



2015 Albemarle Board of Supervisors Candidate Interview

Candidate: Ann Mallek (D)

On November 3, 2015, 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 August 20, 2015 interview with Ann Mallek (D). Mallek is running unopposed.

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

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

INTERVIEW

Ms. Mallek, thank you for participating in this interview with Charlottesville Tomorrow. The complete audio recording 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, the first two questions you will be asked have been provided in advance, for the others you have been provided only the topic in advance. 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. QUALIFICATIONS: Please describe your past experience that qualifies you to be on the Albemarle Board of Supervisors.

I had great good fortune to be born and grow up in Albemarle. My childhood was a wonderful mix of open spaces to play in surrounded by friendly people who care for each other in community. These memories are the background in which I placed years of study and participation in land use decision processes as a citizen starting with my membership in the League of Women Voters in 1975 in another state and carried forward here.

These 17 years in the audience before 2008 provided a strong background on what is important to protect and the function of local government. Since taking office in 2008, I've graduated from the Virginia certified county supervisor program, a two-year series of courses and seminars on all aspects of operations from land use and planning, to budgets, management and leadership. The study and connections with supervisors from throughout the Commonwealth has given me a wider perspective on many issues.

I also thrive on citizen contact. I truly enjoy meeting with and understanding the concerns of our residents. In 2008, citizens did not really know what to expect with my first series of town halls. Now, after 39 town halls in seven and a half years, I believe that people whom I represent expect spring and fall town halls and continue to show up, bringing their ideas, solutions and concerns about our future.

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

Priority number one is to provide community services to our population, yet not drive out the elderly and low-income due to increases in taxes and fees. These elderly neighbors built the county during their working careers, often in a completely different economy than our currently working population. What seemed like an adequate requirement 30 years ago does not begin to cover their retirement expenses today.

We must diversify our revenue sources in order to reduce the burden on residential property taxes to fund local government operations. Every local government in the Commonwealth and across the nation is facing budget constraints due to the sluggish economy. Virginia seems to be hit worse than most because of the high dependence on federal spending and defense contractor employment. We have even seen the numbers at Rivanna Station [Military Base] fluctuate as the drawdown in Afghanistan has caused the missions to be redesigned and the personnel to shift, sometimes out of our area.

There is no question that as our population grows, the cost of providing services to that larger population grows too. The property and sales taxes on an average house do not begin to pay the cost of a year's education for one child. As our mandates from the state and federal levels have increased, the funding to pay for those

services has fallen. Our property tax waiver program is one long-term effort to ease the retirements of some elderly residents which I heartily support.

3. BUDGET: Name one specific area of the county budget that you are concerned about and tell us why.

It's hard to pick one, that's for sure. Because despite the best planning efforts we make with strategic planning followed by five-year financial planning followed by annual budget processes, there are still so many gaps in the items we know we should be doing that we just can't because of that response for question number two. We can't go taking all the money that people get for their social security to spend for these very worthy projects.

But the one I would have to choose is the school demand and the demands which are caused by items that are not of our generation or our choosing. They are increased numbers of children, the changes in the needs of those children in many cases. When my elderly citizens talk about 'well, when I was in high school, we didn't have these things.' And I ask them: "Was there anyone in your high school who didn't speak English?"

At Albemarle High School, graduating in 1967, we had no children there who did not speak English fluently. Even though there wasn't a huge amount of money flying around, a parent could support a family on their wage whatever it was and be there to be able to help their kids with their homework and that kind of thing.

There are so many changes now, not for the good, that we have to deal with and it creates incredible burdens on our school funding. This is a real big problem because it costs a lot to do a really good job and we definitely want to do a very good job on our school education. We know how important education is for all the other aspects of local government.

One of the saddest consequences of the recession was that in order to try to keep the integrity of the core services in local government, our capital improvement investments, the CIP, went to zero. Which means we effectively postponed \$100 million worth of investments for three years and now we're playing catch-up ball and catch-up ball is painful and expensive.

I know that citizens are aggravated by these constant increases in tax rates but when you get tax cuts three years in row, now it's time we have had to pay the piper over the last two years. And as I said, it's an unhappy circumstance for folks.

4. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: Business leaders and social service agencies have told local government 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?

The short answer is yes and the evidence of that is for the last two or three years, I've been making motions and trying to push this. When we found that the school

board was not able to include this in their budget for the last two years, local government said 'well, fine, then we will.'

Basically the question we have to get an answer to is is the school department going to be focused on K through 12 and that's it? In which case, local government has to step up and provide that sort of 3 to 93 range where we have continuing education for older folks and an interest to keep everybody learning, and also very important about that supportive pre-K for children to help them get a good start in school.

5. STORMWATER: How should Albemarle County fund water resource programs to clean up local streams and comply with state mandates for protection of the Chesapeake Bay watershed? [And a follow up] Would you support creation of a stormwater utility fee, similar to the one enacted by the City of Charlottesville, which is based on the amount of impervious surface on a property?

This is one of the lion's dens which I operate in regularly now because I knew this was coming and I've been talking about it for years to the great consternation of some of my rural constituents that if each person and each organization pays a little bit, then we will solve this problem without burdening any one particular segment of the economy overly. That's been my operating basis and we've been working for a long time on the committee. It's incredibly complicated and it affects different stakeholders radically differently so we have learned a lot and I think we are getting there.

I am very appreciative of the fact that we have new stormwater requirements now. Ten years ago the goal for engineers was to get whatever water there was off that person's property as fast as possible and dump it onto next door. Nobody cared about what was coming from uphill except to get rid of it as fast as possible. And now I think everybody is taking a much more responsible role for the long-term for long-term stewardship to be able to retain what's collected on their own property, slow it down, and let it lose its pollution or whatever in biofilters and more modern green infrastructure. When we do all those things that benefit us, the Chesapeake Bay is taken care of all by itself. We don't need to be thinking about 'what am I going to do?' and 'why I am spending all this money for the Bay which is 200 miles away?' What we're spending money for now is protecting and improving the water quality of our own streams because we have streams that our grandkids should not play in and that's a dangerous element to have around here. This is going to be a tremendous benefit for our local humans but also our local wildlife and environment and ecology all around.

The question of the utility fee is one that I have supported in a global and theoretical sense from the very beginning because it is the only one which allows any kind of special categories for offsets for work that you do to already improve your stormwater situation, or offsets that you will do to reduce your impact. My goal is to get the change in the impact, and not to collect a lot of money. That is the reason I am clinging to the possibility of a utility fee at this point.

I will say that my rural constituents are very concerned about a utility fee. There is a general distrust of bureaucracy, period, and they are concerned that all of this extra information gathering and formula figuring out is going to require lots of new staff and lots of inspections and they are foreseeing a big administrative burden. We don't have enough information about that yet but we have heard from other communities that it has not been as bad as [they] were anticipating. One [full-time employee] as opposed to twenty or thirty. So, this is something the board will be taking on directly over the winter and I do think we will do a good job whatever the answer is, we'll do a good job with it, but I do hope that... I'm just going to be fascinated to see what comes out of it.

We've learned a lot about some of the gaps in our local services because our surveying community, who is the one that is on the ground looking at property lines and location of driveways [and] all of those impervious surfaces all the time in our county have reported to us that there are significant errors in our GIS database. First they say universally that is the best GIS system in the Commonwealth, but they also say that there are mistakes and those mistakes have to be corrected in order for this system that we're proposing to work. When you have hundreds of feet of driveway on the wrong side of the property line, it makes a big difference in dollars to the person who is getting the bill. We want to make sure the correct person is getting the bill.

That's just one example of this element of worry on the part of citizens. They want to make sure that they're paying for.... They all want to do the job. There's no question about that. They all understand that. We're fortunate that 60 percent of our county is forested cover. We're very fortunate that five years ago and right now the state is updating our land cover map so we do have a lot more detail than most communities have to be able to make better judgments about this but it's going to be really challenging going forward.

6. DESIGNATED GROWTH AREAS: In the remainder of 2015, or during your first term if you are elected, should the board make boundary adjustments for Albemarle County's designated growth areas to create new locations for business on land that today is in the rural area? Why or why not?

I will start off by saying that the creation of growth areas and rural areas in 1980 was a stroke of genius and I think that is something that so many more recent decisions have been based upon that have helped Albemarle County's quality of life and what makes us what we are and what our scenery looks like. It was a very elemental decision so it's not something that I think is unimportant by any means. It has allowed us to have our master plans and have a real basis of thoughtful decision making. Even getting in the weeds really, really quickly.

And I think that's where we are right now with the project before us.

But balance is really important. I am very strong environmental advocate and no one can accuse me of saying I want to slaughter hillsides and pave everything over and bring in any number of big box stores, but I do also know that people have needs as

well. We have to try to figure out a way to bring in more jobs and more financial assets related to that earlier budget question. And if there are particular locations where we have transportation infrastructure already existing, that seems like a far better place for that kind of activity to be.

Now, there are many, many questions to me that are unanswered at the [Interstate 64 Exit] 118 intersection. I am supportive of it going forward so that we can learn those answers. The last thing that I want to have happen... well, there are two last things. First thing is that that area gets covered by houses which it's zoned for. That troubles me a lot. The other thing that troubles me a lot. The other thing that troubles me a lot is that currently the area which is in the rural area and is steep slopes and forested has no environmental protections at all. In other words, the landowner could come in and clear cut it tomorrow with complete impunity. So if we are in effect getting better land use controls over critical slopes and those environmental assets that back up to our Hedgerow Park with including this in the growth area, that would be a plus.

Someone also mentioned this to me, I didn't have brains enough to think of this myself but I will pass it on, and that is that the area that is now the Hedgerow Park could have been houses and so that is preserved and we have this other area which is over 200 acres, two-thirds of which would still be preserved. I'm very interested in getting some concrete preservation elements on those steep slopes so that we don't come around three or four years from now and say 'oh by the way, I want to do this there.' I'm very interested in a bright-line and hard edge in some fashion.

I'm concerned about the time between the Comprehensive Plan Amendment and the rezoning. What vulnerabilities exist between that. That's something I don't have enough answers on yet but it's something I'll maybe have a come-to-Jesus moment on. Oh, wait a minute! There's a big hole here and we're about to fall in it!

So, I do think the comp plan, the comp plan itself if something which is a living document. It's not something that should be the same in 1950 and then 2015. I'm not interested in wholesale changes as you may remember from the last three years. I was the one who was pulling back things that were being taken out of the comp plan and put back in because they were important descriptions of what's important to our community so I'm hanging on very hard to all those elements as I can. I'm very interested in the capability to have our local businesses grow and hire more people who... I've got twenty and thirty somethings in my family who would love to come back here and work and be in this area. But there are particular jobs where they are elsewhere. But there are others who are working in wonderful small companies here who need some space. And for some, a light industrial property way off the transportation network is not going to work. For some it's fine. We have lots of wonderful, small IT people who are hidden away in the fringes of our growth areas who are working tremendously well and shipping globally and that kind of thing. They rely on UPS and other transport companies and the airport to help them out.

But there are some companies who would have valuable production and give us an element of manufacturing to the extent that we would have an actual product that we

could sell and bring outside actual dollars into our community for our economy rather than just selling to each other. That would be a benefit if we can find a way to safely maneuver this issue.

7. CITY-COUNTY-UVA RELATIONS: Describe a part of local government that would benefit from increased cooperation by the city, county and / or the University of Virginia and that you would make a priority.

Well, as far as the city, county and UVA I'm very appreciative of the fact that all of these elements are here. Growing up here, certainly my summer job location was doing something in the medical school or at the university back in the days when it was easy for high school children to get jobs. Now it certainly is not because of all those twenty-somethings in the way.

But, I think that the university has already done a wonderful job and the city developers around here have made a tremendous effort in housing closer to Grounds than we had for many, many years so I would consider that that element is already taken care of.

But the transit authority and the cooperative efforts in transit for our region would be my highest priority for continued work going forward. I think it's up to the city and the county to figure that out and then invite this university to join. I think it's highly unlikely that they will want to get in the middle of something where the city and county haven't figured it out yet. But I have heard in past years that they would be very happy to participate once we get the bones put on paper. So I'm looking forward to that.

8. PLACEMAKING: What improvements could be made to our community's placemaking efforts?

Placemaking. Well, what I've learned from reading and just living is that a sense of place is the one feeling that provides true loyalty to a locality. As I said in my introduction, those memories from my childhood helped to enrich my vision for what our future might be. It's not a question of going back to the fifties, but of keeping the most important values and features of that time for residents of the future, like our grandchildren. Mine already talk about when they are living on the farm as grownups. Maybe one of them will and I would be very fortunate to do that.

I think our citizen community advisory councils are an incredibly important element in our placemaking. They are charged with being the liaisons between local government and developers and the implementation of the master plans in all those regions. The Crozet Advisory Council, now called a committee, CCAC has been the longest and the oldest and the most experienced and I think incredibly successful because of the citizens who are willing to give of their time and their passion to make sure that their community grows the way they want it to.

Crozet is unique in that it had its own community plan before there was ever a master plan. They did that on their own before the county ever thought of it. And so

they are not willing to be pushed around in any way and it makes for a really lively discussion. But also because there are so many different stakeholders with different perspectives around the table and in the audience and they're never shy, we really get to a much better outcome in the things which are happening and there are some exciting, exciting things going on.

I think that the other master plan areas will benefit tremendously from that leadership of the advisory councils and the local government's role really should be to let them run. Don't put any leashes on them. And that makes staff people very nervous. One of the benefits of the recession was that there was no more every day staffing for the advisory councils and the initial responses was 'well, you all don't need to meet' and they said 'never mind, we'll take care of that. We can post our meetings, we can take our minutes, and don't you worry. We are fine.' And it's been wildly successful. I would encourage the other groups to feel their strength and to really work through whatever their problems are that they have to face.

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

This is one area where I think we've been incredibly successful. Going back to 2010, there was a very brief economic vitality plan put forward right at the beginning of the term which really focused on a limited view of making it easier for people to do whatever they wanted to do. What strengthened the economic vitality plan and made it something which I and others could support was number one, basing all of our economic vitality work on our Comprehensive Plan so that we had a community vision going forward, but number two was expanding to include the rural areas and agriculture and home businesses and those kinds of elements where people live. The rural area is a beautiful place. I enjoy the peace and the freedom to live there. It's a lot of work and it's a lot of travel going back and forth which some people don't like. Many, many people come to our place and go 'I wouldn't live out here for a million dollars.' But it's nice, glad you like it! So it isn't for everyone.

But what we have achieved in the economic vitality plan is more awareness of the needs of our farming businesses, the more high-profile wineries and breweries have gotten a lot of state attention to help them through some of their regulatory issues, but we've made some significant changes to help people who do home occupations as long as they're small and within the building and that aren't impacting neighbors. And I think this is really helping to strengthen people's ability to survive. We don't want to go overboard with that and it's a constant tension between event spaces and the impacts on neighbors and those kinds of things. So in many ways we're trying to help people and in other ways we're trying to rein them in because it's based upon the impact and the ability of the roads and that kind of thing to take care of it.

So we have a lot of work to do, but our rural area is not a museum. It's a place where people live and yet it's also the watershed for our water supply, 250 square miles or something of the western part of the county, most of which is in the White Hall District. Those citizens, those landowners, have made a sacrifice for that water supply as part of the downzoning which happened in the early 80's in the county.

They understand that and they're proud of it and they don't want to change it but we need to all be sort of focused on making sure that whatever we're asking for regulatory wise is based on true need and we're making it as reasonable and helping people as much as possible. Wonderful ideas have come to me about the little Kombucha brewer who is working in his basement who would like to have a new place someplace else but doesn't want to be in the city because that's a whole level of expense plus its public water. If you have really good well water it makes much better product.

This is just one example of how that operation might not fit into any of the categories that we have in our plans and one of the difficulties that we've had in having rules, expansive rules shall we say, is that sometimes they are really a problem and prevent people from doing something that is of no impact to neighbors other than them taking their pick-up truck to go get some herbs and then taking the bottles away to Rebecca's and other places to sell their wares. So, that's going to be an ongoing evolution I think but the rural area residents are very protective of the scenery and the values of the rural areas as they exist. One of the areas where we need to focus, as quickly as possible, is on the Country Crossroads, the small towns, and to help them to have those community meetings and figure out how they will be able to save their old buildings, their own mills, their own country stores and keep life in those old buildings. I was promising for two years to the folks in the four different neighborhoods and country crossroads in the districts I represent, 'oh, right after the comp plan, we're going to get to that!' and of course that's now the next battle we have to have, is to get it to the top of the work program so that we can carry those forward. Otherwise we're just going to start having our own meetings and figure it out on our own because people aren't going to wait. They really need to know and if there's a 200-year country story that would benefit from having an antique shop in there I would say most likely we should find a way to do it.

10. TRANSPORTATION: What is your top transportation priority and how will it be funded?

Well, I have very much enjoyed my last year and a half on the MPO and am very proud of the fact that the [Interstate 64 Exit] 118 interchange has been elbowed up to the top of the list as far as the priority for the MPO for funding from the state and federal dollars. I think it is the essential interchange to get rebuilt. It was a poor design to begin with all those years ago and designed that way to save money. But it has been a safety problem and it is also tremendously impactful for businesses to move their materials and to make that connection. It's a regional impact all the way south when people are trying to connect from northbound [Route] 29 to westbound 64 and those big trucks are sitting there at a dead stop trying to cross three lanes of traffic going 55 m.p.h. That is ridiculous. So that is my absolutely my first priority and as much as elbow-pushing as I can do to get that moving along, that is what I will be working on.

We certainly have through the efforts of the long-range local plan have a wide array of neighborhood connection problems which need to be done, sidewalks that need to be done, all those kinds of things that are many fewer dollars, thankfully, than the

big one. And fortunately come out of different buckets of money so that we need to make it possible for people in our growth area to quickly access their jobs by something other than a vehicle. I know there are residents particularly in the southern part of the growth area who are jumping up and down about their trail connections so they can use them to bike to work for example and not have to go on the main roads of Avon Street and Fifth Street to get into town. I'm really encouraging those elements to go forward as well.

Back to your top priority and the Interstate 64 and 29 interchange and the funding for that. Can you say a little bit about how that would happen?

Well, it has been in the long-range plan for some time but way out in the vision list 20 years away. We were able to get it into the constrained plan which is the six-year element and now this year for funding for transportation there is a parallel track of prioritization for the Commonwealth Transportation Board, the CTB. They will run the numbers and the projects the old-fashioned way and they will also run a parallel decision-making using the priorities in the new HB2 funding legislation that passed the General Assembly two years ago. It is still very much a work in progress. The priority descriptions seem to be changing fairly frequently which makes you pretty nervous but at least for this first year, you will have the elements of both and they will look at the similarities and differences and the result. I take some comfort in that actually that they aren't just making a giant leap into the unknown and I don't know how it's going to turn out. I don't know how the CTB members will react to finding that they can't pull their pet project up from the depths because they wouldn't be able to explain it.

So I see some benefit in the HB2 process. Happily for the exit 118, it qualifies for prioritization in all five categories of economic development and helping businesses move products, of people getting get to their jobs, of safety for the crosses, for the regional effect for people all the way from Culpeper to Danville, basically, is that element of being able to get onto the interstate. I may be wrong, but I certainly anticipate that it will be accepted as our number one priority.

11. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: What areas of the current Comprehensive Plan will you concentrate on for implementation, improvement and/ or monitoring?

That is an interesting question because even though it isn't 500 pages anymore, it's still 250 pages and every one of those pages has something which I know we need to be working on. And this is really a good example of how everything is relative. One of the benefits of taking the supervisor course was working with people from all over the commonwealth and often people would see the county name on my name tag and go "oh! You all are doing such a wonderful job in Albemarle and maybe ten years from now we may be doing this that you're doing today' in their community.

It's a constant reminder that even though we think we have so many challenges and so many things we need to do better, we're really doing very well in many of them. I don't mean to say we should stop but it does give me some comfort that yes we have made a lot of progress based on the work of previous boards and previous

staff for fifty years and we don't want to disrespect them by screwing up so we really need to keep making those baby steps to make improvements.

I think that, oh boy, there are so many but I'm going to grab on to the urban trail connections and urban recreation because it has been something that has been pushed down off the priority list multiple times due to recession, due to fewer than the needed dollars in our capital improvement program. The White Hall district is blessed to have three parks that are spectacular but they are way out in the country. And yet our great majority of our White Hall district population lives in the urban ring in Crozet or for the county as a whole lives in the doughnut around Charlottesville and they have had enough waiting. They are very upfront about the fact that 'we're not waiting anymore. We don't want to go all the way to Walnut Creek [Park] if we live in Redfields. We want to be able to get on our bike and go into town.'

So many of the neighborhoods are newer and have made their own trails and what we need are those connections between them so that people can really benefit with a wider experience. I think the dollars are quite small, relative to lots of other dollars, to do things. I know that the people in Crozet are now beating a drum about the western park there, the land that was donated in Old Trail and I've said to them, please come to the board meeting. Do the old speak up now and over and over routine because we know it works. That's how we got the Crozet library. Different people came month after month after month for about two years and finally the board said, 'okay, okay, okay already!' And I'm happy to use that method any time, but I also think that's a great method for people from around the county to make sure that their board member, but also the board as a whole, is understanding what's important to them because it makes a difference. We have to choose and when push comes to shove it's important to have that background and have the arguments and information that comes from the citizens that then each supervisor can store away and reuse that to promote their items when it comes up. So, I think that's even though there are 25 others that I should be saying instead, that's the one I'm going to stick with.