

ASAP Update

Recap of ASAP's May 6th Membership Meeting Albemarle County's Growth Areas: Their Past, Present, and Future

Presenters:

- **David Benish**, Chief of Planning for Albemarle County and a County employee since 1985
- **Rich Collins**, the Lewis Professor of Urban and Environmental Planning in the University of Virginia's School of Architecture, the founder and Director of the School's Institute for Environmental Negotiation, and a member of ASAP's Board of Directors
- **Tom Loach**, Past President of the Crozet Community Association and the Albemarle Neighborhood Association and a member of ASAP's Board of Directors

History of Albemarle County's Growth Areas

For growth management purposes, Albemarle County's 726 square miles are divided into two parts: the "Growth Areas" (or "Development Areas"—36 square miles) and the "Rural Areas" (690 square miles). Those of us concerned about rapid growth have devoted most of our attention to the pace of new development in the Rural Areas. But we must not neglect the expanding population in the Growth Areas. ASAP's May meeting explored this topic.

David Benish described the history of Albemarle's Growth Areas. The County's growth management policy, delineated in its Comprehensive Plan, aims to channel growth into specific areas of the County. These designated Development Areas, or Growth Areas, are identified in the Land Use Section of the Comprehensive Plan. They include the urban ring around Charlottesville, both sides of Route 29 as far north as GE Fanuc, Crozet, and the area around Glenmore on Route 250 East. The Growth Areas comprise 22,300 acres, approximately 5% of the County's land area.

The County's first Comprehensive Plan was adopted in **1971**. Based on some fairly aggressive population projections, it designated more than 45,000 acres for growth and included 20 development areas: the urban ring, five communities (e.g., Crozet), and 14 Villages (e.g., Rivanna Village/Glenmore). In addition, in the early 1970s the County was fighting with the

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Recap of ASAP's June 3rd Membership Meeting Tim Hulbert, Blake Hurt, and Chuck Rotgin Present Their Views on Growth¹

Presenters:

- **Timothy Hulbert**, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce
- **Blake Hurt**, President of Capital Real Estate, the developer of Republic Plaza
- **Charles Rotgin, Jr.**, President and Chief Executive Officer of Great Eastern Management Company, the developer North Pointe

If Not ASAP's Vision, What?

At ASAP's June 3rd meeting, Tim Hulbert, Blake Hurt, and Chuck Rotgin presented their long-term visions for Albemarle County. David Dadurka of *The Daily Progress* summarized the three men's views in his June 4th article, "Business leaders argue for more growth" (page A3). Dadurka wrote, "Will population growth in Albemarle County ever stop? Three local businessmen hope not." Echoing comments made by the other two speakers, Hulbert said, "Growth is inevitable in any vital and attractive community. The Chamber embraces economic growth as the means to enhance the human, economic, cultural, and natural characteristics of the greater Charlottesville community." He rejected the notion that we can "preordain a vision" 50 to 80 years into the future. All three speakers presented an upbeat, inspiring vision of the area's future.

Hulbert, Hurt, and Rotgin rejected ASAP's use of straight-line extrapolations to project future population growth. Rotgin assured us, "The nominal growth in Albemarle will remain, at best, relatively stable and, as a percentage of population, will actually decrease. ... We are growing at about 1,500 people a year on a base of about 125,000. I don't believe that's unabated growth; I think that's healthy growth."

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¹ This article is based on handwritten notes made during the presentations and an audio recording of the event.

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City of Charlottesville over annexation issues. The County's position was enhanced by designating lots of land for growth and building the supporting infrastructure.

Realizing that the early-1970s population projections were overstated, the 1977 revision to the Comprehensive Plan started to reduce the number of development areas and the overall acreage designated for growth. The 1977 Plan eliminated seven villages and one community from the list of Growth Areas. The 1982 revision continued the trend started in 1977 and dropped a couple more villages.

The 1989 revision to the Comprehensive Plan reduced the Growth Areas to their present level by dropping Earlysville, Ivy, North Garden, and Stoney Point.² By the late 1980s, Earlysville had absorbed considerable population growth, and most of its residents objected to its designation as a Growth Area. Ivy was also largely built out; in addition, its designation as a growth area had always been inconsistent with some of the underlying principles of the County's growth management policy, such as protection of the water supply. The County considered it too costly to extend public utilities to North Garden and Stoney Point, and the ground in those areas is not amenable to wells and septic systems.

Why Crozet Was Designated as a Growth Area

The County has used a number of criteria to make Growth Area decisions: historic patterns of growth, the presence of existing infrastructure, an area's topography and soil, and the absence of natural resources the County wishes to protect. Crozet was designated a Growth Area in the County's first (1971) Comprehensive Plan for many reasons. A community since the late 1800s, by 1970 it was a small town with a substantial number of residents and a major industry (ConAgra). The Beaver Creek Reservoir, Crozet's source of water, had been developed in the 1960s. In 1971 Crozet had a major sewage problem; providing new infrastructure would solve the problem. The I-64/Route 250 interchange was only a mile away, and a railroad line with a siding ran through the town. In making the designation, the County wanted to support a community and employment center that already existed.

Discouraging Growth in Albemarle's Rural Areas

To discourage growth in the Rural Areas, Albemarle County tries to refrain from extending water and sewer pipes into those areas. However, exceptions are made for reasons of health and safety. In addition, before the County had fully articulated its growth management policies, it extended utilities to Farmington, the Flordon subdivision west of

² The Growth Areas now include seven urban neighborhoods (the urban ring); the communities of Crozet, Hollymead, Piney Mountain; and the Village of Rivanna (Glenmore).

Farmington, the Ivy area, and the Key West subdivision off Route 20.

During the 1970s and 1980s, as the County's growth management policy was being honed, more growth took place in the Rural Areas than in the Growth Areas. As Benish phrased it, the sticks to ward off growth in the Rural Areas weren't that good, and there were too few carrots to direct growth into the Growth Areas. Currently, 200 to 300 building permits are issued each year for the Rural Areas. Most of these are for single-family, detached homes.

In 1980, the County downzoned the watershed supplying the urban area's drinking water. Each affected parcel retained up to five "development rights" on the first 10 acres. Additional homes could be built on "non-development-right" lots of at least 21 acres. During the 1989 revision of the Comprehensive Plan, the County considered but rejected the idea of increasing the minimum "non-development-right" lot size from 21 acres to 42 acres. During this year's review of the Rural Areas subsection of the Comprehensive Plan, increasing the lot size from 21 acres to 50 acres was considered, but the Planning Commission has not been receptive to the suggestion.

In response to a question, Benish said that there are no new items in the current revisions to the Comprehensive Plan that will help control or slow growth. He said the most direct way to control growth is to reduce development rights, but, politically, there is no movement in that direction. However, the County employs *indirect* approaches, such as land use taxation, that encourage people to retain land and not subdivide it. These approaches do not extinguish development rights; rather, they discourage their use.

Scottsville—A Special Case

Scottsville was a designated Growth Area in the County until 1994, when the Town of Scottsville annexed the land designated by the County for growth. As a town, Scottsville has its own Comprehensive Plan and governs the use of land within the town limits, just as Charlottesville makes its own growth decisions. However, the County must pay for Scottsville's schools and road improvements, as Scottsville's residents pay County taxes. In early April, Republic Land Development announced that it wished to build 700 homes just north of downtown Scottsville on land zoned for "planned residential development." (Editor's note: A development of that size would quadruple Scottsville's current population of 600.)

The Master Plan for the Community of Crozet

Tom Loach discussed Crozet's history and the recently completed master planning process. Crozet was founded in 1876 and eventually became the commercial center for western Albemarle. It had a movie theater, a bus line that ran

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to the Miller School, and clothing stores. By 1990, it had grown to 550 houses. Since then, another 450 homes have been built. Under the Master Plan, Crozet will grow from its current population of 3,000 to about 12,000 residents.³

While Loach believes that the Master Plan is a good plan, he is concerned that the County may not provide the money to *implement* the plan. For example, improvements to Jarmans Gap Road, which is experiencing ever higher levels of traffic, were supposed to have been made this year, but they have been postponed to 2008.

A New Approach to Planning

Rich Collins became Chair of the Department of Urban and Environmental Planning at the University of Virginia in 1974. Prior to that, it had been called the Department of City Planning. Collins said that the name change mirrored a change in the approach to planning. Dominated by economics up to that point, planning began to consider environmental and quality of life issues. Nonetheless, he believes most planners still resign themselves to accommodating growth, at best slowing it down or “managing” it. Collins, on the other hand, believes that, when appropriate, citizens must say, “Enough! Growth is destroying what we value about our community.” Communities that are economically secure and populated by intelligent, engaged citizens—like Charlottesville/Albemarle—must lead the way.

Collins said, “We have so emphasized those aspects of property that relate to development, growth, expansion, and money, that we have forgotten what enjoyment means. *Property* was originally concerned with the enjoyment of what it is that you *possessed*. [This meaning] has been lost, and we need to recover it.”

Rich Collins’ comments on the June 3rd meeting

“Hulbert, Hurt, and Rotgin rejected the premise that growth in a community can ever bring more costs than benefits. In short, they are committed to perpetual expansion. Apparently, they are unwilling to look at any evidence that ecological and economic principles such as diseconomies of scale and ‘overshoot and collapse’ have any local or regional application.”

³ Consultants calculated the eventual build-out population of 12,000 by analyzing the by-right development potential within the Crozet Growth Area.

Hulbert, Hurt, and Rotgin

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Hurt, looking at the area’s population growth and that of the University of Virginia student body from 1900 to 2000, stated that the area’s population is a function of the number of UVa students. Specifically, he said, for any given year, you can calculate Albemarle/Charlottesville’s population (+/- 10%) by multiplying UVa’s student population by four and adding that figure to Albemarle/Charlottesville’s population in 1900 (35,000).

Current population estimate for Albemarle/Charlottesville = 35,000 + 4 x (current UVa student population)

We checked his math, and we cannot find fault with his equation. The chart on page 5 shows, by decade from 1900 to 2000:

- The total UVa student population (column a) and the combined Albemarle/Charlottesville population (column b)
- The population estimates produced using Hurt’s equation (column c)
- The error rates, or the differences between the actual populations and the estimates (columns d and e)

The greatest error rate was 11.6% in the year 2000. The correlation between Albemarle/Charlottesville’s population and UVa’s student population is 0.989, or an almost perfect correlation.⁴

Hurt cited the 100 years of population data shown in the table to refute ASAP’s growth projections based on 30 years of data (1970-2000). Hurt then went a step further. Assuming that the equation shown above will remain valid for another 85 years, and making at least four other assumptions about the future, Hurt predicted that the population of Albemarle and Charlottesville will grow from the current 130,000 to a modest 217,000 by 2085—a compound annual growth rate of only 0.64%.⁵

Tim Hulbert, declining to make any numerical predictions but admitting that you “can’t grow exponentially, endlessly,” joked that if the area’s population *did* double, it would be ranked as both the *best* and the *second best* place to live in the country.

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⁴ The correlations between Charlottesville’s population and the student population, and Albemarle’s population and the student population, are also very high—0.908 and 0.936, respectively.

⁵ In predicting a 2085 population of 217,000, Hurt made assumptions about the future growth rate of Virginia’s population, the future birth rate, the percentage of the future population that will be student age, and the percentage of those students UVa will attract. He also assumed his Albemarle-Charlottesville-UVa equation will remain valid for another 85 years, even though the equation’s population estimate for the year 2000—the final year in the series of data—shows the greatest deviation from the actual population.

Hulbert, Hurt, and Rotgin

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The three lockstep presentations certainly sounded convincing. Growth will never stop. Growth is good. Don't worry about the numbers, because they will never become very large. We'll even prove it to you. And don't believe ASAP: you shouldn't use "straight-line extrapolation" to project the area's future population.

Let's take a closer look at the three speakers' use of mathematics.

For 100 years—from 1900 to 2000—the area's population has grown at a compound annual rate of 1.3%. Yet Hurt—even though he used the same 100-year record as the basis for his equation described above—claims that the compound annual growth rate will drop by half, to 0.64%, for the period 2005 to 2085. This rather startling prediction is based on multiple assumptions about future growth in Virginia.

Accurately predicting the future is a difficult enterprise. But some models for doing so are more plausible than others. ASAP believes that "straight-line extrapolation" based on a 100-year record will be more likely to accurately predict the future than Hurt's complex calculations based on multiple assumptions. Moreover, we think the growth rate of the past 20 years—2.1% per year in Albemarle County—is a much better predictor of future growth than the growth rate in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Regarding Hurt's equation, does correlation imply causation? Not necessarily. The growth in the number of students has slowed considerably since 1980, yet the population growth of Albemarle/Charlottesville has remained steady at around 14% per decade. While we agree that the growth of the University does indeed explain a large part of the area's population growth, we believe other factors—such as the attractiveness of the area for retirees and entrepreneurs—are playing increasingly larger roles. Hurt admitted that, as the community becomes larger and more sophisticated, other factors in addition to the University will help drive growth.

During the meeting, Chuck Rotgin often referred to a steady growth of 1,500 people per year (a current annual growth rate of about 1.15%⁶). With this kind of growth, Albemarle/Charlottesville would have a population of about 250,000 by 2085. However, holding each year's increase in population to a fixed number implies a steady *decrease* in the *growth rate* over time—something this area is unlikely to experience, given its ranking as the best place to live in the country.⁷

⁶ 1,500 divided by 130,000 (Albemarle/Charlottesville's population in 2004) equals 1.15%.

⁷ The Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service has estimated that Albemarle's population has grown at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 1.5% from April 1, 2000, through June 30, 2003. This low rate of growth, the lowest in over three decades, may be a temporary effect of the recent economic doldrums which have

Using the 100-year historical annual growth rate of 1.3%, Albemarle/Charlottesville's population will be 366,000 in 2085—70% more than Hurt's prediction and 46% more than Rotgin's—and 443,000 in 2100—three and a half times the 2000 population.

Dr. Carleton Ray, a member of ASAP's Board of Directors, had the last word at the meeting:

I'm an ecologist. We ecologists have a habit of looking at the past to analyze and predict the future. There is not one single example that I know of, or have ever read about, where an animal, plant, or human population has grown continuously without collapse. Sooner or later it's going to happen. And the reason usually is resources. How can we continue to grow without depleting space, water, biodiversity, and other resources? How can we continue to grow without depleting these resources and affecting our quality of life?

ASAP will devote its August 5th general membership meeting to a discussion of the comments made by Hulbert, Hurt, and Rotgin. See "Upcoming ASAP Meetings" on page 6.

The Tyranny of Small Decisions

As William Odum wrote in the early 1980s, "Ideally, a society's problems are resolved through a system of nested levels of public decisions."⁸ Individuals and small groups make decisions at low levels. Governmental bodies—local, state, and federal—make decisions at higher levels. Experts at the higher levels set rules for decision making at lower levels.

That's the theory. Odum describes the reality:

Unfortunately, important decisions are often reached in an entirely different manner. A series of small, apparently independent decisions are made, often by individuals or small groups of individuals. The end result is that a big decision occurs as an accretion of these small decisions; the central question is never addressed directly at the higher decision-making levels. Usually, this process does not produce an optimal, desired, or preferred solution for society.

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wreaked well publicized havoc on state budgets nationwide. The Center estimates Charlottesville *lost* 600 residents during that same period, giving the City a CAGR of -0.4%. The combined CAGR for City and County is 0.9%.

⁸ William E. Odum, "Environmental Degradation and the Tyranny of Small Decisions," *BioScience* 32, no. 9 (October 1982): 728-729.

**Albemarle/Charlottesville and UVa Student Populations by Decade, 1900-2000,
and an Analysis of Blake Hurt's Equation:
Albemarle/Charlottesville population = 35,000 + (4 x UVa student population)**

	a	b	c	d	e	<u>% chg. decade over decade</u>	
	UVa Total Student Population *	Actual Pop. of Albemarle + C'ville	Hurt's Estimate	Estimate Minus Actual	% Difference	Albemarle + C'ville Population	UVa Student Population
1900	593	34,922	37,370	2,448	7.0%	N/A	N/A
1910	790	36,636	38,160	1,524	4.2%	4.91%	33.33%
1920	1,385	36,693	40,538	3,845	10.5%	0.16%	75.25%
1930	2,311	42,226	44,242	2,016	4.8%	15.08%	66.88%
1940	2,573	44,052	45,290	1,238	2.8%	4.32%	11.34%
1950	3,978	52,631	50,910	-1,721	-3.3%	19.47%	54.62%
1960	4,825	60,396	54,298	-6,098	-10.1%	14.75%	21.29%
1970	10,669	76,660	77,676	1,016	1.3%	26.93%	121.14%
1980	16,208	95,699	99,832	4,133	4.3%	24.84%	51.92%
1990	17,829	108,647	106,314	-2,333	-2.1%	13.53%	10.00%
2000	18,721	124,285	109,882	-14,403	-11.6%	14.39%	5.00%
CAGR, 1900- 2000	3.51%	1.28%		CAGR = compound annual growth rate			

Sources of data: U.S. Census Bureau and the University of Virginia.

* The UVa total student pop. for any given year is actually the avg. for a 10-yr. period: the yr. shown, the 5 preceding yrs., and the 4 following yrs. For example, the 1900 figure is actually the avg. for the yrs. 1895-1904, inclusive.

April 14th VIRGINIA CURRENTS Special

What Price Growth?

Panelists:

- **Jack Marshall**, President of ASAP
- **Harrison Rue**, Executive Director of the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission
- **Neil Williamson**, Executive Director of the Free Enterprise Forum, a privately funded public policy think tank

On April 14th, ASAP's President, a regional planner, and the executive director of a business-supported think tank debated growth before a live audience in Charlottesville. Moderated by Virginia Currents' host, **May-Lily Lee**, the special was taped and broadcast by the local PBS affiliate, WHTJ Charlottesville. ASAP has several WHTJ-produced copies of the broadcast (two DVD and one VHS). Please contact Andy Wright (andy@eco3.com or 434-244-0793) if you wish to borrow one of them.

Upcoming ASAP Meetings

July 1 – NO membership meeting.

July 15 – Board meeting, 8:00 a.m., Room 235, Albemarle County Office Building – members welcome.

August 5 – Membership meeting, 7:30 p.m., Westminster Presbyterian Church Library, 190 Rugby Road. Tentative topic: discussion of the comments made by Tim Hulbert, Blake Hurt, and Chuck Rotgin at ASAP's June 3rd meeting. An article on page one describes the meeting.

September 2 – Membership meeting, 7:30 p.m., Westminster Presbyterian Church Library, 190 Rugby Road. Topic to be announced.

October 2 – ASAP's 3rd Annual Conference, Lane Auditorium, Albemarle County Office Building.

Tyranny of Small Decisions

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For example, residential and commercial development decisions are made by individual homeowners and businesspeople. People make these decisions to maximize their quality of life. The *individual* decisions—moderated by community-imposed restrictions such as zoning—are usually inherently good, at least for the individual. However, the *cumulative* impact of individual decisions may not be optimal. In fact, the cumulative impact may not be what the community would have chosen had it been able to look at all of the independent decisions as a whole. Ideally, that's what governmental or quasi-governmental planning should do. Unfortunately, the micro decisions are often made long before the community and planners become aware of a large-scale adverse impact or the community summons the political will to assert itself for the common good.

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 January-February and June-July 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 Andy Wright at andy@eco3.com or 434-244-0793.



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