

Joseph B. Walton, Powhatan BOS Candidate - District One  
November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007 General Election  
Times-Dispatch Editorial Endorsement Question Responses

*1) What is the most compelling issue in your county?*

Quality, Sustainable Economic Development

The current economic climate in Powhatan is a budding one from a traditional community business perspective, regional business perspective and tourism perspective. The business tax base is slowly rising but there are certain political steps that need to be taken to help our business tax base grow in a quality and sustainable way. Our proposed State Park, Civil War Trails, pending commercial projects, micro-farms and other history provide seeds for a vibrant economy but the right political support is critical.

As a supervisor I will advocate and support a Board of Supervisors politically and publicly committed to a business friendly environment and to quality, sustainable commercial development. By seeking clean businesses with strict architectural standards and with progressive planning and zoning I believe we can plan for development that will stand the test of time and not be 'hot, new' areas that decline in value, appeal and occupancy within years.

I believe there are examples around the region, state and country that Powhatan can learn from for this type of quality sustainable commercial development. The closest of which is the village of Midlothian and there are many others. The massive commercial development on our east will be a boon to us and we must be prepared to develop our eastern border in a sustainable, attractive manner.

Furthermore, I will be an ambassador to existing businesses and prospective businesses to ensure that business interests know they are important to the Board and the County and have political support. This would be complimentary and supplementary to our Economic Development director's role.

Powhatan County currently has no Gross Receipts tax which is a good incentive but I will seek to invoke a fast-track process, better marketing, political will, and additional incentives as needed to take maximum advantage of the massive commercial development on our eastern border and the unique commercial opportunities throughout other areas in the county.

Lastly, I will bring the objective perspective of a small business owner, Information Technology professional, and 2 acre homeowner to the Board with a sincere willingness to effectively lead and produce cooperative results for the betterment of our county. The last four years have been rather stagnant for any leadership or progress in the face of important development within and without our county. I aim to change that.

2) *How would you rate the level of regional cooperation in Central Virginia? How could the process be improved? Should zoning be a regional responsibility?*

I read the local periodicals and papers and have lived in Richmond all my life. I understand many of the issues regarding regionalism in the Richmond area and I believe more could be done to improve the region's standing through cooperative planning.

Chief among my concerns are to learn what other similarly situated regions have done that was successful and not so successful and apply that understanding to Richmond region.

I certainly think that some aspects of zoning are appropriate for a regional approach, like for instance the major transportation infrastructure (major roads, mass transit). But I also think that some elements of planning and zoning are important to keep local because it helps maintain a unique character for each locality. However, there are levels of regional participation that will still preserve a locality's uniqueness and that will actually help the locality and the region prosper.

On the whole, I am interested in regional cooperation from the perspective and to the extent that a 'rising tide raises all boats'. I do not believe in regionalism for regionalism's sake or charitable support of other localities nor do I want other localities to participate with Powhatan for those reasons. The vision of regionalism is at its best is when it is a win for all participants. I do not view regionalism as a zero sum game.

I will advocate, support and work with our neighboring localities and agencies (VDOT, RRPDC and MPO, state, federal) to make sure Powhatan has a proactive seat at the table and that we take full advantage of the overall benefit to the region to be had by all from regional cooperation by individual localities and agencies.

3) *Should the counties help subsidize a baseball stadium and performing arts center in Richmond?*

In short, yes. Specifically related to Powhatan, I do not have enough information to suggest what support would be but appropriate but certainly political will should be expended. Clearly the larger, closer localities benefit from regional attractions and have citizens who participate and so they should be willing to step up to the plate as well.

Some outside the city limits may have concerns about oversight and accountability. To that I would suggest there are easy ways to gain insight and oversight into the proceedings if that is the true concern.

I believe it is overly burdensome for Richmond to bear the brunt of those two regional (indeed state-wide arts) attractions with yet another hike in the meals tax. That meals tax is quite high as it is and further hikes make the city less attractive for the inhabitants and visitor. Cues from other regions should be studied for successes and failures from a regional sports/arts perspective.

4) *Discuss assessments and real-estate tax rates.*

I support assessing at market value, it is the easiest target on which to pin the assessment. I recognize the difficulty in determining something as subjective as market value in certain circumstances (i.e. no recent data and having to assume a willing transaction) but I still believe it to be the best method and on average it is a reliable metric.

As for the real-estate tax rate, I believe the government that governs best taxes least and taxes in the broadest ways possible (and governs least!). To that end, taxing the residential land and the residential improvements is a fair way of funding the government but it needs to be fairly balanced with sustainable commercial revenue. The people of Powhatan want a quality, sustainable increase in commercial tax revenue to offset residential real estate tax revenues.

Powhatan is just getting into position to assess every two years with the goal being to shortly go to annual. We had been assessing every four years and that resulted in some shocking increases that would not have been quite as shocking had there been biennial or annual assessments.

I understand there are discussions of a few enabling pieces of legislation pending for the next General Assembly session that will attempt to bring a few tools to the localities to quell some of the most serious 'sticker shock'. Those may help but localities can certainly demonstrate their own judiciousness and adopt revenue neutral tax rates if that is what the citizens want. Indeed most people like to know their largest investment increases in value - they invested wisely! The issue is what rate that investment is taxed at that causes them grief. And that decision rests with the localities' government.

Ultimately, I hope the market solves some of the problem. I believe in Powhatan we are seeing the real estate market decelerate and perhaps even slow and that will keep assessment increases low. With fiscal responsibility, a business friendly political environment, and quality sustainable commercial revenues, the residential tax rate can remain reasonable for all the citizens while still enabling Powhatan to provide an excellent education system and other necessary services.

**Dear Times-Dispatch Editors,**

**Thank you for the opportunity to answer these questions.**

**I look forward to an opportunity to meet with you and discuss my candidacy and what I want to do once elected.**

**Sincerely,**

**Joe Walton**

**[www.joewalton.com](http://www.joewalton.com) – 804-677-9090**