



2013 Charlottesville City Council Candidate Interview

Candidate: Bob Fenwick (D)

On November 5, 2013, 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 16, 2013 interview with Bob Fenwick (D). Other candidates in this race include: Michael Farruggio (R); Kristin Szakos (D); and Buddy Weber (R).

The audio of this interview and complete election coverage is available on the Charlottesville Tomorrow website:

http://www.cvilletomorrow.org/topics/city_elections/

INTERVIEW

Mr. Fenwick, 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, The Daily Progress, and the League of Women Voters. 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, public education, 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. 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 the Charlottesville City Council.

I bring a broad range of experience and persistence to any task I undertake. For over forty years I have been a small business man, as an owner of Fenwick Construction, a construction company specializing in residential and light commercial building. As a general construction contractor I know how to meet deadlines, set and achieve goals and deliver a finished project, solve problems and manage people.

I have been active in the arts as a movie producer, video webmaster, literary author and poet. As a longtime resident of our community and a door to door campaigner I am very familiar with the history and the people of our community and the lessons we can learn from it. I know what the people are thinking and why they are thinking it. I feel a responsibility to speak out publicly on matters that the community cares about such as saving McIntire Park, engaging in a thoughtful, prudent, community transportation agenda, and advocating for maintaining our capital infrastructure as a priority.

2. What is your top priority for action by the city council if you are elected?

Well I would like to work to ensure interaction between City Hall and citizens and/or businesses continues to improve. In short, encourage city hall to implement a robust customer service program including returning phone calls promptly, answering e-mails, and being responsive and responsible for satisfying taxpayers concerns.

3. Name one specific area of the city budget that you are concerned about and why. Do you think it deserves more funding or less?

Well that would have to be education. I believe education is about 40 percent of the city budget. A panel of prominent citizens, people who have given a great deal of their professional and personal time to improving our community, has been tasked to review long range funding options for education. This is an important step in securing long range funding for our schools and I would do what I could to ensure that this panel is productive. First we get the facts then we decide on a solution.

4. Earlier this year, the council enacted a stormwater utility fee that will go into effect in 2014 to replace and rehabilitate the city's stormwater pipes. Do you support this program? Why or why not?

I support it. Some people may complain about the fee and that is understandable because nobody wants to pay more than their fair share or more than is necessary for local government. But I view this as City Council making a necessary decision for the long term health and welfare of our

community. I don't see the point of continually complaining about a community problem without making a substantive decision to solve it. Popular or unpopular, this action is largely necessary as a federal and state unfunded mandate. It is the responsibility of City Council to face problems squarely and honestly.

5. Does the city's department of Neighborhood Development Services have the funding, staffing and expertise necessary to implement council's vision for good urban design and placemaking?

Yes. NDS has adequate resources. But it is up to City Council to see that the council's vision is being implemented.

6. If real estate tax revenues increase, should Charlottesville lower its property tax rate? Why or why not?

Well that's kind of problematical because we really don't know what is going to happen to the economy. There is a lot of talk that we are in for a rough patch ahead. But property tax is the primary source of funding for our police fire and rescue departments, education costs, governmental costs, infrastructure maintenance and the city's general well-being. They are also one of the most important factors in newcomers to our area choosing to live in Charlottesville instead of one of the surrounding counties and we have to remember that we are in competition with the surrounding counties. It is very important that the city government is operated efficiently and smoothly and I think I can make a contribution in that area with my business background. So implementing a tax increase or instituting a fee is a solution of last resort.

WHEELER: Just to be clear, at this point you are saying you don't know whether you would increase it or decrease it just because of the uncertainty?

There is talk that we are coming out of this recession now but I see signs that we are not coming out like we should be and I've had a lot of experience with recessions.

7. The Charlottesville City Council has provided the school division with one-time funds to balance recent budgets. What steps should the council take to help the school board build a more sustainable school budget?

Well the first thing is that a panel has been [appointed] to study the problem for a long term solution. Before we do any solution we have to know what the facts are and what the options are. Now with UVa being an integral part of our community much of the effort in encouraging job growth centers on higher end jobs, internet technology, the IT jobs, medical fields, higher education, teaching and administration and so on, but as part of the discussion we have

to include in the education package the education of the lower end jobs, the tradesmen, the teachers the home tutors, the continuing education requirements.

I would include in any community outreach that affects community education I would include in that group the Charlottesville-Albemarle Technical Education Center (CATEC) on Rio Road, the senior center education centers, the senior center education efforts, pre-k education advocates and GED certification centers, so that we have a community approach to education and I think when we do that we will have a better handle on how the funding is going to shake out.

8. Describe a part of local government that would benefit from increased city and county cooperation and that you would make a priority.

In this regard we have pretty good cooperation between the city and the county. The libraries, the transportation, bus number 11 particularly, coming down from Fashion Square into the city, the Jefferson area health clinic and many numbers of different things. But I would include my priority on the city staff and their community service effort to include the same kind of thing between the city and the county. I'm a contractor, I'm a builder, I get permits and I get inspections from the city and the county and it would be much easier on me if the city and the county inspections stacked up about the same. And at this point it is two different code books that they go by. It's the cooperation not just between departments but between governments, businesses, and the citizens they serve.

9. Private developers and the University of Virginia are currently implementing a City Council vision of a more densely developed West Main Street that dates back to the early 2000's. Do you support this vision? Why or why not?

Well density by itself should not be the determining factor in the West Main Street improvement discussion. With a predetermined real estate footprint for Charlottesville, building or redevelopment vertically instead of horizontally makes sense, but the capacity of our roads, utilities, fire and rescue capabilities should be considered as well. But perhaps the primary factor, not just density, but the nature of our community, a small Virginia town where people matter first, where the charm of our community is the biggest selling point. I think that is very important and that cannot be lost in this discussion.

10. What specifically should the city council do to promote employment and what type of jobs will be your priority?

Well creating jobs is not easy. If it were, this problem would have been solved long ago. Now UVa, the city, and the county have extensive resources available for job training. We meet educational requirements, we have the facilities to do that, we provide community transportation to match citizens with jobs and this is a basic asset. The community both city and county and UVa have put a tremendous amount of effort and money into this area. But the most important is a continuing emphasis on the necessity of making our existing businesses feel as if they were valued for their efforts in our community. This is one reason "Cash Mob" [a project to drive customers to local businesses via social media] has been embraced in our community as a way of showing businesses most of whom are struggling to emerge from this recession that their success is important. I think it is of primary importance for people to remember that successful businesses hire more workers. And I think that is where the priorities should be.

WHEELER: For the listeners you could describe what the "Cash Mob" project is?

I was looking for a way to put some excitement and energy into business and let the community know what businesses were up to and in a way let them know what conditions they operated under. Through social media mainly Facebook and now through twitter we decided to put out a call for customers, we did it with the downtown mall, with the artist's cooperative, we did it at McIntire Plaza, we did it at JPA bridge, West Main – three times out there, Mel's, Main Street Market, Quest Book Store, we've done it all over town. People show up. They show up on bikes, they come by bus, they walk and they shop. To see the reaction of the business owners is really heartwarming because the people are really getting in to it. Especially at JPA when the bridge was going on they suffered tremendously because of lack of customers so this was a great boost for them. And the community should know that their efforts really resulting in the saving of several of those businesses. It was a great thing to be involved with and we're going to continue that effort.