



## **2005 Board of Supervisors Candidate Interview October 2005**

*Candidate: Sally Thomas (I), Samuel Miller District*

*Complete election coverage is available on the Charlottesville Tomorrow [website](#).*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This is Charlottesville Tomorrow. An Advocate for Our Future Today. Charlottesville Tomorrow is a non-partisan community organization working on land use, transportation, and community design issues. Visit us on the web at [cvilletomorrow.org](http://cvilletomorrow.org).

On November 8, 2005, Albemarle County voters in 3 magisterial districts will be electing members to four-year terms on the Board of Supervisors.

This recording is Brian Wheeler's interview of Sally Thomas, candidate for the Samuel Miller seat on the Board of Supervisors. Ms. Thomas, the incumbent, is running as an Independent and she is unopposed.

### **INTERVIEW**

Sally, 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. Information from this interview, from some of the candidate forums, and from your campaign materials, will be used 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, some of the questions you will be asked have been provided in advance, others have not. All candidates will be asked the same questions. Are you ready to start?

**Sally Thomas:** Yes, sir.

**1. Please describe your past political experience.**

Before I was elected to the Board of Supervisors I was on the County School Board. It was an appointed position, not an elected one at that point. I also had served in a number of appointed situations, including serving on the City's Social Development Commission which is an unusual thing for a County resident, but I was representing the University of Virginia at that point. At the state level, my job at the University of Virginia was as legislative liaison and so I have a lot of people who know me who are in the state level of the General Assembly, particularly, and then for the last 12 years, obviously, I've been on the Board of Supervisors and if by political, you mean political parties, I've not been involved in political parties partly because I arrived in Virginia as a Republican and served as the President of the League of Women Voters which is a non-partisan situation and I've never gotten involved in political parties particularly.

**2. What makes you better qualified than your opponent(s)?**

Some people think I scare them off by having a very good campaign crew, so I think what makes me better qualified than my lack of opponent is that I have a very good group of people who've worked on my campaigns and we're back again and we're all rearing to go. I think they've been a little disappointed they don't have much to do.

**3. What do you think is the best water supply source to meet our community's needs for growth and for drought? Would you support a pipeline to the James River to address our water supply needs? Please explain why or why not?**

We don't have a water shortage because we live in the Piedmont where the rain comes pretty evenly every month of the year. We have a water storage problem and, in fact, we don't even have a water storage problem. We appeared to in the last drought but we hadn't fully tapped a variety of other sources that we have, such as Beaver Creek Reservoir, but I think the best idea is the one that came out of actually the Nature Conservancy's idea of connecting our two biggest existing reservoirs, the Ragged Mountain Reservoir, particularly if we raise the dam and the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir and I would definitely work vigorously against having a pipeline to the James River. I think that we need to look at our own water source and take responsibility for it and limit ourselves to what it can provide and I think it's a good discipline for the community and an adequate source.

- 4. The Board of Supervisors will approve ordinances to support recently adopted changes to the rural areas portion of the comprehensive plan. Do you support the rural areas portion of the comprehensive plan and what new zoning ordinance strategies do you think stand the best chance to protect the rural areas for future generations?**

I worked hard to get the rural areas portion of the comprehensive plan put together, written, and I think that the phasing of development stands our best chance to protect the rural areas for future generations. I'm not a tremendous fan of clustering. I think it's second best. I think we have to do phasing first and that in other counties has proven to slow down the arrival of big outside developers who think our rural areas are sitting there for the picking. Madison County, Augusta County, others have done it, so it's not cutting edge by any means. It is cutting edge to do both the clustering and the phasing, but, in my mind, the phasing has to come first and that's what our comprehensive plan says and I'm hoping that we'll be able to get every member of the Board of Supervisors who voted for that comprehensive plan to stick to it.

- 5. Consider the growth we see in Northern Virginia. What mistakes have local governments made there and, if you are selected, what will you do differently here?**

I think one of the biggest mistakes has involved employment or employers and where they have been located. I don't think the local governments in Northern Virginia are particularly responsible for all of this because many of them are federal, but, for example, the closing of some of the near-in Army posts mean that there will just be greater sprawl outwards. It's almost impossible to have a good transportation system if people can't get from their home to where they work by that transportation system and it's almost impossible to design one that goes around the rim of the wheel; the spokes of the wheel work and that's what the transportation system in the Washington area was built to be and then employment has scattered all around and so it's almost impossible to have the transportation system work despite having a pretty good transportation system.

So, when NGIC, when Martha Jefferson Hospital, move out of the City, I am very concerned because I think it's just going to be— I hope we haven't reached the point that it's going to be impossible, but I really fear for what we're going to be able to do when our employment base is no longer in the City. The local governments also have made the mistake of fighting for employment base and doing their best to suck out of D.C. the employment and I think that we avoid doing that in Albemarle County pretty well because we don't have a real economic development push or economic development office, but the University of Virginia doesn't pay any attention to our interests in that, although they are keeping the campus more compact than earlier plans had it, so that I cheer on, so that's why I focus a lot on where employment is located.

6. **Goals of the “Neighborhood Model” form of development, a form intended for the County’s population centers, include interconnected neighborhoods and more compact, walkable communities with a mix of housing types that allow a larger population to live, work and shop in a smaller area. Do you support these goals of the Neighborhood Model for new development?**

Yes.

7. **One example of a significant Neighborhood Model provided is Old Trail Village. Do you think Old Trail will be quality growth for Crozet and Charlottesville-Albemarle? And following up on that, will it provide affordable living choices for our citizens and how will they remain affordable?**

Quality growth—interesting term. I think that Old Trail is laid out as a pretty good model, a pretty good adherence to the Neighborhood Model. It does have just about all of those things that you talked about earlier as well as forming a road from Jarman Gap Road down to 250 which is crucial for trying to get less traffic taking 250 and more of it getting onto the Interstate which was hard to get to and will be easier once we get Jarman Gap Road upgraded and using that new connection.

The affordable housing is a dilemma, but they have at least proffered, come forth with the best proffer that we’ve seen so far in that each section is supposed to have the 15% affordable and the accumulative effect has to also be 15% if they slip in one area. I’m little worried about letting them slip too much. How they’re going to remain affordable is something that we’re still working out with people like the Piedmont Housing Coalition and are going to have to get our trust fund and second mortgage situation worked out a lot better than we have it right now, so that’s a little dicey, but we do know how to do it and have done it in some other old developments in the Crozet area actually, so I think we’ll be able to do that, but that one is taking a little bit of leap of faith to be sure that it’s going to remain affordable.

8. **Our designated growth areas tell developers where we want them to build. Should we also tell developers through zoning what form we want that development to take? Why or why not?**

The Neighborhood Model essentially does, if that’s what this question has in mind, and I think the Neighborhood Model has worked out a local form of development that— We call it the Neighborhood Model. A lot of other places call it smart growth, but I think the form that we’ve worked out is an intelligent one and in that sense, we do tell them what form. On the other hand, if they come up with a Neighborhood Model district, then they develop a code of development that is their choice of housing to interpret the Neighborhood Model and it’s a give

and take with our staff and it comes out not perfect and it starts out with the developers' ideas within the 12 conditions of the Neighborhood Model, so I think that it is a way that doesn't stifle creativity but does give a direction to what that development is going to be like because our goal is to have this all be attractive and there's some concern that developers want things to be pretty when you move in, but for it to remain an attractive place for people to live for the next several generations, we have to make sure that it's got the infrastructure and the form that's going to stay desirable over the years.

**9. What types of incentives should exist for developers to build in our population centers or designated growth areas? And following up on that, can you name some specific regulatory or financial examples? And should the development here be required to conform with the Neighborhood Model?**

We provide public water and sewer. We allow a greater density and we allow a compact development. We even allow some degradation of streams that we wouldn't allow in the rural area, all with a goal of having development be compact and more houses and more people living in the urban area. Those, in fact, are very major incentives because the developers can make a lot more money in that situation than they can in areas that don't have public water and sewer. We also are working to let developers have some private roads and have much more narrow roads and some alleys in the urbanizing area and, again, that reduces the expense that the developers go into, so I don't think we need to come up with separate incentives for the ones that exist and I think the fact that we have many major developments that are on the books and being applied for right now proves that those incentives do exist. And, yes, they should be required to conform to the Neighborhood Model.

**10. Do you support construction of a Western U.S. 29 bypass around Charlottesville on the currently proposed route or some other route? Please explain why or why not and where another route might go.**

I do not support the construction of the Western 29 bypass and haven't ever since I got into this political business. In fact, I was endorsed by the *Daily Progress* because I did not support a Western bypass, interestingly enough. I think that we can make our existing Route 29 work. It's not going to be cheap but it's not going to be as expensive as some of the alternatives. I know that— Well, I'm not sure that I've totally decided about the far eastern, that is the one that goes through Louisa County and others proposal. On paper, it looks good, but I'm not certain that that truly is needed. I would rather that, as a state, we put our emphasis on putting freight on railroads so that we don't have to have as many big trucks on our highways and certainly I follow with interest what's going on Interstate 81 because that's such a major freight route in the nation and I'm hoping that we can get many more people and it does seem to be a lot of interest

in getting the freight on the rails. As we make ourselves too attractive to trucks, then we're going to have more trucks.

**11. Please describe any other transportation projects on the Route 29 North corridor that you would support to reduce congestion.**

I think a network, particularly for neighborhoods to use to get to places they want to go without everybody having to go out onto the main highway is a workable and important concept. It gets into trouble on Route 29 North because we only have one bridge across the river. I think we need to look for a second bridge across the Rivanna River at the South Fork and whether that's going to be Berkmar Drive Extended or whether it's going to be the extension of the Meadowcreek Parkway, I don't know which one is going to win out on that, but I think in order to make any sort of network around Route 29 eventually we're going to have to have another bridge over the reservoir.

I think that we can do a lot with public transit without getting too heavy with it, that is, heavy transit. Light rail even, I'm not sure when we're going to be able to justify that, but in the meantime, I think we have to make everything we do be transit ready and that's a mistake that we have made in the recent past, so we have to make sure that we have the right of way when possible, the pull-offs, the turn-arounds, the width to allow for transit.

I also am very interested in small shuttle type of transit situations that the Albemarle Place people are interested in and I think made a proffer regarding having a little shuttle bus that would go from Barracks Road to Albemarle Place across the other shopping centers around so that people can drive once, park and then take a shuttle around. It would reduce a lot of the at least the short-trip type of congestion on the road.

**12. What are your overall transportation priorities?**

Well, someone said recently that Americans care more for their automobiles than any of the Bill of Rights. Take away their speech if you must, but leave them their automobiles. I'm not totally sympathetic to that, but we have allowed this County to develop in such a way that it's almost impossible for people to live without a car, so the more people we can have living without having to get into their car for everything and having to get onto the major highways for the things that they need when they do get into their car, the better we will have saved our existing infrastructure.

I'm very influenced by the Eastern Planning Initiative which actually came out with the models and facts and figures to support what difference it makes. That was based on reducing sprawl and having a network of streets. It takes both of those things, but if you put both of those into effect, you can save the amount of time spent in congestion, of course the resulting air pollution and other things that

I don't think this community really wants, but somehow we have to tackle transportation through land use decisions as much as through transportation decisions and try to keep people having fewer single-occupant vehicle trips and fewer of those on the main highways and buses and all sorts of other things are going to come up as good ideas.

I like to point out that every bus trip begins and ends with a pedestrian trip and so we've got to build good pedestrian ways no matter what else we do.

**13. What is your top priority for action by the Board of Supervisors if you are elected?**

The rural area of the comprehensive plan. I think that the urban area is second priority in the sense that we have to realize it's going to take real money and real infrastructure decisions and investments in order to get our urbanizing area to work, but the part that we have been very slow at now finally do have the comprehensive plan is having some concomitant protection of the rural area, so that's top priority for me.

**14. What are the greatest challenges facing the Albemarle County Planning Commission and what type of person will you nominate for a position on the Commission?**

The Planning Commission is our first line of defense as well as doing a lot of creative work with developments. I've had the amazingly good luck of having found planners. The first person I appointed was Bruce Dobson who's in the Planning School at UVA and also had been a city planner so he knew both the academic and the world of city planners and then for the last two terms, Will Reiley has been there and brings a tremendous wealth of land use planning, landscape planning, and determination to the Board. I've just admired greatly what both of those have brought to Albemarle County. I would hope to find somebody who would do as a good a job if I can't talk Will Reiley into staying there.

**15. Do we have appropriate resources in County government to achieve the objectives in our comprehensive plan? And then to follow up, in what way, if any, do we need to make changes? What impact will your recommendations have on staffing and the annual budget?**

Although we are more heavily staffed in our Community Development than many communities, it is where we've put a lot of emphasis in this community so over the years, I've recommended increased staffing. I'm not certain what the situation is now whether there a real need because they've had some vacancies and so they're understaffed but I'm not sure that's because we haven't provided them with sufficient staffing. The resources that I think we need to achieve objectives in our comprehensive plan are not so much the staff as capital

improvements and there are some major items that are going to have to be given enough money.

We talk about Jarman Gap Road in Crozet. We always depended on the state to fund our roads and I really hate like anything to give up on that because I think it's a state responsibility but we have sidewalks, we have the infrastructure of an urbanizing area and I think it's going to take some real money. Throughout my terms, I've put a lot of emphasis on our having enough funding in our capital improvements budgets even to the extent of raising the tax rate a few years with some of that dedicated to the capital improvements budget and having a formula that a portion of our surplus, so-called, money at the end of the year goes into capital improvements, but I think storm water—that now is a new responsibility because we've reached a certain population level and so federal regs kick in, those things are going to be expensive, so I think that that's the type of resources that we're lacking or just putting in the money.

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

No, I haven't gotten any.

**Thank you very much, Sally.**