



2013 Albemarle Board of Supervisors Candidate Interview

Candidate: Jane Dittmar (D)

On November 5, 2013, 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 27, 2013 interview with Jane Dittmar (D). Dittmar's opponent is Cindi Burket (R).

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

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

INTERVIEW

Ms. Dittmar, 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 Albemarle 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 the Albemarle Board of Supervisors.

My qualifications include being a UVa alumnae and from that beginning relationship, I have served in a number of leadership positions with the university which I think will help as the county considers cooperative ventures and partnerships with the university. Those [positions] include, for instance, being a trustee emeritus of the college of arts and sciences and I am past chairman of the Virginia Athletic Foundation.

I am a business owner. I have created jobs and I understand what helps attract and retain businesses to the county. I am well-versed in the best ways for local government to interact with its own business community. As president of the [Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce] during the nine years I spent there, we founded a number of partnerships with the city, county, university and surrounding jurisdictions. These included the Thomas Jefferson Partnership for Economic Development, now called the Central Virginia Partnership, the regional tourism council, and the Charlottesville Albemarle School Business Alliance to name a few. This experience will be a good foundation for cooperative efforts between our county and others in the future.

I am a professional mediator. I have been mediating now for 13 years both privately and in our Virginia court system and I will bring collaborative decision making and conflict resolution skills to the board.

Additional relevant education includes a graduate certificate in economic development and completion of a program on local government management this past year.

2. What is your top priority for action by the board of supervisors if you are elected?

Although there are pressing priorities, I would select as my most important priority working to improve our critical infrastructure to meet the needs of our past land use decisions and getting ahead of the planning curve so that roads, water and sewer, and digital service such as cell and Internet, can meet our citizens' growing demands.

3. Do you support the construction of the Western Bypass of U.S. 29? Why or why not?

County-level approval to build the bypass was completed on June 8, 2011, over two years ago. The only remaining entity whose opinion matters is the National Highway Administration. My opinion has no bearing on their process. However, my opinion on Route 20 and Route 250 improvements

does have great relevance to the people who will vote on November 5 in the Scottsville District.

Therefore I have focused my attention on how to relieve congestion and improve safety on these critical Scottsville District roads and on how we must strive to make land use planning coincide with infrastructure improvements in the future.

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

The safety of our citizens is a core government service. We are understaffed in the police department by 20 officers, based upon the current board's goals of 1.5 officers per 1,000 citizens. In addition, there are communication problems in the rural area where radio contact and cell service is unreliable. These are citizen safety issues and they must be addressed as soon as possible.

5. Are the cash proffers paid by residential real estate developers too much, too little, or just about the right amount to contribute to the costs for community infrastructure?

Cash proffers paid by developers are passed through to homeowners or leases of commercial space. When they started here they were approximately \$3,500 per housing unit and now are around \$17,500. For perspective, Fairfax County, with one of the highest [cash proffer rates] in the Commonwealth now charges \$35,000, so there is a trajectory that is of concern to me.

The question we face is should all property owners subsidize the costs of growth or should individual projects help defray some of it. We need to study this carefully when setting cash proffers as policy. Some have suggested cash proffers may be part of the affordable housing problem we have here. I know of many police, fire, nurses, and teachers who can't afford a home where they work. I will be studying this issue if elected and help our board decide on the most beneficial formula for the county.

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

Our current tax rate is \$0.766 per \$100 of assessed value. There was a very small increase in the rate adopted by the board this year. Raising the real estate tax rate is my least favorite way to relieve revenue shortfall. Fortunately with increasing real estate value we should continue to have increased revenue this coming budget cycle, so there shouldn't be pressure on the board for any further adjustment in the future.

With regard to lowering the tax rate, we have done that in the past, and so has the City of Charlottesville, when we found that revenues exceed our most important priorities, and I would be 100 percent in favor of doing that given the opportunity to fund what we need to and return the rest to the taxpayers.

7. What is the best example to date of Albemarle County's neighborhood model form of development and why do you like it? What improvements could be made to our community's placemaking efforts?

The planning and development of public spaces where people live work and recreate is based upon common vision for space. Our [Development Initiatives Steering Committee] gathered county residents with varying viewpoints and backgrounds to help develop our neighborhood model. That was a beautiful coalition of skill and opinion that resulted in our current neighborhood model.

There are specific projects that are encompassing this, and I think the way it could be slightly improved is to look at how flexible we can be from time to time with these projects. If we decide that something needs to more reflect market demand I want to make sure that the neighborhood model is flexible enough to work with the developer while using the same vision to create the best project.

Additionally, I think we ought to look at some of our older neighborhoods and see where we could bring this vision of livability to them in the future, such as micro parks, centers of community, and walkways where people can travel without cars to one another's homes and places.

8. Business leaders and social service agencies have told the Albemarle Board of Supervisors that new investments are sorely needed in the area of early childhood education. Will you make pre-K education and quality childcare a priority and if so how?

I think that in some sense the board of supervisors should look to the school board for guidance on this and see what kinds of programs they are looking at for pre-K. If that's a funding priority for the schools than I think we should seriously consider it.

Additionally we have non-profits that are doing wonderful things in the area of pre-K and we need to make sure their funding is protected. One group, besides Head Start, that comes to mind and is being considered for placement in the southern part of the Scottsville District is the Boys & Girls Club. And I have already told the folks in Scottsville that I will help with that project if elected.

9. How would you describe the challenges and opportunities facing Albemarle County's rural farms, fields, and forests?

The biggest challenge to the rural areas are the regulations coming down from the Clean Water Act and the Chesapeake Bay Act. Farms use pesticides and fertilizers that are putting too much effluent into our streams and so they will be further regulated and we are trying to help them now with fencing and other tools to help them meet these standards.

Another pressure on the rural area is pressure from the growth area to expand. We need to be very careful about doing that for two reasons. First, as I understand it from the comprehensive plan, we have enough capacity in the growth area for our neighborhoods and retail and commercial space for quite some time. So to begin to move outside [into the] rural area before that's satisfied is a pressure on the rural area that I do not want to see happen.

Opportunities for the rural area include making farms, which are often called agro-business and tourism entities called agro-tourism, more profitable and protecting the land use tax so that farmers can afford to keep their land.

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

The Commonwealth, unlike most states in the nation, has independent cities and counties. This sometimes promotes inefficiencies because neighboring jurisdictions duplicate the mechanisms by which they deliver services. I would like very much to consider any partnering efforts with the city that would provide the same or better service to county residents if it will lower county expense.

We currently have several models that I think work very well, including the airport authority and the [Rivanna Water & Sewer Authority]. I would like to see a local transportation authority which combines our efforts to get more public transportation out to our neighborhoods. I would also be interested in looking at innovative ideas for our schools and perhaps an authority for parks and recreation.