



2011 Charlottesville City Council Candidate Interview September 2011

Candidate: Dede Smith (D)

On November 8, 2011, voters in the City of Charlottesville go to the polls to elect their representatives to three seats on Charlottesville City Council. This recording is Brian Wheeler's September 26, 2011 interview with Dede Smith (D). Other candidates in this race include: Scott Bandy (I), Brandon Collins (I), Bob Fenwick (I), Kathleen M. Galvin (D), Satyendra Huja (D), and Andrew Williams (I).

*The audio of this interview is available online in the
Charlottesville Tomorrow News Center*

http://cvilletomorrow.typepad.com/charlottesville_tomorrow_/2011/10/smith.html

*Complete election coverage is available on the Charlottesville Tomorrow website
<http://www.cvilletomorrow.org/elections>*

INTERVIEW

Ms. Smith, thank you for participating in this interview with Charlottesville Tomorrow. The complete audio and written transcript for this interview will be available online.

Information from this interview will be used in the compilation of the non-partisan voter guide being co-produced by Charlottesville Tomorrow and The Daily Progress. 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 and community design.

As you are aware, candidates been provided in advance only the general topics for these questions. All City Council candidates will be asked the same questions. We ask that you keep these questions confidential until all candidates have been interviewed.

Each candidate will be provided an opportunity to review the excerpts selected for the voter guide before its publication. Are you ready to start?

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

What I believe I bring to city council is a long experience here in Charlottesville. I have lived here more than 30 years and have been very active in the community.

First and foremost, I bring a background in research. One of my platforms is accountability and using good up to date information. I believe I have a strong background in how to not only get information but how to know what is good information and I am very comfortable with numbers and data and I have shown that throughout my years here in Charlottesville. That's one of my reputation points—evidence-based decision making and data.

Furthermore, I bring a long experience as a director of a non-profit. The reason that's relevant is that I have a strong background in environmental protection as well as historic protection. I was the director at the Ivy Creek Natural Area, which of course is a park...and we do a lot of environmental education and stewardship. But it's also an African-American heritage site which I spearheaded in getting that designation. I have done a lot of research in the local African-American history, not only for that site, but in this community, and I think that brings an interesting skill to the council.

Furthermore, I have a very strong, really 20 years, background in education in this community, not only as a volunteer, as a PTO leader, as a strong voice, but also six years on the school board. One of the things that that has taught me—because I was a volunteer and PTO leader at a high poverty school—is what poverty and some of the struggles that our families have here in Charlottesville, what impact that has on education as well as other social issues.

2. What is your transportation agenda for the city? Does it require more money? How will you fund AND implement it?

Well what I am seeing happen in Charlottesville is that we have a number of initiatives for transportation, whether it's public transportation with buses, bicycling, and pedestrian. They are all very much alive and being discussed here and what I would like to see is a more comprehensive plan looking at all three of those and how they network with each other.

This came up recently in a meeting about the Belmont Bridge. Citizens were saying, "You know we need to be able to get our bikes to the buses." All the busses will accommodate a bike, and I thought that was a really interesting comment, that again we not only have a good bike infrastructure but that that bike infrastructure actually interfaces with other forms of alternative transportation.

The other thing that I think we really need to be focusing on as we look at a comprehensive plan is not only being sure that we're getting people where they want to go, but let's think about where we would like to see people go. We'd like people to see people come downtown—and be able to come downtown by alternative transportation, not just cars—as well as other city tax bases, there's Barracks Roads, there's Whole Foods and some of the places that...if we want our citizens to be able to patronize our city amenities, we need to make sure they are able to get there.

[Brian Wheeler] And the follow-up, had to do with money and how you would fund it.

As we look at the whole picture, we need to look at all those pools of money that we currently have, and quite frankly I don't know how that will play out. I do think it's a strong priority for this community and basically where those funds will come from, I am just not in the know enough to know where those pots of money are, I just think it is a high priority for really a lot of our citizens here in Charlottesville.

3. How should the city, county and the University of Virginia work together to enhance our community's unique character and economic vitality??

Well of course the city, county, and UVa, while we have boundaries on paper, we really do work together and we are one community. Frankly, I think one of the places we are weakest is I think UVa is a grossly underutilized resource. It is a very powerful force in our community, yet it often stands alone. Where I would like to see UVa utilized more is in planning. There is a lot of expertise at UVa, not only in planning, but in social issues and education. It's such a high quality university that I think we could better utilize the expertise there.

And I think in doing so, if UVa was better integrated with the city's planning, there might be a better avenue for cooperation. Transportation is another place where UVa, city, county really need, well it's not that we don't work together, but we really need to ramp up, particularly as we look at redesigning our transportation system which I believe there is a lot of interest in doing. We just need to be sure everyone is at the table.

In terms of economic vitality, I think UVa is again—the expertise and the resources that are at UVa—could really fuel the city looking at attracting an employment identity. I think we will get into that a little later on in another question, but again by cooperating with UVa I think we could bring to the table a lot of interesting industry.

4. What changes, if any, would you make to the city's Comprehensive Plan?

This will be an important issue for the upcoming city council as the comprehensive plan will be reviewed and updated. What I would really like to see is an assurance that the separate plans, the separate issues in the comprehensive plan, are looked at comprehensively together. I'd like to see a matrix, whereby a decision, perhaps if it's in development, that part of that decision takes into account what impact does that have on education, what impact does that have on neighborhoods, what impact does that have on the environment, and be sure that we are really making all of our plans, as it relates to the comprehensive plans and all of our decisions, that we look at them in a very comprehensive way. I think too often what we see are unintended consequences for looking independently in one arena, that we don't anticipate the impact, say on the schools, that's one people can relate to. So as we are reviewing... and again with the One Community grant where we are looking at really working closely regionally, I think that will be really important to integrate into our comprehensive plan.

5. Last month the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce reported that Charlottesville lost 3,248 jobs during the years 2000 to 2010. What specifically should city council do to promote employment?

This is where I think it would be interesting to work with UVa, to promote industry, whether we are attracting it from elsewhere or whether we are growing it ourselves, that really grows an identity. The biomedical technology is one that people often cite, and it's very real and it's very promising, but there are other promising industries that are really being incubated at UVa. Whether it's energy-based or education-based, I think it would be a good idea to really look to what kind of support those kind of industries need and then work around that. It would also take, if our citizens aren't the ones getting those jobs it's not going to help us that much, so certainly from this perspective, we need to ensure we have training in our community to support those kinds of industries.

6. What is your top priority for action by City Council if you are elected?

I am quite intrigued with the city council's new priority, which I think you can sum up with "mutual respect." It's an issue that I've been very involved with over the years that I've been in Charlottesville particularly as it relates to education. That is issues of race, issues of poverty.

That goes back to as we update the comprehensive plan, I think we need to be very aware of what the implications are for our families that struggle. Of course we have many more now with the recession, the economy as it is, and

we need to be very cognizant of the impact that our decisions have on all of our families here.

7. What would you improve with respect to the city's parks and recreational facilities?

Well I think the city's parks and recreation department is fantastic. I have had a lot of involvement with them over the years, having run a park, which was a city-county park. I am a great admirer of city parks and rec. If I had to pick something, and there's certainly a lot of interest, and a lot happening right now, with trails. The city is becoming more involved with the trails system. It's been a kind of volunteer Rivanna Trails Foundation kind of effort up until now, but the city is really partnering well with Rivanna Trails.

I think parks and rec can really help to integrate our transportation alternatives. Trails will be a very big part of that. We are seeing it with the green belt trail over at Riverview Park. It is being used for transportation. I find this absolutely fascinating. People will walk to Pantops from Riverview Park along the multi-use trail. So multi-use trails will be something I think we will see more of and again I would hope that those will be well thought out in terms of transportation as well as recreation.

8. Are you planning to seek a new vote by the council on the previously approved 50-year water supply plan and how would you change the plan, if at all?

I don't think it's necessary to look at this as seeking out a vote. There will be a number of issues that this council has to vote on in the next months to year, and I don't know what the timing will be on that. I am well known as opposed to the current water supply plan. I would vote according to my well established platform on this which is that city interests must be protected and city ratepayers must be protected.

This issue crosses not only environmental issues, there is a social justice issue here about how much can our families—many of whom are struggling, more of whom are struggling than used to be—really how much more can we ask them to pay to support a plan that's really not going to help them. It's those kind of issues. There will be issues of giving up city resources.

Again, I do not support the fifty year water supply plan as it is now. How would I change it? I would want it to be more of a restoration-based, preservation-based, and conservation-based plan than it is now. I think we absolutely need to maintain the resources we have, and that of course includes dredging the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir. I look forward to hearing the bids that come in in the next months hopefully, from outside markets, the market-based approach.

How would I change it? I would try to get it to be more flexible, so that we can anticipate, or kind of a wait to see how population plays out, but more importantly how water use plays out. So I am more for the flexible plan. I supported not only dredging-based [plan], but the incremental increase [of the dam height] at Ragged Mountain Reservoir, not only in order to be able to adapt to changing times, but also so that the cost of the plan isn't front-loaded onto our current ratepayers.

9. Would you support switching from at-large seats to ward-based representation for elections to Charlottesville City Council? Why or why not?

Well I am certainly interested in looking at this issue. It doesn't necessarily have to be all at-large or all ward-based either, a combination might be a more reasonable approach. What we really need to do is ask why? Why are we are interested? The reason that I am interested in exploring this is that I would like to see better representation on council, not only to represent our changing demographics but also geographically. I am from the south side of Charlottesville. We haven't had that much representation and certainly a ward-based approach would pretty directly address a geographic concern, but whether it would address a diversity concern really needs to be examined. And there is data to do that, I just haven't seen it, and I'm not sure anybody has.

With the changing of our precincts since the census, it would be an interesting time to look at it because at least we know we have these precincts for the next 10 years. So this would be a great opportunity.

The other reason I think, getting better representation, I think would at least encourage more citizen involvement. If citizens think there's somebody on council who really represents them, I think it's likely they are more likely to get involved themselves.

10. If the federal lawsuit opposing the construction of the grade-separated interchange for the Meadow Creek Parkway is unsuccessful, will you support completion of the parkway?

Well I am not sure there will be any issue of that once the federal lawsuit is settled....If it can go ahead, my bigger concern will be making sure that the interchange, and any other infrastructure associated with the parkway, enables citizens to get to [McIntire] Park. That is one of the positives. And also that the park is developed in a way that makes it an amenity to the community and that we can actually make it work.

The other thing that I am concerned with, and that we will need to be very vigilant about, is the impact that the parkway might have on our neighborhoods and that's been on one of my concerns all along. I am opposed to the parkway on a number of different grounds, but I am very concerned about cut-through traffic. If it increases traffic, which I believe it will, I believe it will be a magnet for traffic, the congestion which we already have, is already here, before the parkway is ever built, will further exacerbate an already bad situation with people just trying to get to [Interstate] 64, or whether they are trying to get to some [other] place by using the parkway, that they will cut through our neighborhoods.

11. Should city council support moving the Rivanna Sewer Pump Station from its current location in Woolen Mills even if it will cost city and county ratepayers an additional \$15 million to \$18 million to do so?

First and foremost I do believe we should move the sewer pump station from Riverview Park. It should never have been there, although I think the park sort of came a bit after the pump station. It's an inappropriate place for it. It's certainly an inappropriate place to enlarge it.

My bigger concern about this issue, and the way this [question] is worded is that I don't think we know what each of these options will cost. I have got a long history with working with, or certainly observing, the Rivanna Water & Sewer Authority and I happen to know the point at which these decisions are right now are very preliminary numbers. It looks very favorable to keep it at Riverview Park but I am not at all convinced it is.

Will we ever know that it costs really \$15 to \$18 million more, it's a way of framing it that I think biases the decision a bit. I do think that when you make a mistake, sometimes you have to undo that mistake. The pump station in that location is a mistake, and we need to fix it.