



2006 Charlottesville City Council Candidate Interview April 2006

Candidate: Rob Schilling (R)

On May 2, 2006, voters in the City of Charlottesville will be electing candidates to two seats on the Charlottesville City Council. This recording is Brian Wheeler's April 6, 2006 interview of Rob Schilling. Mr. Schilling is running as a Republican. The two other candidates in this race are Dave Norris (D) and Julian Taliaferro (D).

The audio of this interview is available online on the Charlottesville Tomorrow Weblog
http://cvilletomorrow.typepad.com/charlottesville_tomorrow_/2006/04/candidate_inter_2.html

Complete election coverage is available on the Charlottesville Tomorrow website
<http://action.cvilletomorrow.org/cvilleaction/elections.html>

INTERVIEW

Mr. Schilling, thank you for participating in this interview with Charlottesville Tomorrow. The complete audio and written transcript for this interview will be available on the Internet after we complete all three candidate interviews. Information from this interview, from some of the candidate forums, and from your campaign materials, may be used as sources in the compilation of Charlottesville Tomorrow's non-partisan voter guide. As you know, 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 related to land use, transportation and community design.

Also, as you are aware, eleven of the questions you will be asked have been provided in advance, four other questions have not. All candidates will be asked the same questions.

- 1. Please describe your past experience that qualifies you to be on City Council.**

Four years' experience on City Council will make me the second-most senior member of the new Council. There are so many things to learn upon taking a seat on City Council, and the experience in the position is a valuable component

to Council service. My experience serving as a Councilor over the past four years uniquely qualifies me for re-election.

I'm the only Councilor and only candidate with a business degree.* I have over 25 years' management experience in various businesses and organizations. I understand business processes and how to make them more efficient. I utilize my management experience in serving on the Council in the evaluation of the many complex business decisions that we must face. My education and background in business management uniquely qualifies me for re-election.

I spent five years in the classroom as an elementary and middle school teacher. I understand education issues and I've been stepped in education for most of my life because my mom was an educator and both of my wife's parents were educators. My wife, Joan, is enrolled at UVA's Curry School of Education and currently is writing her doctoral dissertation. My personal experience in the field of education uniquely qualifies me for re-election.

I have over 20 years' experience as a licensed Realtor and currently hold licenses in California where I'm a licensed salesperson and in Virginia where I am an associate broker. My direct experience in rental and for-sale housing markets on both sides of the country gives me a unique perspective and a breadth of experience regarding housing issues unmatched by any other Councilor or candidate. My extensive background in housing and rental issues uniquely qualifies me for re-election.

Finally, I am an artist who has always lived in communities that respect and value the arts. Over the years I've spent much time writing, recording and performing music professionally. I've worked as a writer, graphic artist, and a web designer. Currently, I direct a contemporary choir at St. Thomas Aquinas University Parish. My background in the arts helps me to look at solutions from both sides of my brain. The creative side of me is a good balance to the management side and my background and experience in the arts uniquely qualifies me for re-election to City Council.

* Since Charlottesville Tomorrow's interview with Rob Schilling, candidate Julian Taliaferro submitted information indicating he holds an AAS degree in Business Management from PVCC. As a result, this sentence was not included in Mr. Schilling's response to this question as printed in the 2006 Charlottesville Tomorrow Voter Guide which went to press on April 18, 2006.

- 2. Later this month, the Rivanna Water & Sewer Authority will recommend a plan to improve our water supply to handle expected growth and future droughts. Assume that the plan recommends a larger Ragged Mountain Dam and a new pipeline to connect the Ragged Mountain Reservoir to the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir. Will this water supply solution get your support? Why or why not?**

Yes, I will support this solution. It seems to be the only currently viable solution that enjoys broad-based community support. I am pleased with the community input on the water supply issue, and the process has been inclusive. However, this project is not the end of our discussion. We've waited too long to address our current problems and we should continue to carefully evaluate and publicly discuss all water supply options in order to meet future needs.

- 3. The County Board of Supervisors will spend considerable time in 2006 looking at new ordinances to protect the fields, farms, forests and mountains in our rural area. They will be looking at the development process in local government and considering phasing of new development in the designated growth areas surrounding the City. They will be reviewing rezonings that could bring thousands of new homes and retail shopping to the County. How do you view these developments in the County and how might they impact your priorities as a City Councilor?**

Unfortunately, growth in the County is something that can't be directly controlled by elected officials in the City. However, County growth has a significant, cumulative and often negative impact on City residents and neighborhoods.

I've been to Biscuit Run and have spoken about the project with locally impacted residents as well as with the association president for the adjacently impacted City neighborhood. I understand their well-founded concerns about the increase in traffic that may result from this and from other developments in the County's urban ring. Council priorities should be to look out for and protect our valuable City neighborhoods from such impacts. We must work more closely with the County's Board of Supervisors to mitigate the impacts of County development. This will also involve a closer and more regionally oriented working relationship between City and County staffs and better communication between the respective governing bodies.

- 4. What is your top priority for action by City Council should you be elected?**

Affordable living in Charlottesville and careful management of our financial resources will be my top priorities in my capacity as a City Councilor during my next term. As I talk to people in the community every day, the one concern that I hear more than any other, is the devastating impact of compounded escalating assessments on the lives of homeowners and renters alike. Many retired City residents now on fixed incomes fear they no longer can afford to live in the City

and will be forced to move soon. Many nearing retirement age already are planning to sell their homes at retirement because they will not be able to afford the annually increasing taxes when their income is reduced. Renters fear annual increases as a result of landlords' increased tax bills. Young families are concerned that after barely being able to buy a house they will be forced sell due to the tax payments. I know others who already have moved because of the crushing tax burden.

The City's budget has nearly doubled in 10 years and property taxes and rents have skyrocketed within the same timeframe yet people's incomes have not substantially changed to keep pace. I understand that the high cost of living in Charlottesville is directly related to the high cost of city government. We must put a budget process in place that requires Council to clearly prioritize its wants and needs and that requires public justification of spending increases as well as of spending cuts. This will assist in allowing us to maintain our middle and working class families who are an important part of the fabric of our community.

5. What are your overall transportation priorities?

Traffic flow within the City is very important. While no one likes the ever-increasing traffic on our City streets most people are happier when the traffic at least is moving. Signal synchronization is something I've advocated for while on Council and that has been implemented during my term, and it is bringing some relief. I will continue to advocate for increasing signal synchronization as warranted throughout the City.

Increasing the quality and efficiency of public transit options is a top priority. Our public transportation system is underutilized and because of so many large and nearly empty buses on our City streets appears to be wasteful in the eyes of many citizens. In my travels to other parts of this country, I have seen the benefits of well-used public transportation systems, and we should try to emulate the successes of these places.

Personally, our family of three has maintained only one fuel-efficient automobile for years. I enjoy taking the bus and do so whenever I can, but the nearest bus stop is a 25-minute walk. I think this exemplifies the problem many in the community see: our current public transit options need some major adjustments to become more efficient and more convenient for people to use. Making City streets more bicycle and/or walker friendly would also be a step in the right direction toward offering residents transit options aside from personal automobiles.

Finally, the development of feasible regional road networks should help alleviate many of Charlottesville's traffic woes. The southern parkway and the eastern connector are two such projects that I as a Councilor support conceptually and that currently are being studied.

6. In what ways should City government be working to reduce traffic congestion at critical road intersections?

Signal synchronization, service roads at new development where appropriate, promotion of flextime and telecommuting options are a good start. Increasing residents' opportunities for ride sharing and public transportation usages also will be very helpful.

7. A report was recently submitted to the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) which made recommendations on policies and revenue sources that could be used to fund some or all of the area's \$100 million in transportation project priorities. The report said that if the state is unwilling or unable to act to provide more funding, our region should move forward with implementing several of the recommended solutions. One of the policy recommendations was to create a new transportation district for the City and County which would allow for revenue sharing on cooperative projects and to enable government to create bondable revenue streams. One of the funding options recommended for servicing these bonds is a new local sales tax of ½ cent dedicated to transportation. Would you support the creation of a transportation district and a new local sales tax to support funding the area's priority transportation projects, and/or are there other funding solutions you prefer?

We should continue to work with the state and federal governments to obtain funding for necessary projects. Local residents pay substantial portions of their income to both the state and the federal government, yet a smaller portion of these taxes is returned to the area. Before asking for more money, local governments need to adequately prioritize both projects and expenditures.

That being said, new taxes sometimes are appropriate and necessary. But before raising taxes in an area like Charlottesville/Albemarle that already is unaffordable for too many people, we should carefully consider the impacts of another tax on our residents. Other areas have made extensive use of public/private partnerships in developing a better transportation network. We should fully explore those options, as well.

Most importantly, the citizens of this community deserve a voice in the process and perhaps a referendum on the topic of a transportation district would be appropriate.

8. Do our citizens and government employees have plentiful choices for safe, convenient, affordable, and attractive places to live?

Well, that depends on which citizens and which employees. Certainly, those in upper-level management government positions have more choice than those employees who hold the everyday government jobs. Unfortunately, too many of our citizens find themselves with too few choices. As long as our area is growing and people are attracted here by no. 1 city designations, our problem is largely one of supply and demand. When there are too few places to live to meet the demand of those who wish to live here, prices rise in response to that demand. When there are more houses available than people seeking to buy or rent, housing prices and rents fall. We've seen this here in the rental market very recently.

A glut of new rental communities and buildings has led to a decline in some rents and a halt in the rate of increases for others. In fact, there has been such an overabundance of available rental units that some former apartment buildings are now being converted to relatively affordable, for-sale condominium units. Until housing supply meets housing demands and until City spending is brought under control, housing choices will most likely remain limited for a substantial percentage of citizens.

9. The University of Virginia is planning over \$1 billion in construction projects during the next six years. In what ways does this impact our community? And a follow-up—how would you characterize the level of co-operation between the City and the University and in what way will you seek to make changes?

Construction at the University of Virginia is a huge economic driver for the local community. The influx of dollars coming here from construction projects at the University helps to keep our economy healthy and isolated from some of the ups and downs that other communities face. The level of cooperation between the City and the University is reasonable and I think it's gotten better. However, over the years prior to my time on Council and in the first couple of years, there were definitely serious issues of trust between the University and the City Council which made it very difficult for the City and the University to come up with cooperative agreements. I think we've worked through some of those and we need to continue to build the trust and I think mainly that involves better communication and it involves following through when Council or the University makes an agreement with the other party.

10. What are your views on working more closely with the County and UVA to jointly operate a regional transit system?

Where I grew up there was a regional transit system. It was at the time called RTD for Rapid Transit District, now called MTD in Los Angeles and it went all over the greater Los Angeles area. I can't imagine if that area had been operated with individual transportation for each city and I think in having the system like that locally, we would be allowing more people to utilize the system. I've been very bothered by the fact that the County has not picked up enough of its share of regional transportation. A lot of that's on the back of the City. I think there are tremendous opportunities for the County to become more involved and to encourage people to use the system.

Currently we're running routes into the County which are being subsidized by the City. Of course, City employees are working in the County and it's important for them to get to work, but also the County needs to be I think a better partner financially with this process and I think also we've looked at the University of Virginia bus system. We've talked to them regarding coming on with the City and running a joint system. Those talks haven't gotten too far because there's some issues regarding the pay of drivers and the differentiation between City drivers and University drivers. The University wasn't interested in pursuing that, but to the extent that we can work together, coordinate routes and increase ridership on both systems, I think it's a good thing that we need to pursue.

11. What will your priorities be for further development in and around the Downtown Mall area? And a couple of follow-ups—how should public transit and parking needs be addressed? And also, what distinctive characteristics of the Downtown Mall area do you value the most?

Further development around the Downtown Mall is very, very important to the continued viability of the Downtown Mall for the sort of venue that it is now. We are facing a crossroads in the City right now based on competitive development in the County. There're a number of places coming online, developments, retail establishments, that will be harmful ultimately to the businesses at the Downtown Mall. They will not replicate the experience of the Downtown Mall because they can't. It will be new construction. However, they will be competing for local tax dollars and they will certainly take them.

A case in point is the Giant grocery store that opened on Pantops. After that store was up and running for a brief time, we noticed a 10% drop in sales at the local Giant. That's a huge impact. I think what we could expect to see is a major impact on all the Downtown Mall retail and also restaurants and service businesses because there will be other options and there will be places for people to go. Ultimately that could be devastating to the future of the Downtown Mall. Again, they will not be able to replicate what the Mall is, but they will be able to offer opportunities that are more convenient for people to access. I think

we have to act proactively in making the Downtown Mall a place that people want to come and need to come to spend money. Otherwise, it will cease to be the Downtown Mall. It can't survive on its own.

One of the areas that the City studied recently was Burlington, Vermont. While I did not go up on the City-sponsored trip to Burlington, I took my own trip to Burlington, Vermont to look at their downtown mall and to see what was making that successful and one of the things that I noticed in Burlington was a much better retail mix. One of the things that I notice here is we have a lot of boutique stores that have a very small market and very targeted sort of market, but we don't have a lot of opportunities for general shopping which is where people tend to drop a lot of money during Christmas time and other sorts of retail holidays and so I think in order for us to continue to be viable downtown we have to have a broader retail base and I think that the opportunity is here now before these various types of stores get taken up and regional franchises are purchased and put into locations in the County, so I think we have to maintain the character of the Mall as Burlington has done and at the same time offer a variety of retail options and I think that's really the only way that we're going to be able to maintain the viability of the Charlottesville Downtown Mall.

Public transit and parking needs definitely need to be addressed. I think the transit station, as we have placed it and we have produced it, is not the best option that we could've done. I think that there are other places in the City that it would've been more conducive to encouraging people to ride the buses and we're not going to be solving problems and furthermore, there has been a discussion in this community about what sort of public transit we want to have and what sort of a system. There's been a discussion of a trolley.

We took a trip to the west coast to look at some various transportation options there and I think we've gone about this backwards. Instead of building a transit station for the current system and then saying we're going to decide what we want to do, we should've first decided what we want to do and then have built a transit center that would suit whatever that decision was and I think it was really backward and harmful to future options and considerations that we may want for public transit.

Also parking is very important. Having been on the Downtown Mall for a long time and many many nights in the summer talking to people who were there, talking to people around the community who like to go but don't go, one of the issues is parking, the ease of parking and the ease of getting in and out of downtown. I think we need to be particularly mindful of those things in any new development that goes on downtown.

And finally, the distinctive characteristic of the Downtown Mall I think is the visual impact of what the Mall looks like when you're there and how it feels to be there.

I think we have to be careful to protect it, but we also have to realize that the Mall itself cannot exist without the support of people coming here.

- 12. In December 2005, a study was presented to City Council indicating our city parks were outdated and needed significant improvements. The report detailed \$33 million in improvements to parks, pools, and trail systems. If elected, what will you do to address our park facilities and urban green spaces?**

I think it's a tragedy that we have found ourselves in this position and I think it is largely a failure, a long-term failure of management. There's no reason that things should've gotten to the level of decay and degradation that they have if we were paying close attention to our facilities. We've seen pictures and in visiting the facilities we've seen things that are virtually unusable and that is just not acceptable, so we find ourselves in this position because of a lack of oversight over the last dozens of years probably.

We will not as a City be able to come up with \$33 million immediately. That is a list of wants. As I have talked about before, we need to look at what is it that we need to do right now. My focus on Parks & Recreation, our facilities in particular, is before we spend money on new facilities, we need to fix what we have. It's incredibly important to maintain our infrastructure because the longer we wait to take care of it, the more expensive it will be to repair and in some cases, it may be completely unfeasible and it may have to be scrapped.

I think in the next term of Council when this issue is facing us, I will want us to have a very serious discussion on wants and needs. One of the things that has come forward from our consultant is can we really afford to operate a decentralized system as we have and try to have programming going on in every single facility that is essentially the same as it is in every other facility and I know that people in the community really like having the neighborhood-based facilities but if it comes down to there's only a certain amount of money and we come down to facing hard decisions of either maintaining all of the things that we have right now and cutting down services or moving services regionally and being able to expand a little bit because we're focusing things in certain locations, I think that the public's going to have to weigh in on what they want to see. We do not have unlimited resources to fix this. Hopefully, in the future, we won't face this problem because we'll manage it better and we'll be able to keep on top of these sort of repairs and items that we've gotten behind on.

- 13. Do we have the necessary human and financial resources in City government to achieve the objectives in our comprehensive plan? And a follow-up, in what way, if any, do we need to make changes?**

The comprehensive plan is a far-reaching document that essentially is a vision statement for how the plan's participants would like the community to look in future years. The comp plan process is important in that we should have goals for development that incorporate community priorities. Most people recognize that the comprehensive plan provides guidance for decision makers and that sometimes changes are necessary. I don't believe that we currently have the necessary resources to fully implement the comp plan when we can barely keep up with our existing infrastructure and service obligations. Council and community prioritization of needs vs. wants is essential in reviewing the process and any necessary changes as is the realization that our resources are limited.

- 14. One of the items in the Council's 2020 Vision states that the City will work to "sustain our natural resources and enhance the quality of our natural and built environment." It goes on to say "that new development must be high quality and sustainable." Do you agree with that goal and if so, how will you work to realize that vision? And a follow-up—how does recent in-fill development in the City measure up?**

High-quality and sustainable development is a laudable goal and I agree that that's the type of development we should seek. The planning commission as an advisory board has been doing a good job in reviewing guidelines for City development and where appropriate, advising developers on how to make their projects better. However, the terms in question unfortunately are subjective and the resulting development may be perceived differently by different groups of people.

There have been many commendable, small infill developments in the City over the past few years, but there is always room for improvement. During my time on Council I typically have supported maintaining set back and other "greenspace" requirements for City development projects. It is important that Charlottesville retain its natural character and avoid becoming a concrete jungle. Greenspace, air and light considerations all should be carefully reviewed when contemplating infill development.

- 15. Have you received any endorsements yet that you would like to make the public aware of?**

Well, the public should be aware that many organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and others do not officially endorse candidates for election and that other organizations are still determining which if any candidates they'll endorse. So far I'm honored to have received the personal endorsements of notable community citizens who are immersed in Charlottesville's history like Hovey S.

Dabney and Eugene Williams. I value the endorsements of the hundreds of Democrats, Independents and Republicans across the community who have posted my signs in their yards and added their names to my list of supporters and who have pledged to vote to re-elect me to my second Council term on May 2nd.

Thank you very much, Rob.

Thank you.