



## **2013 Albemarle Board of Supervisors Candidate Interview**

*Candidate: Phillip Seay (I)*

On November 5, 2013, voters in the Jack Jouett Magisterial District go to the polls to elect their representative on the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors. This recording is Brian Wheeler's September 23, 2013 interview with Phillip Seay (I). Seay's opponent is Diantha McKeel (I).

*The audio of this interview and complete election coverage is available on the Charlottesville Tomorrow website:*

[http://www.cvilletomorrow.org/topics/county\\_elections/](http://www.cvilletomorrow.org/topics/county_elections/)

### **INTERVIEW**

**Mr. Seay, 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, 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, some of the questions you will be asked have been provided in advance, others have not. 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. Please describe your past experience that qualifies you to be on the Albemarle Board of Supervisors.**

I have been a public servant for 28 years. I Have worked in law enforcement as a field officer, as a juvenile probation officer. I have worked in public education for 13 years as a teacher, coach, administrator. I worked in both middle schools and high schools. I have been the executive director and director of a public non-profit since 2006.

I have worked at entry level, to mid-level, and somewhat upper management positions, and going through those levels you learn to work with many people with various backgrounds and fields of knowledge. I believe that you can better solve problems by discussing and talking with people and not talking at people. I have learned in my experience, and in speaking with the voters, that there's this gap between those that do and those that decide. I feel that my experiences can help reduce that gap. I can say, 'Hey guys have you thought about this? Let's have a conversation, I think we can solve this problem.'

This is what I have learned and I feel I can contribute this to county leadership.

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

I am not going to narrow it to a specific action. From a broader sense, basically [I want to] get more people, residents, involved with the process of local government. Most have one topic concerns, but having general knowledge of how the process works--from the individual to how it's effecting them, to their family, to their neighborhood, getting that conveyed properly to staff and even to the board of supervisors--I think helps bring a more informed and collaborative outcome and hopefully creates an understanding, or at least a blueprint for the community to sit there and go, 'OK I have an issue, this is how we can start discussing this issue and bring about resolve to this issue.'

I think it will actually in time reduce [the time] to solve issues. Everyone starts from point one. At least there's a sense where people know when they have an issue, which department deals with that, and they can speak to that department first. It's getting folks to understand where their problem can be solved as opposed to just griping about it openly. When there are more stakeholders and more people involved, you get some really good solutions.

**3. Do you support the construction of the Western Bypass of U.S. 29?  
Why or why not?**

I am going to be short and to the point on this one. As I understand it, this is a done deal. So we are going to move forward, and I am moving forward. If elected, I will work hard to make sure that the impact of this construction is reduced on the landowners and business owners especially with noise, water runoff, to make sure that they are protected. Because that was a concern of mine when this whole thing started. You know my history with VDOT. I could never get a straight answer as to how the property that I lived on, which was going to be impacted by this bypass, how it was going to be protected. The public has got to be aware of that and be involved in that [to get answers to these questions].

So with that addressed, it's just we need to make sure there's no impact. We are moving forward, and we need to take care of our property owners as we get this road built to make it the best road possible.

**4. Name one specific area of the county budget that you are concerned about and why. Do you think it deserves more funding or less?**

Being from a law enforcement background, that was my first job and I did that for six years, my concern is public safety. I am being told that we don't have enough law enforcement officers on the street. I am getting, and as I get into it I'll find out more about it, mixed information on whether we have enough fire protection, enough emergency services protection. We've got to be safe. This community has to be safe first. I feel that we need to make sure we have adequate personnel and that the personnel that we have are adequately trained and re-trained to serve our population. We have a diverse population, so it can't be one model of training that's going to address everything. We have to be prepared for incidents and situations that communities all across this country are facing every day. Whether unfortunately, and please may it not be here, but mass shootings, hostage situations, potential terror threats, and natural disasters. How do we handle them, how do we communicate? We just have to be safe and our residents have to be involved in that safety.

**5. Are the cash proffers paid by residential real estate developers too much, too little, or just about the right amount to contribute to the costs for community infrastructure?**

I am still studying this. I have been doing a lot of reading on the Internet. [The Free Enterprise Forum's] Neil Williamson wrote a very informative article recently. I have talked with land owners, I have talked with business owners. It seems to me that this needs to be an open discussion and not just decided by a small group of people. It needs to be a discussion with county staff, the board of supervisors, land owners, business folks, real estate folks, and their

interests need to be heard. I think that everybody can get in a room and figure out what the common ground here is and decide if we want this, how much do we want, or do we not want it at all.

**6. If real estate tax revenues increase, should Albemarle lower its property tax rate? Why or why not?**

Property taxes. Taxes. That's a wonderful subject, glamorous is it not? There's a big misconception by the public about what their tax dollars pay for. As I have been a public servant for many years, I have a greater understanding of this. The taxpayer just wants to make sure that their money is going for what it's supposed to go for. So with that said, it's important that the public understands what the rate is, why we have it, and what it pays for, most importantly the core essential services, and that there is fairness to each socioeconomic group and especially those on a fixed income.

**7. What is the best example to date of Albemarle County's neighborhood model form of development and why do you like it? What improvements could be made to our community's placemaking efforts?**

We all know a model, or a point of reference is a good start. However, I don't think we should be locked into one size or model that we apply to all situations. I have seen the Old Trail model. That looks awesome, but how many of us can afford to live in that situation? Will that model work in another situation? With that said, being flexible, and in tune with the environment, the land, the given location, I think it is very important to how a community or a neighborhood develops and how it can sustain itself.

**8. Business leaders and social service agencies have told the Albemarle Board of Supervisors 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?**

It will definitely be one of my priorities. Being from an education background, I see the advantage of getting young people involved in education-type programs, whether it is to learn a skill or whether it is to socialize. For example, I know that we have partnerships, and from what I understand money has increased over the past several years from the board to these programs.

I know that there are partnerships with the Boys & Girls Club, a fine organization. There is a partnership with the First Tee. The First Tee of Charlottesville actually does programs for [Albemarle County Public Schools'] Enterprise Center. The First Tee also does programs for children ages 5-6. When you watch a child that comes to the program for the first time at age 5, whether they attend a six-week session or whether you see them 12-18

weeks throughout the year, and then afterwards as they get older, you see how that initial involvement, understanding, the structure, and watching them grow and develop. It gives them more experiences, it gives them more opportunities. It's really neat to see it happen and it's just got to happen.

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

As I understand it, five percent of our 736 square miles is designated for growth areas, and the rest is to remain rural. Then obviously there is a balancing act between the rights of property owners, with what they want to do with their property, and their neighbors. As I understand it, there are tax incentives to keep large tracts of land rural, which is the [Acquisition of Conservation Easements] program.

So it's a balancing act. There are development areas. There are areas that's not for development. But say the land owner changes their mind. So again it's a balancing act and there needs to be a mechanism to just work with your neighbor. Too many times I find folks that want to do something, and if they had just walked across the street and said, 'Hey this is what I would like to do here. Can I have your support, or do you have some suggestions? How do you think it will impact you? How will it not impact you?'

Just having those conversations, you'd be surprised. You know there's the old saying, 'It's better to ask for forgiveness than permission.' I think in certain times, the more people you can get on board with your cause, sometimes you get more answers and more opportunities to further your cause along.

**10. Describe a part of local government that would benefit from increased city and county cooperation and that you would make a priority.**

I think as a city employee, and I have been a city employee since 1998, I have a unique perspective on this, and then having run the First Tee through parks and recreation since 2002. For example, in parks and recreation the county has certain services that it can provide that the city doesn't. [The city has] certain services that the county doesn't. We work really well together to blend those services and provide them for both city and county residents.

So I would hope that, if elected, I can take this opportunity if it presents itself, to work with our folks in the city and see what we can do. There's no question about it, for example, there are certain city programs where a good majority of the participants are non-residents, and the same thing with the county. So instead of reinventing the wheel and each one having their own, if we have something and we can make it better, let's do that.