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Message from Lee Catlin, Director of Community Relations

Our annual report is an exciting statement about the strong involvement and lively engagement of Albemarle County citizens in the issues and activities of their local government. As indicated by our recently completed Citizen Survey, 76.5% of our residents feel that public input/involvement is a critical service, placing it among the top 12 priorities of county government.

As the desire for meaningful engagement grows, so does the need to explore new options and technologies that allow Albemarle to offer cutting edge public information and involvement opportunities. New features added to the website this year like County View Web and on-line Planning Commission agendas joined other popular tools like podcasts of Board of Supervisors meetings and GIS Web to offer an “an impressive collection of material available online” according to Charlottesville Tomorrow. New electronic Parks and Recreation newsletters and monthly Press Room Summaries share important program news with interested subscribers, as do regular issues of AMail, our enews service.

This technology focus on efficient and convenient ways to interact with the County has not eliminated the need for more personal conversations with our citizens, which remains the heart of our community relations effort. Whether it is a citizen advisory group, a high school class, or a group of neighbors, face-to-face interaction with our residents is our best and most important communication tool.

While efficiency and financial restraint have always been at the forefront of our operations, the current economic climate challenges us to focus even more keenly on savings and cost reduction opportunities. We continue to explore and implement new features for the website, which is a major tool of customer convenience and cost savings, providing 24-hour, seven-day service and access to a broad range of county information and business functions. While we have reduced operational expenses and shifted personnel to meet pressing needs like all other County departments, we remain committed to our fundamental mission of connecting with Albemarle citizens.

As evidenced by the number of website visits, community meetings, citizen interactions and other indicators, the Albemarle County community clearly values participation in its local government activities. The Community Relations Office looks forward to fulfilling its role as an active partner with our citizens in the coming year.

2008 Key Performance Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>175</td>
<td>Press releases sent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,679,963</td>
<td>Visits to the Albemarle County website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,011,318</td>
<td>Documents downloaded from the Albemarle County website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>Community workshops, information sessions, outreach events, and citizen committee meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7712</td>
<td>Citizens assisted through the Albemarle County Visitor’s Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000+</td>
<td>Citizens participating in community workshops, citizen committees, education and outreach events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1498</td>
<td>Citizens assisted through the County telephone/email information lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>AMail enews notices sent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**County Executive’s Office Strategic Goal 1: Engage Citizens in Addressing Community Priorities**

**Responding to Citizen Priorities**

Every two years, Albemarle County surveys citizens to learn their level of satisfaction with County services and priorities for delivering those services. When asked specifically about the importance of providing opportunities for citizen input, over 75% of citizens said it was important to them.

In response to our citizens, Community Relations has partnered with other County departments such as Community Development to significantly expand citizen input opportunities, including:

- Creating Citizens Advisory Councils for completed master plans
- Recruiting citizen representatives on County capital project committees
- Expanding outreach to stakeholders and other citizens to increase participation
- Diversifying public input opportunities to accommodate a broader range of schedules and demographics

**2008 Citizen Satisfaction Survey Highlights**

- 86.3% said they were satisfied with citizen opportunities for input, up from 81.3% in 2006.
- 79% of residents said they were satisfied with County efforts to keep them informed about County government programs and services, compared with 78.5% in 2006.
- 55.8% of citizens who have access to the internet visited the Albemarle County website, an increase of over 12% since 2006. (88% of citizens surveyed in 2008 had access to the internet, up from 78% in 2006).
Connecting Citizens with County Government

Connecting citizens with their local Government is the primary purpose of the Albemarle County Community Relations Department. In its most visible role, Community Relations is the public face of the County, with Director Lee Catlin reporting County news and events on television and in the newspaper, facilitating strategic discussions or presenting to the Board of Supervisors.

Behind the scenes, Community Relations staff provides leadership and professional support for a broad range of communication and involvement efforts. Community Relations works with County staff and citizen groups to keep the community informed, resolve community concerns, and provide opportunities for meaningful citizen participation in County issues and programs.

Responsibilities include:
- Media Relations
- Albemarle County Website Management
- Community Partnerships
- Strategic Communications Planning
- Citizen Assistance and Information
- Publications and Outreach
- Community Education
- Citizen Participation and Input

★★ 2008 Awards and Recognitions★★

- The Center for Digital Government named Albemarle County among the Top 10 most technologically advanced county governments of its size for 2008
- The Virginia Association of Counties awarded Albemarle County a 2008 Achievement Award for the Community Relations Public Participation Planning Program
Community Relations Responsibilities and Programs

**Media Relations**
Serve as primary point of media contact for the County, keep media informed of County activities, provide support and training for County staff in public information efforts.

**Albemarle County Website**
Manage and continually update County-wide website content to keep information current and easy to access for residents and visitors and manage County staff intranet site.

**Community Partnerships**
Engage in partnerships with other organizations and entities for community service, stewardship and education.

**Strategic Communications Planning**
Develop strategies for communications outreach to inform and involve the community in local government operations and activities.

**Citizen Assistance and Information**
Manage and operate the Visitor’s Assistance Center and Citizen Information Telephone line at COB McIntire and resolve citizen concerns and issues.

**Publications and Outreach**
Provide outreach for events, meetings and workshops, produce and distribute all County A-Mails and e-newsletters, design and develop educational materials such as newsletters, posters, displays, fact sheets, brochures and reports.

**Community Education/Events**
Coordinate the annual Citizens Open House to educate citizens of all ages about County government, conduct events highlighting County government activities, and develop customized educational programs.

**Citizen Participation and Input**
Provide leadership and support for County public participation efforts, facilitate meetings and workshops, develop and implement programs for meaningful public participation, promote accepted professional practices, evaluate programs for areas of improvement, and provide training for County staff.

*Governor Tim Kaine addressed the 5,000/70,000 Celebration for the Acquisition for Conservation Easements (ACE) Celebration in July, where the community celebrated exceeding 5000 acres in the County’s ACE program and 70,000 acres overall in conservation easements in Albemarle County. The effort was truly a community partnership, with multiple County departments and local organizations such as the Piedmont Environmental Council pulling together to celebrate Albemarle County’s treasured rural preservation areas.*
Community Relations in Action—2008 Highlights & Accomplishments

Events and Education
- Citizens Open House
- Crozet Town Meeting
- ACE (Acquisition of Conservation Easements) 5000/70,000 Celebration with Governor Tim Kaine
- Tend Albemarle Environmental Stewardship Education Program Partnership
- Student QA with Board Members/Mock Election
- Climate Action Week
- DIA Town Meeting
- Water Conservation Measures
- Bike-to-Work Week

Publications
- A-mail enews updates
- Barking Dog Ordinance Brochure
- Board/PC Monthly E-Newsletter
- Parks and Recreation Quarterly E-Newsletter
- Crozet Library Fact Sheet/FAQ
- Old School/Western Park Public Participation Reports
- Crozet Community Advisory Council Brochure
- Crozet Business Brochure Design
- Annual Report to Citizens
- New Resident’s Guide
- Public Participation Planning Program

Community Workshops
- Crozet Old School Reuse Study Community Workshops
- Crozet Western Park Master Plan Community Workshops
- Western Albemarle High School Student workshop for Western Park Master Plan
- Village of Rivanna Master Plan Community Workshops
- Crozet Downtown Streetscape Stakeholder Meeting
- Crozet Downtown Stormwater System Stakeholder Meetings

Community Committees
- Pantops Community Advisory Council
- Crozet Community Advisory Council
- Western Park Master Plan Committee
- Old School Reuse Study Committee
- Village of Rivanna Master Plan Stakeholders Group
- Crozet Library Steering Committee

Many thanks to all of the citizens, County departments, local organizations and elected officials who partnered on these activities!
County Executive’s Office Strategic Objective 1.1: 
Increase usage and promote functionality of the website.

The Albemarle County Website

Mission of the Albemarle County Website
The mission of the website is to create and maintain a dynamic, interactive online government presence that educates and informs citizens and allows people to conduct business with the County in ways that increase our accessibility and customer service and improve our operational efficiency.

“The Self-Service Lane through County Government”
The Albemarle County Website provides up-to-the-minute, around-the-clock information and access to County government and its services. Online access reduces the need for citizens to travel to a County office building—web statistics show the highest level of usage between 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. Web availability of information also increases employee efficiency by reducing the need to contact County staff for general information. Website business functions include:

- County View for building and planning activity
- GIS Web for mapping features
- Online employment applications
- Online payment for tax bills

Communication and Public Input
In addition to providing general information, the County website is an essential two-way communications tool used to:

- Inform citizens about input opportunities
- Receive comments from citizens

The Community Relations Role
Community Relations manages the content and appearance of the County’s website, working closely with the Information Technology (IT) Department as a technical advisor/manager. Content management responsibilities include:

- Coordinating with 12-15 content editors from County departments to create a consistent look and feel for the website
- Interfacing with IT to identify technology needs and solutions
- Keeping web content up-to-date
- Designing department websites
- Advising other departments
- Reporting on website usage data
- Developing web marketing and communications plans
- Increasing opportunities for meaningful public involvement

2008 Citizen Satisfaction Survey Highlights

- 55.8% of citizens who have access to the internet had visited the Albemarle County website, up 12% from 43.5% in 2006
- 88% of citizens surveyed in 2008 had access to the internet, up from 78% in 2006.
County Executive’s Office Strategic Objective 1.2: Increase opportunities for meaningful public involvement.

Providing Opportunities for Meaningful Public Involvement
Albemarle County government believes that providing opportunities for meaningful public participation enriches our service to the community, creates more effective outcomes and strengthens relationships with community members.

Meaningful Involvement Makes a Difference
Each person probably has a unique idea of what makes his or her involvement with County government meaningful. One person may care about a vacant public building near her home and want to work with local government to reclaim it for the community. Another may care about amenities in a neighborhood park. Someone else may be interested in volunteering on a County Board or Commission, participating in a community master planning process, or maintaining trails in public parks.

The personal definition of meaningful may be different for each citizen, but what they all have in common is the desire for their contributions to make a difference.

Citizen Jimmy Powell spoke on behalf of the County’s Acquisition for Conservation Easement (ACE) Program during the 5,000/70,000 Celebration in July of 2008. Mr. Powell’s farm was the first property to establish a conservation easement through the ACE program.

Public Participation Guidelines: Planning for Meaningful Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education/Information</th>
<th>Input</th>
<th>Involvement</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| One-way communication between Albemarle County and the public to provide citizens with balanced and objective information to assist (educate/inform) them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions. | Seek public feedback on a proposal, analysis or alternatives. Requires a response from the public, but limited opportunity for public dialogue. | Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered. Includes elements of public information and outreach, but adds a third dimension of two-way communication. | Collaborate with the public on some or all aspects of the planning or decision including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution. 

Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation Spectrum |
Community Relations = Community Relationships

Community Relations is about building relationships—one person at time, one neighborhood at a time. Whether the contact is personal, electronic or through local media outlets, Community Relations believes that the professional and personal quality of each interaction sets the tone for the County’s relationships with community members. It takes time, specialized expertise and personal contact to develop mutual understanding, trust and productive relationships between County government and citizens—something that is central to the long-term effectiveness of County government.

Citizens Making a Difference

When working with the Crozet Old School Reuse Study Committee, which helped guide the public participation process for the Crozet Old School Reuse Study, citizens suggested setting up a table at the local grocery store to gather suggestions from people who might not be able to attend the community workshop. This effort was an enormous success and resulted in several hundred suggestions that might not have been received otherwise.

Comments from citizens who served on County project committees in 2008:

“I just wanted to say that I feel honored to have been able to work on this committee. I have learned a lot about architecture and “green-ness” and legalities. It has enriched me as a person and as a citizen! I really think everyone should take the opportunity to work with their county government in one capacity or another such as this.”

“Please keep using citizens committees to aid understanding and create teamwork between county and growth areas.”

“I felt honored to be a part of the process and used my participation in the process to get input from other organizations not represented as stakeholders.”
Involving Students in County Government: Engaging our Young Citizens

Albemarle High School Leadership Class Helps Develop Western Park Master Plan

Students from Western Albemarle High School participated in a series of 3 workshops to provide input into the Western Park Master Plan. They visited the park site; learned about technical site evaluations for critical slopes, wetlands and other natural features; and provided creative, thoughtful suggestions for park amenities. They contributed a fresh perspective and represented an important stakeholder group for the park, providing invaluable input into the Master Plan. Students told us they enjoyed their work on the project and looked forward to seeing some of their ideas realized when the park is constructed.

Bright Stars Students Tour Emergency Vehicles and learn about other services on County Government Day

Several hundred students from Bright Stars Preschool program visited County Government Day, meeting police officers, fire fighters and touring emergency vehicles. Students also participated in activities planned by Albemarle County Schools, Social Services and other County government departments. Sitting on the police motorcycle was one of the highlights of County Government Day! Through County Government Day, children are introduced to County government and its services—starting citizen education at an early age.

Charlottesville Catholic School 5th-Graders Learn about Taxation and Citizenship

Fifth-grade students from Charlottesville Catholic School contacted Community Relations to see if we could set up a program to expose students to County government, citizenship and taxation. Working with the Registrar of Elections and Board members Sally Thomas and Ann Mallek, Ms. Thomas and Ms. Mallek developed a QA for the students that presented photos of scenes of activities throughout the County supported by tax dollars. The two Board members quickly engaged their audience, sparking lively discussion and leaving the students and parent chaperones wanting more! The Registrar’s office developed a mock election activity so that students could learn about the entire process, from voter registration through voting. For an added bonus, students toured the Green Roof with Gregor Patsch. Hands-on education about local government to inspire young citizens!

A Bright Stars student tries out a County Police Motorcycle
What’s Coming in 2009...

Throughout 2009, Community Relations will continue to engage the community on significant County projects, with highlights including:

- Crozet Master Plan Revision Process
- Upgrade/Enhancement of the County website
- Budget Public Hearings
- Climate Action Planning
- Crozet Streetscape and Library Projects
- New Parks and Recreation Opportunities

Helpful Resources:

Sign up for A-Mail, the County’s e-news service:
www.albemarle.org/amail

Learn more about County government services:
www.albemarle.org

Send us your comments and suggestions:
Email communityrelations@albemarle.org or call 434-295-5841

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Call the Community Relations Office: 434-295-5841

Citizens discuss designs for the Western Park Master Plan at the Crozet Town Meeting in September of 2008.
Public Participation Guiding Principles

▪ **Building relationships, trust and community capacity**—The foundation for successful public participation is opening channels of communication early with partners and stakeholders, and developing collaborative working relationships with them. Effective public participation activities should leave neighborhoods and communities stronger and with increased capacity to influence their livability.

▪ **Inclusive and respectful**—Broad public participation will be welcome. An effort will be made to identify, invite and encourage stakeholders to be involved early in public participation processes. Their input and feedback will be given careful and respectful consideration.

▪ **Adaptable and creative**—The extent, timing, manner, and outcomes of public participation activities will necessarily vary to suit the circumstances and magnitude of a particular project or decision, and facilitate maximum public participation.

▪ **Transparent results**—The public participation process will be transparent with results to be fully shared back to participants and with officials involved in the decision-making process.

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*A Publication of:*

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