

Advocates for a Sustainable Albemarle Population (ASAP)

Statement to the Rivanna Water & Sewer Authority

at its September 21, 2004, Public Meeting

Statement on Our Community's Future Water Supply: Staying within Our Watershed

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 in addition to "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.

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 people 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 governments should be able to maintain and protect an adequate supply of water within their own jurisdictions.

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.