



2006 Charlottesville City Council Candidate Interview April 2006

Candidate: Julian Taliaferro (D)

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 5, 2006 interview of Julian Taliaferro. Mr. Taliaferro is running as a Democrat. The two other candidates in this race are Dave Norris (D) and Rob Schilling (R).

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

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

INTERVIEW

Mr. Taliaferro, 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 others have not. All candidates will be asked the same questions.

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

Well, I served as Fire Chief in the City for I guess almost 34 years and during that time I had to manage a budget. I had to make cuts, not only talk about them. I really had to do it and one of the priorities in the Fire Department was always to

really try to give a high level of customer service and we really run a pretty cost-effective Fire Department if you compare it to other localities. Essentially, operated with a Fire Chief and a secretary. That was basically our administrative staff because we really took all our people and put them on the street in order to give good service to people. And that's kind of indicated by our fire fatality record. You can look at lot of other cities, surrounding cities, etc., and for the last nine years we haven't had a fire fatality in the City of Charlottesville and you can go to places like Lynchburg that's had 14, Harrisonburg—four, and I forget, in the County since 2003, they may have had seven or eight, but anyway, we've done remarkably well and we think that's because of some of the things we've done in terms of technology and putting more staff on the street.

During that time I was also able to build a award-winning Fire Department that became internationally accredited which is really one of I guess one of 106 that are currently accredited worldwide and I've had a lot of experience in dealing with budgets outside of the Fire Department. I served on Board of Directors of the International Association of Fire Chiefs since 1992 and I currently serve as the International Treasurer for that organization and I'm proud to say that I was able to play a significant part in making that organization debt free for the first time in anyone's memory or at least in their modern history and they're a hundred and some years old. And I was able to do that essentially by convincing a 18-person board of the need to make some changes. During the last really 10 years or so and I think that more or less demonstrates that I have a consensus builder.

I also served as the past chairman of a national board that had over a million members where I had to deal approving property improvements all over the United States and had to deal with their pension system and deal with a lot of other legal issues, so I consider myself well versed in budget matters and I think that the ability to deal with municipal budgets, the ability to work with people I think give me the qualifications and experience to make a good City Council member.

- 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?**

Well, I'm glad you asked that question because I'm pretty concerned about the water supply and I guess one of my concerns is why we haven't acted more quickly than we have and I'm concerned about both the quality and the quantity of our water supply today and in the future. I think I would support that [approach]. It's not so much of the water shortage. We don't have sufficient storage capacity and it appears to me that's probably the best option is to do that pipeline you just described. I know there was some talk of building a pipeline, I

think to the James River was one possible solution, which I think would probably not be the most cost effective thing to do and I think also it would probably have a significant effect on the environment and all those sorts of things, so I would support what they're recommending.

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?

Well, let me first say that I think the County has done a good job with their Designated Growth Areas which kind of help them to preserve a lot of the open areas, farm land, etc., which helps to protect the rural character of Albemarle County. I don't think they've done the best job in developing an effective transportation system to transport people, for instance, from growth area A to growth area B and those sorts of things and I know when you talk about the phasing in of development, I think a lot of that will be driven by the market forces, in all honesty, but I guess one of the things that'll influence me a lot I think is I'm going continue to pursue a good economic development program in the City because I think it really demonstrates the need for us to make the City a business-friendly place to do business because it's important for us to maintain that to really protect the tax base of the City because as more and more businesses develop in the County, there's a certain element of competition there. So I think the biggest influence it would have on me would really be two things: one is trying to look for traffic solutions to handle the traffic; and the second thing is to certainly support the economic development efforts in the City.

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

Well, my top priority is to really support our school system. I'm concerned as a lot of other people are about some of our standings. I really find it hard to believe where we are and I want to be sure that as a Council member that I support the newly-elected School Board. I want to support the new Superintendent and I want to support the teachers within the system and along with that, besides supporting them, I want to insure that we have adequate funding for our schools in order to insure a quality education for all of our children.

5. What are your overall transportation priorities?

Well, I guess really is to address the impact of Route 29 and, of course, the Pantops Mountain area and trying to determine how we can best deal with those traffic issues because I'm sure you know and I've been for years and I've seen things change dramatically and I've looked every year, for instance, at the 250 Bypass and we're just about at the point of gridlock it looks to me in some areas, so that's going to be my priority.

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

Well, I think they need to continue with such things— I think on West Main they've put in what they call the ITS system which is Intelligence Transportation System and I think that will probably improve things on West Main Street. I think beyond that, I think they really need to take a close look at a lot of the intersection designs in the City, but a lot of times by reconfiguring intersections, putting in turn lanes and doing all those sort of things I think you can make some improvements without drastically altering roads, etc.

7. A report was recently submitted to the Metropolitan Planning Organization or MPO that 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 that 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 are there other funding solutions you prefer?

Well, I would support creation of such a commission or district, transportation district I guess is what you referred to there. I guess in looking at what's going on in the General Assembly and I think it's unlikely any time in the near future we're going to get much in the way of funding from the State for programs such as that and other programs. Of course, that's one of the problems a lot of the cities are having today because they're really not putting up the money they should be, but in any event, it would appear to me that the ½ cent sales tax would be the fairest way to go with this and I would certainly support that, I think. I think it's probably fairer than trying to address through increasing local property taxes or through other taxes.

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

Well, I can answer that. No. And I've had some experience with that just by working with people in the Fire Department over the years and I know it's not only fire fighters, police officers and teachers and other government employees but also people that work in other capacities within the community and the City. It's really difficult to be able to buy a home and there're some programs that are helping with that, but the affordable housing issue is a big issue facing the entire community, not only the City but I think the County also, and I guess one of my concerns is I think you really lose something when people work in the city but yet they can't live there because it's almost like they become not associated with the community in some respects, so I think there's a lot of— I'm trying to think of how I want to say this, but I think there's a real need to have those people that work within the community be able to live where they work.

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? 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?

Well, those construction projects, they're going to certainly have an impact on traffic and all those sorts of things. I think probably one of the positives of those projects is probably there's going to be a lot of money put into the local economy as a result of that. There'll be a lot of jobs created as a result of that and I guess, like I say, the big impact is probably going to be traffic disruptions and all those sorts of things.

As far as cooperation between the University and the City, I think it's a lot better than it used to be. When I became Fire Chief 30-some years ago, it wasn't very good, in all honesty, and I've seen it change. There've been a lot of positive changes really during the years. They have what they call the Planning Coordination Council. I don't know whether you're familiar with that, but they have like the City Manager and County Executive and a member of the Board of Supervisors, a Council member, I think President Casteen, and Vice President Sandridge sit on that. They meet quarterly and then they have what they call the PACCTEC which is some of the other people like Director of Public Works, people from the Hospital, Facilities Management, all those groups get together and they try to look at those issues that impact the City and also the University and I think that's been a major step in improving the cooperation and I guess I would certainly— And I don't want to see that change and I guess I would encourage that to continue because I think we really have to look at it as if really one community.

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

I would certainly support that. I think it behooves us to look at any of those things that we can do jointly. I think most of the time there's some savings in money and I think also there's the opportunity to perhaps increase the efficiency of the public transportation system. One of the problems today is the frequency and that's why some people I think don't use it, but I would certainly support that effort.

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

Well, I think we need to continue the type of development we're doing now on the Mall. I think particularly from the residential standpoint I think it really great to see a lot of new lofts, etc., in the Downtown area. I know there's money in the Capitol Improvement Program to replace the bricks on the Mall and I think we need to move ahead with that. I guess that parking and public transportation needs certainly need to be addressed. I personally use the two parking garages and I think they work pretty well and maybe we need some more. To date, I really haven't seen them filled up, but they're close to being filled sometimes I realize.

I guess from the public transportation standpoint, I would really be interested in really looking at the streetcar system that would possibly run I think from Downtown up to the University area which would kind of be the hub and then I think the secondary leg of that would probably be from the University area out to Barracks Road Shopping Center and I think as we continue to have more development along the West Main corridor, I think we have some type of transportation system like that, I think it'd really be great to move people from the University Downtown, people from Downtown to the University on out to Barracks Road and it's kind of like the trolley system they're using now which I think appears to be pretty successful, so—

And I guess the characteristics that I really appreciate and value is that it is so neat to come Downtown and see all the people down there and there're people down there at night which really— I remember when they weren't many people there and I think it was probably one of the smartest moves the City ever made when they did that Mall, but I just think it's a nice place to come. We have the Paramount and we have so much entertainment coming here and most of the business people that I talk to are really excited about it. I know in talking to one person in the restaurant business, he was telling me how much his business has increased since all this happened, so I value not only what it's doing for the

merchants down there, but also just for a place for people in the community to be able to come.

- 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?**

Well, I think we really need to take a look at that needs assessment that was done and I can tell you that I know from experience that we haven't really taken care of some of our facilities as we should have. We haven't put enough money into the Capital Improvement Program to deal with a lot of those issues, not only parks, but fire stations, and other city-owned buildings and facilities. What I would like to do is really take a look at all the programs that are being carried out and see if there's a possibility to combine or eliminate any programs. I think you kind of have to take a look at who the programs are serving and all those sorts of things and I think they certainly do a great job.

I would certainly want to preserve the parks in the City. I think we have I believe over two dozen parks in the City which is pretty neat for a city of a little over 10 square miles, so we have a lot of open space and a lot of green space as a result of those parks that are in place and I certainly wouldn't want to eliminate any parks. I'll put it that way, but, you know, I think we can look at things like rec centers and all those sorts of things and they certainly need to have some improvements done and I think beyond that, I think we can also take— We need to look at some of the things we've done with the County in the past and pursue that also and possibly doing some joint things because a lot of these programs serve people in both of our jurisdictions and I guess the Darden Towe Park is probably an excellent example of where the City and County went together and did something, so I would support those sorts of things.

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

In talking to people in the City, I think they had about 150 initiatives originally in that comprehensive plan and they tell me they've completed about 140 of them and I guess that would kind of demonstrate to me that we have the necessary resources. I think the only thing we need to do is really to update that plan. It probably needs to be updated now and of course it obviously needs to be updated on a regular basis which I think they probably do.

- 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 indicates that “new development must be high quality and sustainable.” Do you agree with that goal? If so, how will you work to realize that vision? And then a follow-up, how does recent in-fill development in the City measure up?**

I certainly support that goal and I guess the way I would work to realize that vision would be continue to support ordinances that offer protection. Now, the City’s done a couple of things. I know they’ve got I guess it’s a stream protection ordinance now, steep slope ordinance and also I think recently they’ve adopted new guidelines for quality construction and I would support those and would look for any enhancements we could do in those areas because I think it is important to do that because as you do infill development, you certainly increase the population density in Charlottesville and we’re one of the most densely populated cities in the State which causes other problems.

And then the follow-up to that was do you think the recent in-fill development measures up to the quality standards?

Yeah, I think they’ve done pretty well with that, the best that I can tell. And the other thing about the in-fill development is I think it allows you to do the development without putting in new water lines and having to materially I guess alter the street system and all those sorts of things and I think they’ve done that, the best that I can tell anyway.

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

You know, I have received two endorsements but I haven’t officially received notification so I would probably not want to do that until I get it in writing.

Okay. Thank you very much for your participation.

Thank you.