



Candidate Pre-Interview Questionnaire

The Committee for a Better Atlanta (CBA) is a coalition of business organizations concerned about Atlanta. In 2009, CBA is interviewing candidates for mayor, City Council president and City Council with the intent of publishing a voter's guide of candidate evaluations. The evaluations will be based on the answers to the questions in this document, plus in-person interviews to be held this summer.

Your answers to these questions are very important to the CBA interview and evaluation process. ***Candidates who do not complete this questionnaire will not be scheduled for an interview with CBA.***

Please complete this questionnaire and deliver it to the Committee for a Better Atlanta so it arrives **no later than 5 p.m., July 31, 2009**. Questionnaires can be filled out electronically and emailed to cwatkins@macoc.com, or mailed to:

**Committee for a Better Atlanta
235 International Blvd., NW
Atlanta, GA 30303
Attn: Che Watkins**

If you have any questions about completing the questionnaire – or about the CBA process – please contact Che Watkins at (404) 586-8468.

Candidate information:

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Position Sought: Atlanta City Council Post 2 At-Large

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Secondary contact information: (If you prefer that CBA direct scheduling inquiries to someone other than the candidate, check here. PLEASE SELECT)

Name: Howard Franklin

Relationship to candidate: Campaign Manager

(e.g. Administrative assistant, campaign manager, etc.)

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Please answer the questions in the space provided on this questionnaire.

1. In your opinion, what are the three greatest issues (problems or opportunities) facing Atlanta?

Public safety - Atlanta's most immediate challenge is to become a safe city. For as long as I can remember, Atlanta has battled the reality and perception of being an "unsafe" city. We recently witnessed a spike in unsettling property crime that was incongruently met with furloughs to fire and police forces. We cannot continue to hold public safety as anything but the City's top priority. If our streets are not safe, our growth may slow, our tourism and convention industry suffers, our revenue streams are restricted and our neighborhoods lose passionate, invested residents. We must grow police and fire forces, provide the rank and file with incentives to stay with the City and find departmental leadership that demands excellence and raises morale.

Transportation - The biggest long-term threat to Atlanta's future success is a transportation framework that is too reliant on the automobile. There is not a great livable city in the world that is dependent only on the car. The longer we wait to increase transit options for residents, the farther we will fall behind our peer cities. Increasing transit mobility is an economic development issue, a public health issue, a smart design issue and a neighborhood development issue. Atlanta needs action on two fronts: (1) an aggressive commitment to sidewalks, bicycle lanes, reliable bus routes, east-west transit and transit-oriented development in the City; and (2) a robust and sophisticated courtship with the State for funding for MARTA and regional transit infrastructure.

Renewed confidence in City Hall through transparency and accountability - City Hall suffers from an enormous confidence gap that will only be bridged through increased transparency and accountability. We cannot tackle the big challenges facing Atlanta until city government renews its covenant of trust with residents, business and surrounding legislative bodies. All important stakeholders, including the State, need to see a well-run city in order to fully invest in Atlanta's future. To renew confidence in City Hall, we need greater budget transparency, higher performance expectations, and stronger ethics rules.

2. Describe briefly your qualifications for holding this office. (*Please answer in the space below, but you may also attach a resume or other description to provide us with additional detail.*)

My qualifications for this office are a mix of professional experiences, community engagement and longitudinal perspective of having been born and raised here.

Professionally, I practiced commercial litigation and international arbitration at McKenna Long & Aldridge for nearly five years, resigning from the firm in July to campaign full time. That experience has left me with strong analytical skills, an attention to detail and a strategic understanding of when to push hard, when to push subtly and when to sit back when trying to achieve a certain result. Moreover, as a benefit of having practiced at a large law firm, I have gained a deeper appreciation for the role the private community can play in assisting the City define and reach its goals.

While my professional experience has given me a skill set that I believe will make me an effective Council member, my community commitments have given me a greater understanding of the role City government can play in helping communities address their challenges. Since returning to Atlanta to practice law, my community commitments have been fairly diverse: Board of Trustees at The Galloway School, Board of Directors at the Drew Charter School in East Lake, the board of a young professionals group at the Georgia Conservancy, L.E.A.D. Atlanta, and most recently, the Advisory Board of Creating Vibrant Communities, a community development organization in the West End. I have also spent the last two years attending neighborhood and NPU meetings all over the City. These collective experiences contribute to a broad understanding of the needs of residents and the tools we have to address challenges in our communities.

Finally, I view my age (31) as an asset for this particular office. Although I have spent a great deal of time in various circles of the City, I am not engendered to any one constituency or burdened by old alliances. We cannot solve the City's challenges with the current paradigm of decision-making or with the limited group of stakeholders currently allowed a seat at the table. We need a new type of governance from City Hall; one that is premised on solutions, productivity, and creative thinking.

(see also, resume attached)

3. What events or experiences caused you to decide to run for this office?

My decision to run for City Council is the culmination of a long-running collection of experiences and events. In the late 1970's, my father earned his Ph.D in political science at Atlanta University. His dissertation analyzed the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce's changing influence in local politics from 1960-1978. In 1980, he joined the faculty of Morris Brown College, where he has taught since. My father's profession colored my youth with an educational history of Atlanta politics and public policy.

In the summer of 1997, I interned with then-Atlanta City Councilmember Doug Alexander. That summer opened my eyes to the possibilities and limits of Council. Although I was given relative autonomy, by necessity, I spent hours on constituency-services and little time researching/drafting ordinances. I quickly learned that many Councilmembers were interested only in their political survival, often over-burdened by constituency-service demands, and focused on avoiding the scorn of the Mayor. It was both an exhilarating experience and reality-check on my perceptions of the Council's legislative power.

In 2000 and 2001, I lived abroad for a year in Taiwan, and again for six months in Singapore in 2003. During that time, I traveled extensively in Asia and Europe. This time abroad, and subsequent travels to South America and the Middle East, opened my eyes to Atlanta's relative strengths and weaknesses. I was particularly struck by the way great cities maximized public space and small businesses to inspire and create sustainable street life, fully integrated into existing residential and retail areas. These cities also exhibited a near universal reliance on smart design and mass transit to create livable neighborhoods, even in high-density urban areas. In full, my travels abroad left with me a newfound pride in Atlanta that was matched by frustration with Atlanta's sluggish political decision-making; particularly our inability to enact smart, proactive policy despite the fact that Atlanta is a city that is pregnant with possibilities.

Finally, over the past five years, I have grown increasingly frustrated by the level of public policy discussion coming from City Hall, particularly on transportation, livability issues and good governance. The divide between the expectations of residents and businesses and the performance of the City has widened to an unacceptable level.

These collective experiences caused me to decide to run for City Council.

4. Please identify up to five organizations or individuals who are actively supporting your candidacy.

Although it is early in the race for endorsements from various groups, I have received support from the following:

- 1) A 20+ member campaign committee that includes Former Atlanta City Councilmembers Lee Morris and Doug Alexander, State Rep. Margaret Kaiser, State Rep. Stacey Abrams.
- 2) Over 400 campaign contributors from over 90% of Atlanta's residential zip codes.
- 3) NPU-leadership, including Sally Silver, Anna Foote and Kwabena Nkromo.
- 4) Pastor Gregory Eason (Big Bethel AME).

5) Young professional organizations like Young Democrats of Atlanta.

5. The city government faces a \$50 million budget shortfall this fiscal year. How would you close the budget gap?

This question is somewhat moot given City Council's approval of the Mayor's proposed 3 mil property tax increase. However, the economic downturn has revealed that the City's existing revenue framework is unsustainable and that massive inefficiencies in City operations leave Atlanta particularly vulnerable to economic downswings. To reduce the risk of future budget deficits, we need more dependable revenue streams, reduced costs and better operational efficiency.

The City's first priority must be efficiency. While staffing has been significantly reduced over the last 8 years (some of it necessary, some of it troubling), the City repeatedly fails to collect money it is owed through code and parking enforcement and bill collection. A 2009 audit of Watershed Management revealed \$50 million in uncollected fees and indicated that millions more go uncollected each year. Moreover, a 2009 audit of Atlanta's fleet management revealed \$11.2 million in cost overruns. And, for most of the last year, the City has had practically zero parking enforcement. This is unacceptable.

We must also think outside the box to reduce the inordinately heavy burden that residents carry by paying for city services that benefit millions of daily visitors. To equitably share the burden, the City has a range of tools at its disposal that do not require State approval. For example, we can reexamine how water rates are calculated for the buildings used primarily by visitors or we could increase parking rates.

Further, sale of the City jail, which is under-utilized, could help the City realize tens of millions of dollars. Finally, I would like to see the City use green initiatives to raise revenue and reduce costs. A 5-cent fee on plastic shopping bags has the possibility to generate substantial revenue, even if just in the short term. Installing LED light bulbs in street lamps and parking garages can significantly reduce our electrical bill.

Revenue ideas aside, our top priority must be operational efficiency, reinforced by transparency and better budget oversight (including quarterly, user-friendly, public one-page financial reports from each department, a four-year budget plan and a rainy day fund). The smarter we operate, the more we can get from our existing revenue framework. To this end, Atlanta must make better use of technology in its service delivery. The future of efficient cities will recognize that residents not only want ease of access (e.g., submitting service requests online) they also want to mold their city and neighborhood and need an outlet to do so (e.g., a city that runs like Wikipedia; open data, open source tools for residents to shape policy).

6. Since 2004, the city's official goal has been to have 2,000 police officers. The Police Department is now at 1,615 officers. Do you support the goal? If so, how would you pay for the additional officers given the city's budget problems?

Yes, I support the premise that we need more police officers but I prefer to see an updated calculation of how many officers Atlanta needs. The goal of 2,000 officers was set out in the early part of the decade when our population was over 100,000 less than it is today. Assuming we need between 2,000 and 2,500 officers in Atlanta (by comparison, Washington, DC has a population of roughly 590,000 and approximately 3,000 police officers), the challenge will be to recruit quality candidates or laterals, train them, pay them accordingly and retain them at higher rates than we do today.

We can pay for a larger police force using some or all of the following tools:

- Make public safety the City's first budget priority. State Sen. Kasim Reed has suggested moving some of the new 3 mil property tax increase to fund public safety. If elected, regardless of whether State Sen. Reed is elected, I support this type of prioritization. We also need to realize that code enforcement, recreation centers and community policing also play an important role in Atlanta's public safety.
- Collect all ticket and code enforcement fees that currently go uncollected.
- Push for a dedicated funding stream for public safety. There is some sympathy to this framework at the State Legislature and Atlanta would be wise to join forces with the Police and Fire Unions and other municipalities to lobby the State Legislature to allow municipalities to create dedicated taxes for public safety. Our current revenue framework subjects the public safety budget to the whim of our annual operating budget, and by relation, the health of the local economy and property values.
- Increase Atlanta's population. The more livable we are, more residents we attract, the stronger our tax base, the more we can afford to do and the better Atlanta can provide services to residents and visitors and set the regional agenda.

7. Mayor Franklin has used tax-allocation districts and tax abatements to support redevelopment projects. What would you have the city government do to support desirable redevelopment projects in the years ahead?

Atlanta has relied heavily on tax-allocation districts (TADs) and tax abatements over the past decade to stimulate development. This framework has worked well for our city, particularly when economic and property value growth were all but assured. Yet, as the economy slumped and property tax revenues shrank, the City sorely needed the property tax revenue that it might have received if not for tax abatements and TAD tax-deferrals. Thus, while recognizing that the TAD-related developments have generated previously non-existent sales tax revenue to the City, we would be wise to use TADs (and to a lesser extent tax abatements) more conservatively going forward.

Atlanta needs new development, especially in under-served neighborhoods, blighted corridors and urban areas. Yet, we must carefully balance redevelopment incentives with realistic tax revenue expectations that are not overly reliant on rosy growth projections. In some instances traditional TADs or tax abatements may be appropriate, but we might also consider using smaller scale incentives to promote redevelopment. For example, we can waive permitting fees, commit the City to street and sidewalk improvements alongside the development, promote smaller TADS and shorter tax abatements. We should also seriously consider a program similar to Washington D.C.'s "Great Streets Initiative," which made \$100 million available for six major corridors in order to transform streets into clean, walkable, enjoyable spaces, as well as stimulate small business growth along the streets, create jobs and expand the local tax base.

Our future development must be viewed through a holistic lens; making sure to incorporate transit, small business incentives, affordable housing, green space, retail and jobs for local residents.

8. Traffic congestion is a major problem in Atlanta. If you could implement only one initiative, enhancement or management change to reduce congestion in Atlanta in the next four years, what would it be? Note: This should be something within the city government's ability to implement.

In order to be a vibrant, livable city in 20 years, we must fundamentally change how we move around the region and within the City of Atlanta. Yet, drastic traffic reduction in the City of Atlanta requires implementing a regional plan, with new transit infrastructure, using state and federal funding.

Given our regional transportation framework and the absence of strong political commitment to changing how we move around the metro region, I don't believe, unfortunately, that there is one single initiative that the City of Atlanta could implement on its own in the next four years to significantly reduce traffic. Atlanta is too connected and affected by the region's traffic to single-handedly reduce its traffic. There are a handful of infrastructure projects that the City should undertake (e.g., a comprehensive sidewalk and bicycle plan, streetcar service) but these will not reduce traffic in Atlanta in the next four years.

To reduce traffic in Atlanta over the next four years, I would promote incentives to reduce the need or desire to drive to work: a "Clean Air Campaign With Teeth." Given the high volume of vacant (often affordable) housing stock in our urban corridor and in nearby neighborhoods, the City should offer a package of incentives for workers to either live within 3 miles of their office or to commute to work not using a car. These incentives might include 3-year property tax reductions for residents who live within 3 miles of work or who commute to work via foot, bike or transit. Conversely, similar incentives could be used to attract business into Atlanta.

9. In your opinion, what are the three greatest infrastructure problems facing Atlanta over the next four years? Please rank them in terms of importance and urgency.
 - 1) Creating "complete streets" (streets that are well-kept and accessible for those on foot, bike, bus car or streetcar);
 - 2) Sidewalks: building new sidewalks where none currently exist and maintaining older sidewalks; and
 - 3) Proper street signage/stripping, synchronized traffic lights and functioning pedestrian signals.