

2009 Committee for a Better Atlanta
Candidate Questionnaire

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1. In your opinion, what are the three greatest issues facing Atlanta?

During these challenging financial times, the persistent and apparent issues plaguing large metropolitan cities become exacerbated, and those issues lying just beneath the surface eventually emerge. As a public servant, I believe adversity presents an excellent opportunity to identify, assess and resolve situations which impact our collective quality of life.

First and foremost, **public safety** is an issue with which every citizen grapples. Our families, homes and communities are under attack by those who are not vested in the future success and prosperity of Atlanta. We can address long term and academic public safety policy, but right now our citizens demand to feel safe, secure and confident. There are six things we can do to improve public safety right now:

- a. **Expand the Foot Patrol Program and R.E.D. D.O.G. Unit:** I authored existing legislation requiring recent police academy graduates be assigned to work 8 weeks on a foot patrol in high-crime areas. If elected, I would advocate for the expansion of the foot patrol program into every police zone during every shift, thereby increasing visible police presence and fostering better community relations. Over the last 10 years the RED DOG unit has dwindle in numbers from its prior optimal strength. I have been a staunch advocate of expanding the RED DOG Unit to its historical numbers to aggressively fight street level crime. As Council

President, I will continue to push for at least 100 RED DOG officers, and propose the necessary fiscal and operational policy necessary to maintain those numbers long term.

- b. **Review existing Atlanta Police Department Recruitment and Retention Policies:** The city should offer police officers and other civil servants opportunities to purchase homes within the city, compensation and benefits comparable to regional competitors, and tuition reimbursement for those officers who wish to continue their education. We should also pursue a more aggressive police recruitment policy that targets graduates from local two and four-year criminal justice departments, returning National Guardsmen and other departing military personnel, as well more strategically targeting lateral hires from other jurisdictions. I also intend to push for the funding of a ‘Quartermaster system’ which allows for officers to exchange service uniforms in the event of damage rather than be obligated to purchase new ones out of pocket.
- c. **Restore the City’s Insurance Services Organization (“ISO”) rating:** In the near term, the City must take the necessary steps to restore its ISO rating back to a two (from the current rating of four) by restoring some of the 120 firefighter positions eliminated in recent budget cycles in part through shifting resources from non-charter mandated services generated by the recent three-mill property tax increase. In the mid and longer terms, I will spearhead an effort to revisit the Fire Department’s capital improvement program to ensure that the Department is adequately equipped to fully protect the City’s property owners from fires and higher homeowner insurance rates. We should also begin the process of identifying revenues that could be earmarked for fire safety services.
- d. **Sustained Commitment to Funding Code Enforcement:** As noted by the ‘Broken Windows Theory,’ code enforcement is a vital component towards reducing crime and creating community. Properties in disrepair are a calling card for criminal activity and apathy. We need dedicated police personnel to work with code enforcement officers to ensure violators are penalized to the fullest extent of the law where fines and fees assessed for non-compliant properties will be used to fund the expansion of the City’s code enforcement capabilities.
- e. **Fully staffing 9-1-1 personnel while considering the establishment of a non-emergency 3-1-1 service:** Citizens should not call 9-1-1 and receive a message or have their calls

dropped or be placed on hold. A person should always be at the other end of the phone ready and able to assist. Just as important, citizens should be provided a 3-1-1 alternative to 9-1-1 so as to avoid consuming 9-1-1's resources for matters which are neither urgent nor emergent. The City should restore the nearly three dozen positions necessary to fully staff the City's 9-1-1 operations and consider the cost and feasibility of a non-emergency 3-1-1 number to complement 9-1-1 for non-emergent matters. Fees assessed for false burglar alarms, and if necessary, support from the general fund, could be used to begin to fill vacant 9-1-1 positions.

The second challenge facing the next City Council President is a clear need to pursue and maintain a **fiscal reform agenda**, which must include identifying new revenue sources, developing an enhanced ability to collect on delinquent and/or outstanding obligations to the City while also improving city agency budgeting processes. Under my leadership as Atlanta City Council President, the Council will undertake the following steps to help establish a culture of fiscal discipline across city functions :

- a. Implement annual budget growth caps and zero-based budgeting;
- b. Commission a revenue optimization study to identify new, non-property tax sources of income thereby lessening our dependency on property taxes;
- c. Ensure the completion of a full-turnaround of the city's Finance Department;
- d. Reorganize council staff to include full-time budget staffers;
- e. Establish a communication protocol between the CFO, COO, council members and council budget staff;
- f. Develop a website for tracking the City's progress in instituting the aforementioned fiscal reforms; and
- g. Instigate a citywide discussion and evaluation of managed competition, interjurisdictional service delivery coordination, functional consolidation and possible privatization of select city services, which if pursued, could lead to further reductions in the City's expenditures.

The third issue facing Atlanta is **economic development**. Atlanta must fully leverage existing development assets, identify new opportunities for growth and reduce poverty. Within a 21st global economy, our city must be poised to attract and retain local, regional, national and multi-national companies who offer competitive salaries. In turn, Atlanta needs to offer the

infrastructure, labor force, education, amenities and quality of life that companies find inviting. We can do so by implementing the following initiatives:

- a. Develop a comprehensive anti-poverty plan where the private, public and non-profit sectors work in concert to increase family and community sustainability through targeted workforce development and affordable housing strategies;
- b. Create an improved jobs policy to be implemented by a reinvigorated Atlanta Workforce Development Agency;
- c. Continue support of the Atlanta Development Authority, particularly the existing Tax Allocation Districts and New Market Tax Credits initiatives;
- d. Provide further support (loans, training, and technical assistance) for Atlanta's small businesses; and,
- e. Identify and cultivate economic development for certain industry clusters including but not limited to: the television, film and music industries; logistics; health care provision; biotechnology and nanotechnology research and development ("R&D"); clean energy technology R&D; and "green collar" jobs.

2. Briefly describe your qualifications for this position including what in your background has prepared you to serve as an elected official. This might include your community activism and/or business/work experience.

As a 40 year old native Atlantan and long time resident of District 4, I meet the minimum age and residency requirements to seek the office of President of the Atlanta City Council. My background as a transactional attorney with a national law firm and a degree in economics gives me a particular capacity to understand and address the complex legal and fiscal issues facing city government. My legal work with small, community-based organizations as well as large businesses that routinely interact and partner with government has provided me with a great deal of awareness of the work and responsibility of city government to deliver city services and address taxpayer and ratepayer needs in a responsive and efficient fashion. As a citizen who actively volunteers a significant amount of my time to a number of impact-driven grassroots community and civic organizations, I am intimately aware of city government's opportunity to help address the critical needs facing everyday citizens and neighborhoods in our city. As an at-large Councilmember for the last 8 years, my chairmanship of three different committees, my legislative leadership, my constituent-based initiatives and my service as Acting Council

President have fostered for me keen understanding of the workings of the City Council and city government, and have thoroughly prepared me to serve as President of the Atlanta City Council.

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

My continuing love for my hometown and the persistent belief in and commitment to the notion that Atlanta can be clean, green, safe and thriving. I believe I can play an even greater role as Council President in helping to make Atlanta the best place in the world for all of our citizens, their families, their businesses and their chosen communities.

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

None. However, I expect the strong support and endorsement of a number of individuals and organizations that represent a broad swath of the many interests, perspectives, viewpoints and demographics that make up the diversity of our city.

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

As you are aware, I was one of eight Council members who made the tough, yet fiscally prudent decision to pass the 2010 budget with a 3 mil tax increase. Easy decisions come infrequently at best in tough times. However, it is important to note that the Council has rolled back the tax rate 6 of the last 8 years. Last year alone we rolled back the millage rate by 2.5 mils. During the last 24 months, city government has reduced its total annual expenditures out of the General Fund by over \$100 million and experienced a nearly \$100 million drop in annual revenue. Disappointingly, of those who voted against the recent tax increase, none offered an alternative course of action and only one verbalized any rationale or explanation for their no-vote.

In the years ahead, we will have to seek both cost and revenue-oriented solutions while building the city's reserve to prevent dependence on tax increases in tough economic times. On the cost side, under my leadership, I will encourage the City Auditor to continue to identify sources of waste and inefficiency in all City agencies. Additionally, managed competition and/or privatization both present new opportunities for introducing market forces into the city's service

delivery mix that could further reduce public expenditures while maintaining the quality of service delivery that citizens have come to expect. Interjurisdictional service delivery coordination and functional consolidation are also ways I will seek to reduce the per capita tax obligation of citizens and businesses that are served by overlapping or adjacent governmental or quasi-governmental entities.

I would also support both a revenue optimization study to identify non-property tax sources of revenues and a review of the City's ability to collect on outstanding taxes, fees and fines. In tough economic times, the City's fiscal policies should respect taxpayers' inability to shoulder additional tax increases when better collection of existing obligations could ease the tax burden that citizens currently face. Though unpopular, additional fees or fines and more stringent collections could provide the much-needed property tax relief for which property owners across the City are clamoring. If elected, I intend to meet citizen demands for better collections and identification of new sources of public revenues.

We can also better control how we spend public dollars. We must establish stronger checks and balances such that the Atlanta City Council can consistently provide the necessary oversight and guidance needed to prevent wasteful spending. As Atlanta City Council President, I would call for setting clear budgeting priorities to shift existing resources to charter-mandated services, a reopening of a discussion about managed competition and privatization, and I will advocate for long-term structural fiscal reforms that emphasize accountability, transparency and strategic spending like zero-based budgeting, joint purchasing arrangements across jurisdictions and mandated caps on annual budget growth.

- 6. Since 2004, the city's official goal has been to have 2,000 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?**

Actually, the city has had a goal of 2000 officers since the mid 1990's. I actually support the goal of having as many as 2,500 officers protecting the citizens of Atlanta. Moreover, while I feel 2500 is a realistic goal, we must confront the fact that reaching this number will be met with incremental success at best. Many of the ways to pay for additional officers and retain existing ones have been set forth in previous questions. The city can identify non-property tax revenue sources, consider additional surcharges on delinquent accounts and fines and invest into the APD

Grants Management Office to pursue federal funding to meet the fiscal demands that expanding our police force will require.

As well, I believe that police operations can become more efficient through the use of crime-fighting technology. As City Council President, I will support innovation and technological strategies designed to modernize APD's policing procedures. Lastly, it is important to note that the success of efforts to make our city safer depends as much on the quality of our deployment techniques as it does the number of police officers staffed in the department.

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?

Not only do I support tax-allocation districts (TADs), as a Councilmember I conceptualized and authored legislation creating 4 of the City's 10 TADs. These four TADs are commonly referred to as our Commercial Corridor TADs and provide incentives along 5 historically underdeveloped corridors in our city. These TADs, in particular, fit most squarely the underlying public policy purpose of the TAD incentive tool. While serving as Chair of Community Development Committee, I also provided strong leadership, instituting an effective neighborhood input process and built community consensus to pass the Beltline legislation. TADs have been an extremely successful economic development tool which has led to expanded retail and residential options while providing the quality of life and amenities common in world-class cities. Once blighted areas are now thriving with homeowners, storefronts and community life.

Nonetheless, cannot become totally dependent on TADs by thinking that they will help the City meet all our development needs. Additionally, given the changes that have occurred in our economy, I believe that as a general proposition the bond debt attached to our TADs should be retired as expeditiously as possible in order to make the incremental tax revenue created by the new development available for city service delivery. I further intend to work closely with the Atlanta Development Authority and of the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce to support the interests of entrepreneurs, developers, small business owners, corporate CEOs and other entities who have a shared interest in the vibrancy of the City's economy.

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?

As more people move to Atlanta to live, work, play or learn, our capacity to absorb additional motorists lessens. As an avid transit user myself, I believe we must provide citizens viable opportunities to travel without the use of their car. Through the work of the Transit Planning Board, ARC and other regional organizations, we must strongly advocate for the expansion of MARTA via securing state and federal funding and inspiring the participation of additional local jurisdictions in the funding, planning and operations footprint. This expansion can also be enhanced by ensuring the connectivity between other transit efforts such as the Beltline project and the Streetcar initiative which support “pedestrian friendly” communities where goods and services are located within walking distance. We should also incentivize higher-density and mixed-use developments in and around these transit resources to further reduce the need for using our cars.

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.

The possibility of maximizing our economic potential as a City is predicated in part on having the infrastructure necessary to meet our current and long-term development needs.

1. **Water Supply.** The greatest infrastructure problem we have is an imperiled water supply and infrastructure that is embroiled in legal wrangling and has not kept pace with the City’s growth. Our viability as a city is dependent upon whether homes and business are able to receive the water they need to live and work. We must support the construction of additional reservoirs, but any success on this issue will depend not only upon state leadership, but also upon citizens retrofitting their toilets, showers and sinks with low-flow plumbing fixtures to conserve our water resources.

2. **Sanitary Sewer.** Given the legal obligations of the consent decree, another infrastructure problem involves modernizing our water and sewer system. Mayor Franklin has shown leadership in addressing this problem. It will be incumbent upon the incoming Mayor and City Council President to continue the improvements made under the Franklin Administration.

3. Mass Transit Availability/Roads and Streets. Our ability to transport people and goods with the use of transit in and around the city, throughout the metropolitan area, and ultimately from point to point in the Piedmont Atlanta Mega-region will determine whether Atlanta remains the dominant business center in the southeast. Additionally, a city as beautiful as Atlanta cannot have streets littered with potholes, cracks and uneven surfaces. Citizens deserve to drive throughout our city without fear of damaging their cars.

As City Council President I intend to identify viable, pragmatic solutions to our infrastructure problems. Access to clean water, a modern sewer system, mass transit and paved roads will only improve our city and make it more attractive to potential property owners and businesses.