

ASAP Update

How to Slow and Eventually Stop Population Growth

Part IV of a Multi-Part Series

In the first two parts of this series, we discussed how to “take our foot off the growth accelerator.” In Part III, we began to look at how to “apply the brake” to growth. In that article, we:

- Defined the goal—eventual stabilization of the region’s population in order to preserve its quality of life
- Narrowed our geographic focus to Albemarle County—but only for the purpose of this series
- Described the advantages of a long planning horizon and implementation timeline
- Listed five criteria for evaluating and selecting methods to control growth: legality, efficacy, justice, optimization of cost versus benefit, and understandability

In this article, we are going to outline, in very broad terms, one possible **framework** for slowing and eventually stopping Albemarle’s population growth. Over the next year or two, we hope that ASAP’s members will submit thoughtful letters and essays that either suggest alternative frameworks or describe various means for actualizing this framework. Ultimately, we intend to select the best ideas and present an *integrated* strategy for accomplishing ASAP’s long-term goal. It will not be the *only* way to slow and eventually stop growth, but it will be one way. In other words, ASAP hopes to demonstrate that there is *at least* one legal, efficacious, just, parsimonious, and intelligible way to eventually stabilize Albemarle’s population.

The framework suggested here is relatively straightforward; it is based on how land is used. There are two steps. First, permanently freeze the Growth Area Boundaries, the lines demarcating Albemarle’s Rural and Development Areas. Then deal with population growth in Albemarle’s Rural Areas (443,000 acres) and Development Areas (22,300 acres)¹ as separate issues. The City of Charlottesville would be treated as part of the Development Areas.

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¹ Albemarle’s Development (Growth) Areas include the urban ring surrounding Charlottesville, both sides of Route 29 as far north as GE Fanuc, Crozet, and the area around Glenmore on Route 250 East.

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The Growth Area Boundaries

The Growth Area Boundaries are the linchpin of the framework. An urban growth boundary is a “regulatory line established to distinguish between urban and rural land uses. It is designed to encourage growth within the urban area with higher density zoning and discourage it outside the boundary with lower density zoning and restricted public infrastructure.”²

At ASAP’s November meeting, Jeff Werner of the Piedmont Environmental Council presented the following data:

	City of Charlottesville	Albemarle County Development Areas	Albemarle County Rural Areas
Acreage	7,000	23,000	440,000
Population	40,000	40,000	44,000
Density: Persons/Acre	5.7	1.7	0.1

According to Werner, if the County’s Development Areas were built to the same population density as that of the City, the former could support another 134,000 residents. Thus, the existing Development Areas provide plenty of space for population growth over the next two or three decades. There

is no compelling rationale for expanding the boundaries in the near term.

The task of stabilizing Albemarle’s population will be far simpler if the Growth Area Boundaries are permanently frozen and appropriate solutions are sought for stabilizing population in the low-density Rural Areas and high-density urban areas. Otherwise, expanding Growth Area Boundaries will present a moving population target.

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- Carleton Ray

² Virginia Natural Resources Leadership Institute, “Smart Growth and Conservation of Open Space: Private Markets, Public Responsibilities,” 2001.

Examples of How Albemarle Might Slow Population Growth in the Rural Areas

At the November meeting, Werner also presented data on Albemarle County’s buildout potential.³ Based on the existing number of development “rights,” another 89,000 dwelling units can be built, including 54,000 in the Rural Areas.

	Albemarle County Development Areas	Albemarle County Rural Areas
Potential Number of Dwelling Units	51,000	70,000
Existing Number of Dwelling Units	16,000	17,000
Remaining Potential	35,000	54,000

Thus, even if Albemarle’s Growth Area Boundaries are permanently frozen, it will only be a matter of time before the County’s Rural Areas are built out—unless the population can be stabilized. How could one go about protecting the bulk of the Rural Areas? Without foreclosing other options, two come to mind.

1. Purchase of development rights (PDR). Albemarle could acquire development rights by purchasing them. To have an impact on population growth in the Rural Areas, Albemarle would have to make a sizable investment. Funds could be obtained through:

- **Elimination of land use valuation.**⁴ Since 1975, Albemarle County has taxed real estate devoted to agriculture, horticulture, forestry, and open space at lower than fair market value. This program, known as land use valuation, applies to parcels of 20 or more acres. The elimination of land use would increase the County’s *annual* real estate tax revenues by \$9 million.⁵ The County could devote all of the extra tax revenue to its Acquisition of Conservation Easements (ACE) program, permanently protecting as many as 10,000 acres each year.⁶ Those who currently employ land use for its intended purpose (such as full-time farmers) could be given the highest priority under new ACE guidelines. Alternatively, eligibility for the land use program could be tightened in a way that would not penalize landowners who are *really* trying to preserve land. For example, it could be made available only to those whose land is under conservation easement or placed

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³ Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, 1996 Buildout Study.

⁴ Tom Loach, an ASAP Board member and President of the Albemarle Neighborhood Association, suggested this strategy.

⁵ Albemarle County Real Estate Department, quoted in John Borgmeyer, “Land use facts,” *C-ville Weekly*, 1 April 2003, 9.

⁶ See Part III of this series, *ASAP Update*, December 2003, 3.

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in an Agricultural/Forestral District for at least 15 years.⁷ Taxes collected from those removed from the Land Use Program could be invested in the ACE Program.

- **A large bond issue.** Citizens for Albemarle has suggested this a number of times, most recently in December 2003.⁸ The state of New Jersey (\$3 billion in 1998)⁹ and Montgomery County outside Philadelphia (\$150 million in 2003)¹⁰ have approved such bond issues, and the state of Michigan is contemplating a statewide bond issue (perhaps as high as \$1 billion) to buy rights to preserve open land.¹¹ Bucks County, PA, has been purchasing conservation easements since 1990. In 1997, it approved a \$59 million bond to preserve open space. Some of this money will be used to purchase additional agricultural conservation easements, while the remainder will be used to buy parkland and natural areas.¹²
- **Special tax assessments.** In November 2003, the city of Ann Arbor, MI, approved a 30-year extension of an existing property tax to raise some \$84 million to protect roughly 8,000 acres of farmland around the city.¹³

2. Rezoning. Albemarle could reduce development rights through rezoning, but only if a number of criteria are met.¹⁴ A rezoning must promote or protect a community's quality of life¹⁵ and "must be founded upon a credible planning rationale."¹⁶ One such rationale might be protecting the ecosystems that provide drinking water, form soil, produce food, treat waste, control erosion, and provide recreational activities. These "free" ecological services, if lost, would be

⁷ Al Weed, a member of ASAP's Board of Directors and a candidate for U. S. Congress, suggested this alternative.

⁸ David Dadurka, "Farmers take on proposal: Debate addition to Albemarle plan," *The Daily Progress*, 17 December 2003, A1, A10.

⁹ Steve Chambers, "Governor's new pitch on sprawl: buy land," *New Jersey Star-Ledger*, 6 October 2003.

¹⁰ Bob Martin, "'Open' space sometimes isn't," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 13 November 2003.

¹¹ Dawson Bell, "Study says state must step up preservation efforts," *Detroit Free Press*, 5 August 2003.

¹² "Agricultural Land Preservation Program" and "Open Space Program," Bucks County [PA] Government: Planning Commission: Policy website.

¹³ Keith Schneider, "At the polls, another good day for smart growth: Ann Arbor greenbelt," *Great Lakes Bulletin News Service*, 6 November 2003.

¹⁴ Albemarle County's Attorney's Office, *The Albemarle County Land Use Law Handbook*, October 2001, Chapter 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12-1.

¹⁶ The Virginia Chapter of the American Planning Association, *Virginia's Growth Management Tools*, June 1999, updated January 2002.

impossible or impractical to restore.¹⁷ Albemarle's best ecosystems are its watersheds. Protecting all 1,700 miles of streams in Albemarle County with a minimal 100-foot buffer would preserve nine percent of the County's land mass. Using a more ecologically sound 600-foot buffer would preserve almost half of the County.¹⁸

Of course, many view downzoning as unfair, violating one of the criteria ASAP has established for developing a strategy to stabilize the population. On the other hand, downzoning may not be so unfair. A rigorous study by a non-profit, non-partisan corporation concluded, "Conventional wisdom that zoning has a uniformly negative effect on land prices is untrue. It is also untrue that downzoning has a uniformly positive or neutral effect on prices in all cases. There are many factors that influence value..."¹⁹

Examples of How Albemarle/Charlottesville Might Slow Population Growth in the Urban Areas

Ideally, freezing the Growth Area Boundaries will lead to more thoughtful (horizontal and vertical) development in the urban areas. After all, one tends to, or should, use a finite resource more frugally. Higher service levels, such as inexpensive mass transit and better mixed-use neighborhoods, should accompany increased density; otherwise, urban area residents might resist such a plan.

Slowing population growth in the urban areas will be even more difficult than in the Rural Areas, although, in order to preserve their quality of life, residents of urban areas will probably resist growth beyond some level. Examples of strategies that might effectively slow urban population growth include:

- Encouraging new businesses to locate here if they can *demonstrate* that they will provide new or better jobs for *existing* residents, and discouraging businesses that cannot do so.
- Redirecting future growth in higher education (including research park initiatives) *away* from the University of Virginia's grounds in Charlottesville and *toward* a UVa satellite or new institution in Virginia's economically depressed Southside. A new campus would benefit that area while sparing Albemarle further UVa-driven population growth.

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¹⁷ See Robert Constanza et al., "The Value of the World's Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital," *Nature* 387, no. 6630 (15 May 1997): 253-260.

¹⁸ Dr. G. Carleton Ray, a member of ASAP's Board of Directors and a Research Professor in the Department of Environmental Sciences at the University of Virginia, provided this data.

¹⁹ Rob Etgen et al., *Downzoning: Does It Protect Working Landscapes and Maintain Equity for the Landowner?* (Maryland Center for Agro-Ecology, Inc., December 2003): iv.

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We Need Your Input

This article has outlined, in very broad terms, one possible **framework**, based on land usage, for slowing and eventually stopping Albemarle's population growth. It has suggested that we freeze the Growth Area Boundaries and deal with population growth in the Rural and Development Areas as somewhat separate issues. It has provided examples of tactics that the County and City could employ. It has suggested that extinguishing development rights in the Rural Areas and resistance to further population growth in the urban areas could lead to population equilibrium in the County. Please keep in mind that we are trying to *illustrate* how one might go about the task of slowing and eventually stopping population growth. We are not suggesting that this is *the* framework, nor are we laying out a strategy just yet. Rather, we are inviting you to help us identify the best framework, flesh it out, and create a strategy.

So, we need your input. How do **you** think we should slow and eventually stop population growth in the Rural Areas and the Development Areas/Charlottesville? Keep in mind our criteria; your suggestions should be legal, effective, fair, economical, and understandable. Please e-mail your letters and essays to harry@harrydale.com or mail them to: ASAP Editor, P. O. Box 90, White Hall, VA 22987.

The Future Rests in What We Are Now

Preston Lea Campbell, Jr., is the owner, publisher, and editor of the award-winning *Recorder*, an independent weekly newspaper that serves Virginia's Allegheny Highlands. In an article recently published in the *UVA Alumni News*, Campbell said, "[The Allegheny Highlands are] virtually unspoiled by the tasteless development that robs us of our sense of what's good, beautiful, and meaningful."²⁵ Campbell's interviewer wrote:

Campbell has watched the Shenandoah Valley succumb to increasing development over the past several years and considers the *Recorder* an essential part of the floodgate against such development in Highland and Bath Counties. "The responsibility of any community newspaper is to support the community it publishes in," says Campbell. "It's not a chamber of commerce responsibility. You have to have a sense of what the place you publish your newspaper in should look like." He adds, "If the *Recorder* has a core belief, it's that the future of these two counties rests in what they are now, not in what they could be if developed."²⁶

²⁵ Deborah R. Huso, "Fit to Print," *UVA Alumni News*, Fall 2003, 94.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

An Introduction to Herman E. Daly and Ecological Economics

Herman Daly, a professor at the University of Maryland, is an expert on the environment, economic development, and population issues. The "dean of ecological economics," he co-founded the journal by that name. Daly challenges the conventional notion that growth is always good. In the journal *The Social Contract*, John Attarian provided the following summary of Daly's ideas.

Daly maintains that the economy is a subset of an ecosystem which is finite, non-growing, and materially closed (i.e., no matter enters or leaves it.) The economy uses the environment as a source for material inputs and as a sink for wastes. Unfortunately ... the economy has become so large relative to the ecosystem that human activity is undermining the ecosystem's ability to support life. Resource finitude and the entropy law [in a closed system, the availability of useful energy always declines] make perpetual economic growth impossible. Accordingly, we must abandon growth (quantitative enlargement) in favor of development (qualitative improvement) and a "steady-state economy" which can be sustained long-term. ...

Daly's vivid awareness of the reality of limits is sharply at odds with mainstream economics, which lives in an artificial alternative universe of abstract economic models and treats limits as fictions and resources as unimportant. ... Integrating theology, ethics, science, and economics, Daly's ecological economics is the kind of comprehensive vision we too seldom see.²⁰

In an article on steady-state economics, Daly wrote the following.

The impact on the environment comes from the scale of throughput that can be decomposed into three factors:

$$I = P \text{ times } A \text{ times } T$$

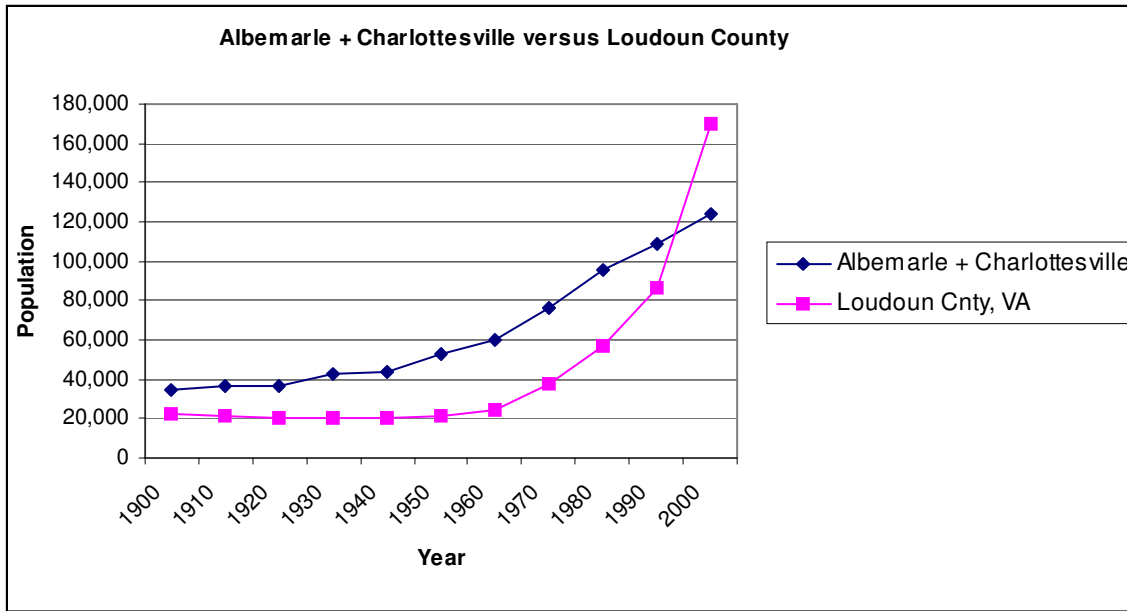
... Environmental impact (**I**) equals population (**P**) times affluence (**A**) times technology (**T**). ... Population (**P**) is projected to double in roughly the next 40 years. Per capita gross national product (**A**) in the high-income countries is on the order of 23 times higher than for the low- and middle-income countries. If the goal is for the poor to catch up with the rich, and there is no further increase in the average per capita income of the rich countries over the next 40 years, then to avoid greater impact on the environment than today, technology (**T**) would have to improve by a factor of 2 times 23 = 46. ... Since technical improvement in resource efficiency by a factor of 20 to 40 [let alone 46] is very unlikely, we can be sure that we will have to have recourse to reductions in population and affluence if we are to avoid wholesale environmental degradation.²¹

²⁰ John Attarian, "Herman Daly's Ecological Economics: An Introductory Note," *The Social Contract* 13 (2003): 153-154.

²¹ Herman E. Daly, "Steady-State Economics: Concepts, Questions, Policies," *The Social Contract* 13 (2003): 163-170.

Albemarle versus Loudoun

In June, the Piedmont Environmental Council published the first *Albemarle County Clarion*, which compared Albemarle to Loudoun County and warned, “Albemarle could turn into Loudoun.” After reading the *Clarion*, one of ASAP’s members wrote that it would be helpful to see a graph showing Albemarle’s and Loudoun’s population growth from 1900 to the present and projections for the next several decades. The following chart shows growth during the last century.²² We have lumped Charlottesville and Albemarle together because Loudoun’s numbers include all of its communities (such as Leesburg). We have not graphed any projections, although we discuss them below.²³



The Similarities	The Differences
Both Albemarle and Loudoun are experiencing growth pressures.	Loudoun’s pressure is due to its proximity to a growing metropolitan area, Washington, DC. Albemarle’s pressure is due to the presence of the University of Virginia and the area’s natural beauty.
Albemarle’s and Loudoun’s population problems are caused by their proximity to employment centers.	Loudoun is a bedroom community for Washington, DC. Albemarle/Charlottesville, on the other hand, is an employment center. It has 1.2 jobs for every adult of working age who resides within its boundaries. ²⁴ It is dumping major population growth on its neighboring counties, particularly the bedroom communities of Fluvanna and Greene.
Both Albemarle and Loudoun have experienced tremendous growth in the last four decades.	Loudoun is now growing at a much faster rate. The Virginia Employment Commission estimates that Loudoun’s population will approach 400,000 by 2030, while Albemarle and Charlottesville’s will be around 160,000.
At one point in the mid-1990s, both localities had the same population. Citizens in both communities realized that population growth threatened their quality of life.	Loudoun’s citizens, spurred on by the obvious, implemented a new Comprehensive Plan and new zoning measures. However, a newly elected pro-growth majority on Loudoun’s Board of Supervisors might reverse some of that progress. Albemarle’s citizens are not yet as alarmed as Loudoun’s, probably because the pace of growth here is more insidious.

²² U.S. Census Bureau.

²³ It is difficult to accurately estimate population growth. For example, the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service estimates that Albemarle’s annual population growth has slowed from 2.1% to 1.3% and that the County’s population was 88,000 in September 2003. Others think that the historical growth rate of the 1980’s and 1990’s (a compound annual growth rate of 2.1% over 20 years) has continued unabated and that the County’s current population is higher than 88,000. We will not know for sure until the 2010 Census is published.

²⁴ Davenport & Company LLC, *Current Financial Status and Effect of Long Range Capital Financing*, report to Albemarle County, VA, March 5, 2003, p. 12: graph titled “Jobs as a Percentage of Population” corrected by a June 17, 2003, e-mail from Courtney Rogers (Davenport & Co.) to Roxanne White (Albemarle County Assistant County Executive). The 2000 U.S. Census shows that 33.4% of Albemarle County and City of Charlottesville residents are under age 18 or older than 64. Applying this figure to the Davenport data yields 1.17 jobs per person age 18-64 inclusive.

The Environmental Education Center

The Environmental Education Center (EEC) is an independent, non-profit organization that has worked in the Charlottesville-Albemarle area since the early 1990s. Its mission is to implement a regional program of environmental education for the community and its schools that encourages informed participation in the issues, decisions, and projects that shape our environment. The EEC has helped students to design and own conservation projects; gathered data about the health of our local waterways; conducted summer environmental education camps for 6th through 9th graders; published Green Lights Directories of local organizations and resources; participated in community events such as Earth Week, Eco-Summit, and the Student Water Congress; and educated teachers to help expand local environmental literacy.

Upcoming ASAP Meetings

February 5 – General membership meeting, 7:30 p.m., Westminster Presbyterian Church Library, 190 Rugby Road. Topic: **Local Water and the Limits of Growth: A Continuing Conversation**. Speakers: Nick Evans, Chairman of the Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District and President of Virginia Groundwater LLC; John Hermsmeier, Program Director for the Environmental Education Center (see box at left); and Carleton Ray, Professor of Environmental Science at the University of Virginia.

March 4 – General membership meeting, 7:30 p.m., Westminster Presbyterian Church Library, 190 Rugby Road. Topic to be announced.

February 19 and March 18 – Board meetings, 8:00 a.m., Room 235, Albemarle County Office Building – members welcome

ASAP is a non-profit corporation organized under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Its **mission** is to increase knowledge and awareness about the effects of net population growth on our natural environment and quality of life, and to advocate appropriate policies and mechanisms that will enable our region to reach a sustainable population size. To achieve this, ASAP will engage in research, community education, policy development, and advocacy. ASAP publishes this **newsletter** monthly except for combined June-July and January-February issues. Submit editorial comments to the newsletter's editor, Harry Levins, at harry@harrydale.com. Articles may be reprinted or excerpted with attribution. To become a member of ASAP and/or to receive this newsletter and a notice of ASAP events, contact crijack@cville.net.



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