over green fields which isn't good for— It may be good for the bottom line of the developer but those incentives can be adjusted such that it's easier to redevelop and that's one of the things I think we need, before we talk about expanding the growth area for business. That's one of the things we need to look at very closely.

Beyond that, I think part of the answer to this question lies in creating and encouraging rural innovation. Now, what I mean by that is if we have zoning ordinances in Albemarle County or regulations in Albemarle County or even on the state level, then we can partner with state officials to fix, when you have a bed and breakfast down in Scottsville that has six rooms and as such is treated like a hotel and is required to have a three-basin steel kitchen sink and thousand dollar backflow device on the water line that they have to pay for, when you have ordinances like that in place, you create not only pressures that are counter to Albemarle policy so you have pressures to subdivide if, say, if you're a rural farmer, but at the same time you aren't encouraging economic vitality with a rural use in the rural area and so I think we need to take a look at regulations and ordinances that may make sense in the growth area, but in the rural area, they may be over broad, they may be overly burdensome and they may actually be counter to some other very good policy that we have in Albemarle County so that sort of answers the question about rezoning.

Obviously, there're always going to be counter examples, things like NGIC where we need to do a spot rezoning very quickly or we're going to lose a thousand jobs. Those are the exceptions to the rule rather than the rule, but as a general rule I think that we should look for alternatives before we consider expanding the growth area.

And to answer the second question, it definitely matters if the land is in the watershed of the Rivanna reservoir and I think that that's, again, a case-by-case basis. It always factors in. It's definitely important. It's about a conversation with folks.

**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?**

I think the approach that I would take as far as local government's role in economic vitality, it's two-pronged and I sort of addressed it a second ago when I was talking about City/County cooperation. It's a two-pronged approach. The first prong is identifying unleveraged opportunities like procurement dollars at UVA. And at the same time— So, unleveraged opportunities as well as sectors where for whatever reason there's some kind of market problem, the supply is there or the demand is there, but the other side isn't stepping up and sometimes there's work that government can do to help, like I said, grease those skids and other times, government may be the problem. There may be an overly burdensome regulation or an over-broad regulation that is having unintended consequences.

I know, for instance, farmers market stands or something, it's been in the news a lot lately or vineyards. There're a lot of examples of rural businesses that as an urbanizing jurisdiction we pass County-wide ordinances and they may make sense in one area but they may not make sense in another and so I think it's the role of government to identify those unleveraged opportunities, identify those sectors where the market isn't quite perfect and then remove that barrier and sometimes that barrier is government needs to do a little more and sometimes it's government needs to do a little less and it's a case-by-case basis.

I do support the Economic Vitality Plan and I think any recommendations that I would make regarding the plan can sort of go back to what I said a second ago. Sometimes it's about ordinances, sometimes it's about removing regulations, but the other times, it's about stepping up where we need to step up. I don't like the fashion in which the Economic Vitality Plan was sort of done in backrooms and I think transparency is very important and I would encourage, again, any modifications made to that plan as it is being incorporated again into the Comprehensive Plan as we move forward to be

part of a public conversation, part of a public debate and having everybody weigh in on that.

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

One thing I've been talking about the most as I'm out there talking to folks is the Comprehensive Plan. It all comes down to the Comprehensive Plan and the Comprehensive Plan is something we're required to review every five years, but it really is what we make of it and I think there are so many people here in Albemarle County who appreciate the importance of sitting down and having a conversation about where we want to be in five years, where we want to be in 10 years, where we want to be in 20 and 50 years, and so I think that document can, if we want it to, encapsulate all of these decisions.

The things I'm hearing about the most as I go out and knock on doors— infrastructure, infrastructure, infrastructure and we need to be planning for transportation infrastructure. If we want to grow, we need to decide where we want that growth to go and we need to plan for, like I said, the infrastructure, but beyond that, schools, firehouses, police stations, and these need to be part of the plan.

And I think that it's important, like I said, to have a conversation. If you open this up, it's borne out of public debate and it needs to be followed through with, and if you have a thousand people show up and 950 people want something, that's something that should go on the plan.

And sort of an overarching theme, I think it's about responsiveness, it's about implementing, developing and then following through and executing that plan and not just doing spot rezoning willy-nilly when someone comes in with a lot of money or hires an expensive attorney to come in and make it. Sometimes, like I said, there're always exceptions to every rule but I think it's very important from a strategy point of view to have that document and that document is relied on by everyone, from business leaders who are looking to relocate to people who want to move to an area and want to know that their backyard is going to be— A development won't pop up in it overnight. If they live in the rural area, they want to know my backyard's going to be rural in 5, 10 years, 15, 20 years as I'm growing old, so I think it's very important that we focus on that.

**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?**

That's an interestingly framed question. I think I'm going to have to say no to that and I'll offer a few caveats. The first caveat, character of our community. I don't think anybody in our community enjoys congestion on 29. Nobody enjoys driving on 29 right now unless you're looking for something to do in the car and you like listening to the radio or whatever. I think that everybody understands congestion on 29. It's a huge issue and when you have people who would rather drive to Zion Crossroads or to Waynesboro to go to the WalMart or to the Lowe's, employment's hurting in Albemarle County, you're losing commercial tax base. If you lose commercial tax base, you either have to cut services or raise residential property rates, so all of these problems are interconnected and congestion on 29 is a huge issue.

And beyond that, I don't think there's anything inherently opposed in the character of our community and the public vision to the idea of a bypass. There will always be some people who are against all growth and there will always be some people who are 100% for paving things over, but I think the community as a whole understands that there's a balance there and that if a solution is right for our community, it should merit public support and the money's there for it.

That being said, the Western Bypass is, as I indicated earlier, it was a road that was envisioned 20, 25 years ago and obviously there were many iterations of it as it popped up, but it's a road that for the money we are spending on it, what we're getting for it, it's not very good. In essence, it's a bad value. If we could spend and, again, the number is obviously up in the air right now, let's go with a low end estimate—\$300 million—if we spend \$300 million on the Bypass to remove 12,000 cars, 10,000 a day from 29, whatever the estimate is, every study I've seen—VDOT's own studies—indicate that for less money than we would spend on the Bypass, we could take about twice as many cars off 29 if we were to complete the parallel roads projects, if we were to complete Berkmar Extended, Hillsdale Drive, widen 29 at bottlenecks, update the 29/250 interchange and maybe incorporate grade-separated interchanges.

I know there's certain individuals who do not support that and that's fine, but as I understand it, there is a better plan out there and maybe the state didn't come to us and say here's the money for your better plan and I understand that, but that's where we have to partner with the state. That's where we have to use the MPO, use the TIP and say, you know what, I'm not opposed to a bypass, but a bypass needs to come after this, this and this and that bypass needs to be the right one for our community.



I have no problem with helping business interests downstate in Danville and Lynchburg. I know they need to move their goods around Charlottesville and I'm completely fine with that but I don't want to roll over when the state comes in and says we want this bypass and we're going to build it.

**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?**

There're a few ancillary points I want to make on this. First of all, we're looking at the best bidding environment we have seen in years because of where the economy is right now and so I think that over the last few years we might've missed a pretty good opportunity to take some projects to bid where we could've gotten spectacular deals on them. That being said, I understand everyone I've talked to has been sort of pleased that property taxes stayed where they've been at the last few years but I think, again, with so many things, it's about having the conversation. It's about talking to people in Crozet and saying you want this library, is it worth an extra penny to you on the tax rate.

Or Monticello High School is at capacity. If we want to build Monticello High School as it was originally envisioned and put in those extra few buildings, is it worth an extra penny to you, and a lot of people will say yes and a lot of people will say no but I think it's a discussion that needs to be had.

There're a few things the County has been doing recently with regards to capital improvements and finding funding for that which I completely support. I'm really glad to see that Davenport came in recently and helped us sort of restructure the way our bonds were set up. They actually came in and did the same thing recently with Region 10 and saved us tens of thousands of dollars so blow that up to the scale of the County budget and it's obviously a significant amount of money and I think that the plan that they brought before the Board with regard to putting an extra penny or two on top of the tax rate and setting that aside in sort of a capital improvement project budget is one that merits consideration and I think it should be part of the budget conversation next year. Things like that, any kind of potential tax increase that's going to be discussed, if it's clear what it's going towards, people are less likely to be resentful of it. I mean, when money just disappears into this big morass, this general fund, and it's getting spent on who knows what, I think a lot of people are hesitant to sort of support that but if you can say, look, this building will get built and your child's classroom will be able to go from the 30 students crammed in there to only 25 students crammed in there, people say, well, you know what, that's worth an extra five bucks a year to me, ten bucks a year, twenty bucks, whatever the actual number is, so again,

it's about a conversation, it's about sitting down with folks, addressing the needs and I know there's a lot of needs right now. We haven't really made any major improvements in a few years but I think it's something we need to talk about in the next budget cycle.

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

The Scottsville District is obviously one of the most agrarian in the entire County. It's sort of the last vestige almost at this point, if you will. And I think, again, it comes down to a few things: first, something I've always supported has been fully funding the ACE Program. I think that obviously the amount of money that we've had to put towards that program has diminished over the last few years and I think that that's something that needs to be revisited. That program is supported by a wide variety of people and I understand that we were obviously facing a budget crunch recently but it's something we need to revisit the next budget conversation.

The most important thing to me as far as preserving rural lands and everybody understands the importance of preservation, for environmental reasons, for ecological reasons, for cultural heritage reasons, for agricultural heritage reasons. I think it comes down to economic vitality. If you can support rural innovation, if you can support the development of rural businesses, if you can find a way in essence essentially to make rural living economically sustainable again, the pressure to not preserve those lands, essentially the pressure to subdivide, the pressure to develop, will evaporate. I've talked with hundreds of farmers as I've been walking around knocking on doors, small farmers, bigger farmers, and they don't want to develop their land. They don't sit around thinking I want my retirement plan to be selling my land to a developer and having it turned into— A lot of these farms have been in their families for years, years and years and years, but for economic reasons, they feel compelled to do so, and so I think— They'd love to put it in conservation easement but they just can't, so I think what it comes down to is finding a way to make rural living sustainable again. Again, that goes back to partnerships with the City and UVA.

If we can get UVA to buy local food, if we could have a requirement that a certain portion of the County school system's food comes from local sources, if we can tweak our bed and breakfast rules, if we can essentially find ways to make rural economic development and job creation sort of front and center as far as the County's agenda goes, I think you'll see a lot of people saying, well, you know what, I can afford to put my land in conservation easement now or you know what, I'm going to turn my farm over to my son who before knew he couldn't make a living off of it, but now he knows he can. He knows that the opportunities are there and then suddenly that pressure to develop, that pressure to destroy those really important lands sort of evaporates.

**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?**

It's always something I'd consider. I said it a few times so far in our discussion, the debate, the conversation is very important to me. And I think it's something we should've considered last time. Would I have voted for a property tax increase? Probably not. Would it have been a good opportunity for hundreds of people to come in and say they didn't support it or why they would have? It would have and that would've been a good debate to have, in my opinion.

I think the very first thing you always do before you consider raising property taxes is ensure we're getting value for the money we're currently spending. There are plenty of places right now in the budget where we can consider making cuts, where we can consider— Again, this goes back to County/City cooperation, merging departments. The School Board is one I won't touch with a 10-foot pole but there're some that sort of jump out as obvious candidates like Social Services, like Parks & Rec so you always look for ways to cut administrative overhead and to sort of cut things that you're not getting value for. That's the first place you look.

But beyond that, I would never have a problem with posting a higher rate for discussion. Like I said, it's not something I would always vote for but to take a no tax pledge or whatever the analog would be, I think it sort of abrogating your responsibility to actually have those conversations with folks because the conversation is the most important thing.

**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?**

This is an interesting question and, again, this one sort of touches upon everything that we're talking about. It comes down to cooperation. It comes down to capital improvements. It comes down to all sorts of things. I know that we've been able to—when I say we, I mean, the Albemarle County Sewer Authority and the RWSA have sort of managed to stave off rate increases for quite a while and we've been doing all right as far as funding our infrastructure needs, funding our maintenance needs based solely upon development connector fees and that sort of thing. This is going to be a huge expenditure, though, and my understanding is that I think it's option D is the one that—

This is option D or option E where they're going to be drilling the pipeline under the river and my understanding is that this \$15 to \$18 million is still sort of a ballpark estimate. They have no idea what the geological characteristics

under the river look like. And I think at the end of the day it comes down to, one, conversation with the folks in the neighborhood.

Obviously, Woolen Mills doesn't want— The residents of Woolen Mills don't like that pump station where it is. They don't want all that work. They don't like what it does to the character of their neighborhood, but insofar as we in the County would be willing to have it moved over on our part, I think the City should pick up a portion of that. Perhaps a disproportionate portion of that recognizing that most of that benefit to moving that would inure to the City and if it's something that they're willing to foot a lot of the bill for, I would have no problem. I think it's the State Farm land they're talking about moving it over to and my understanding is that plan could go forward.

It's just now a question of money. Is it something we should pay for with no help from the City? I don't think I would support it, no.

**Chris Dumler, thank you for participating in this interview with Charlottesville Tomorrow.**

Thank you very much, Brian.