

A Comment on the *Chamber Jobs Report*

Is the Glass 2.6% Empty or 97.4% Full?

On September 14, ASAP Board members Rich Collins, Francis Fife, and Jack Marshall released the following ASAP statement at the annual Local Government Luncheon sponsored by the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce.

On September 1, the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce released a study on Charlottesville area employment.¹ The *Chamber Jobs Report* used Virginia Employment Commission data to examine Charlottesville area trends in private and public sector employment over the last ten years. The Chamber press release publicizing the *Report* focused on “a troublesome trend: jobs in private enterprise, which grew between 1994-2000, have decreased each year since” for a net total loss of 1.6% over the last three years.² The report also revealed that “private enterprise employment [growth] in the Greater Charlottesville Region (15.6%) has not kept pace with the rest of Virginia (17.9%) over the entire 10-year period, a concern for Chamber officials and others.”³

Though the *Chamber Jobs Report* is factual and the author’s analysis is more or less straightforward, Advocates for a Sustainable Albemarle Population (ASAP) questions the *conclusion* the Chamber has drawn. Simply stated, the interpretation that we have a jobs problem is not supported by the data. In fact, the data shows the opposite.

- Among the 331 metropolitan areas in the United States, the Charlottesville area has the **ninth lowest unemployment rate**.⁴ While the national unemployment rate is 5.7%, the Charlottesville area’s unemployment rate was 2.6% in July. The Thomas Jefferson Planning District’s rate was only slightly

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¹ Kevin Decker, *Report and Analysis: Employment in the Greater Charlottesville Region: 1994-2004*, prepared for the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce (Decker Economics, Kinderhook, NY, August 2004).

² Larry Banner, “Chamber Releases ‘Chamber Jobs Report,’” *Chamber Bits*, 1 September 2004.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Metropolitan Area Employment and Unemployment,” July 2004 (the latest data as of 1 September 2004). Charlottesville tied with Burlington, VT, for ninth place.

Statement on Our Community’s Future Water Supply

Staying within Our Watershed

The Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority (RWSA) held a public meeting on September 21 to solicit input on five options for increasing the area’s water supply. The options are part of a long-term Community Water Supply Plan designed to satisfy the projected demand for water in 2055. The five options are: raising the lower dam of the Ragged Mountain Reservoir, raising the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir dam, dredging the Rivanna Reservoir, releasing water from the Beaver Creek Reservoir, and taking water from the James River. Rich Collins, an ASAP Board member, wrote the following statement with the help of several other Board members. Collins, Tom Loach, Jack Marshall, and a number of other ASAP members represented the organization at the meeting.

ASAP appreciates the opportunity to express an opinion about our community’s future water supply, though we agree with the concerns of the League of Women Voters about the format of this session. Moreover, we trust that there will be other occasions at which the public will be invited to discuss issues other than “the short list of alternatives.” For example, we wish to address some of the attractive elements of the 2002 Water Supply Plan whose inclusion in the current plan is unclear (e.g. integrated resource planning, watershed management, and drought management response).

ASAP supports the water supply options that obtain water from within our own watershed. We do **not** support the option of seeking additional water supplies from the James River.

Our position is based on five considerations:

First, Albemarle County and Charlottesville have taken many steps to ensure that the quality and quantity of water supplied to the urban area are protected from industrial, agricultural, and residential impacts. The Shenandoah National Park protects the headwaters of the Rivanna River in the Blue Ridge Mountains. But probably even more important, *we*, the citizens of Albemarle and Charlottesville, govern that part of our water supply that lies outside the Park’s boundaries. This is a fortunate arrangement that provides incentives for protection, since all the costs and benefits of protecting the land and water sources redound to the *users* of the water. We are able to obtain higher quality water, protect our reservoir supplies, and maintain a balance between land use and water availability. We should remain in control of our urban water supply.

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higher at 2.8%.⁵

- While *private* sector job growth lagged the rest of the state, *public* sector employment in the Charlottesville area grew by 21.9% over the last ten years, **triple** the rate in the rest of Virginia (7.3%).⁶
- *Overall* Charlottesville area job growth during the last ten years (17.4%) outpaced the rest of Virginia (15.9%). Total employment in the area grew from 79,889 in 1994 to 93,769 in 2003. The 2003 figure represents 66,136 private sector jobs and 27,633 public sector jobs. Over the last ten years, the area added 8,909 private sector jobs and 4,971 public sector jobs for a total increase of 13,880.⁷
- Although the Chamber may bemoan the fact that private sector employment growth has not kept pace with public sector job growth—at least over the last three years—it is a fact that being a college town is a *strength*. The University of Virginia provides an extra margin of unemployment “insurance,” as public sector jobs are less likely to disappear. College towns have the 23 lowest unemployment rates among all metropolitan areas in the United States.⁸

ASAP understands the need to continue to create jobs in both the private and public sectors, both to keep our unemployment rate at its historically low rate and to employ those who are no longer actively seeking work.⁹ However, ASAP is concerned that the Chamber will use its *Jobs Report* to lobby for “economic development” efforts aimed at attracting *major* employers to the area, particularly to Charlottesville and Albemarle County.

Efforts to market the city and county to big businesses would not decrease our low unemployment rate, as it is extremely difficult to drive an unemployment rate below some base level. Rather, luring major employers to the area would simply drive up our population growth rate, as large employers would attract workers from outside the area to fill the new jobs. Because the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County already have 1.17 jobs for every resident between the ages of 18 and 64, Albemarle has justifiably taken a conservative approach toward economic development.¹⁰ Our elected leaders should continue to do so.

⁵ Virginia Employment Commission, “Local Area Unemployment Statistics,” July 2004 (the latest data as of 31 August 2004); and U. S. Department of Labor, “Metropolitan Area Unemployment,” July 2004.

⁶ *Chamber Jobs Report*, pp. 12-13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸ John Yellig, “Diverse job growth lags in area,” *The Daily Progress*, 2 September 2004, p. A6; and U. S. Department of Labor, “Metropolitan Area Unemployment,” July 2004.

⁹ The Virginia Employment Commission’s unemployment statistics exclude those who are no longer actively seeking work.

¹⁰ Davenport & Company LLC, *Current Financial Status and Effect of Long Range Capital Financing*, report to Albemarle County, VA,

Counties surrounding Albemarle have tended to be more active in trying to attract major employers, as many of their residents must commute to jobs in Albemarle and Charlottesville. ASAP sees no problem with such efforts in neighboring localities as long as they are targeted at employing *existing* residents rather than attracting new ones. Attracting new residents is a losing financial proposition for existing residents. We should oppose overly aggressive business recruitment efforts if we care about our quality of life and our local tax burden.

Does Albemarle Need a “Business Builder”?

In May 2004, Albemarle County included funds for a “neighborhood model implementation planner” in its 2005 fiscal year budget.¹¹ *The Daily Progress* stated, “The new planner would focus on activities in the county’s master-planned and other urban areas, evaluating funding alternatives and partnerships that could pay for public infrastructure projects. The job evolved from discussions surrounding the creation of the Crozet master plan.”¹²

Lee Catlin, the County spokeswoman, said,

[Creation of the position] is a recognition that we need a resource and expertise in the county that will help make the urban areas successful and viable. ... For a master plan like Crozet, we recognize there needs to be jobs and shopping opportunities to keep [residents] in the community ... instead of driving to Charlottesville or [Waynesboro]. ... The exact description is dynamic. We are still looking at what kind of skills this person would have. We don’t envision this position going out and soliciting major companies to relocate into the county, so much as working as a partner with communities and with other business partners to bring the right kind of business element into the planning.¹³

Based on quotes in *The Daily Progress*, Albemarle County Supervisors Kenneth C. Boyd and David C. Wyant want the County to engage in *traditional* economic development efforts. Comments by Supervisors Dennis S. Rooker and Sally H. Thomas were more in line with Catlin’s.¹⁴

ASAP could easily support the position described by Lee Catlin. However, we do **not** support *traditional* economic development efforts in Albemarle County for the reasons outlined in the ASAP statement on the *Chamber Jobs Report*. ASAP will be watching to see how the position is implemented.

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).

¹¹ David Dadurka, “Albemarle hires business builder,” *The Daily Progress*, 9 May 2004, pp. A1, A10.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Staying within Our Watershed

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Second, Albemarle County has taken important steps in the past to protect the land upstream of our major water reservoirs from undue and inappropriate development. However, the protection of our watershed is still insufficient, as urbanization and rural development continue. Further limits on rural development in the western part of the County are justified by the need to protect the Rivanna Reservoir from filling up with sediment and to assure higher pre-treatment water quality. Lower quality source water requires more expensive treatment and poses more of a risk to human health. The chemical treatments required to manage that risk are themselves health risks. Sourcing water from *outside* our watershed would lessen the incentives to manage the land and water *inside* our watershed.

Third, ASAP is concerned that the James River option would be a drawn-out, highly political, and legally uncertain undertaking. The pursuit of a James River intake and pumping station would require years of study and review.

Fourth, the James River option will be very expensive, both in initial capital outlay and long-term maintenance and operating costs. It is fair that current users of the urban water supply pick up the expenses of maintaining our current system (e.g., dredging and increasing the protection of the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir). However, current residents should not be burdened with the costs of expanding the water supply for those who will be encouraged to move here in the future as a result of pro-growth policies (such as pursuit of the James River option).

Fifth, we can support a reasonable population size with the water available within our own watershed. Building the James River pipeline would allow unsustainable growth far beyond the capacity of our natural watershed.

We encourage Albemarle County's Board of Supervisors and Charlottesville's City Council to *directly* address the water supply issue and not leave water supply decisions to the Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority (RWSA). Nonetheless, ASAP believes the Community Water Supply Plan is fundamentally sound and, with the exception of the James River option, presents the most cost-effective alternatives. Water users and their elected government should be able to maintain and protect an adequate supply of water within their own jurisdiction.

We vigorously support the "Rivanna watershed options" such as expanding existing reservoirs, water conservation, and upstream sediment protection. We encourage local governments to link comprehensive land use planning and water supply planning to population increases. We believe that such coordination will lead to the protection of groundwater supplies that serve our rural residents and surface water supplies that serve our urban residents.

We urge the RWSA to carefully reassess the projected demand for additional water supplies from current users and new growth. Population growth is a major variable that needs further consideration. We believe that optimum population growth should be the overarching consideration in comprehensive planning for Albemarle and Charlottesville. Our own watershed will provide adequate water supplies for foreseeable growth until we reach the point where we can stabilize our local population in a "soft landing."

ASAP advocates for a comprehensive planning process that will lay the foundation for an optimum sized community by considering a number of important values. We believe water quantity/quality is one of those values, and that obtaining our water from within our own watershed should be a principal strategic planning criterion.

ASAP Merchandise Now Available

Thanks to ASAP member Janis Jaquith, you can now purchase over three dozen reasonably priced articles bearing ASAP slogans. For example, you can buy:

- A high-quality, 100% cotton golf shirt with "Don't Fairfax Albemarle" embroidered on the front
- A black cap that warns, "GROWTH: A few profit ... we all pay"
- A button that shouts, "Dammit, growth is *not* inevitable"

You can order these and dozens of other shirts, caps, buttons, and mugs at the web site,

<http://www.cafepress.com/albemarle>,

or by calling (toll-free) 877-809-1659. CafePress sells merchandise as a service to organizations like ASAP, but ASAP will not make any money from your purchase.

Are We Fairfaxing Charlottesville?

On September 19, *The Daily Progress* published a letter by Tom Leinbach, who wrote that growth **will** stop for one of three reasons:

- We use up all of our building sites, quadrupling our population in the process
- Due to overpopulation, our quality of life deteriorates to the point where people no longer want to live here
- Citizens and their elected officials decide that further population growth is not good for the area

Leinbach is a founding member of ASAP; he joined at our first conference in September 2002. We encourage other ASAP members—and non-members sympathetic to our efforts—to write letters to the editors of local publications.

Upcoming ASAP Meetings

October 2 – ASAP’s 3rd Annual Conference, 9:00 a.m. – 12:45 p.m., Lane Auditorium, Albemarle County Office Building. Topic: No. 1 today – but tomorrow? Will this still be the “Best Place to Live” when our population DOUBLES?

October 7 – NO membership meeting.

October 21 – Board meeting, 8:00 a.m., Room 235, Albemarle County Office Building – members welcome.

Wednesday, November 3 – Membership meeting, 7:30 p.m., Westminster Presbyterian Church Library, 190 Rugby Road. Topic: Albemarle County’s land use taxation program. Read the article titled “Is Albemarle County’s Land Use Taxation Program Achieving Its Goals?” on page 2 of the September 2004 issue of the *ASAP Update*. (This meeting, normally held on a Thursday, was moved to a Wednesday so one of our speakers could attend.)

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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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