



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

Name Keisha Waites

Position Sought Atlanta City Council District 12

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Dear Committee for a Better Atlanta,

Thank you for the work you do to engage voters and stakeholders in the electorate process. I appreciate the opportunity to share my vision for the district with you and the voters of Atlanta. I am excited and looking forward to working together representing the district and partnering with the business community.

Keisha Waites

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

a. Public Safety –Violent crime in Atlanta threatens our residents, our tourism industry and cost in loss of life and property. The opportunity lies in recruiting, hiring and retaining more law enforcement personnel. I support enhancing the compensation packages of law enforcement personnel and teachers by provided down-payment assistance to relocate and invest in high foreclosures neighborhoods.

b. Fiscal Accountability

Atlanta residents and businesses are been taxed to death, yet the city has not been good stewards of the public dollars entrusted. The opportunity lies in finding ways to create new revenue streams and utilize every tax dollar with fiscal restraint. We must also implement the measures highlighted in #5.

c. Transportation

We must find regional solutions to our traffic concerns. Corporations and business have begun to over look Atlanta due to our poor infrastructural planning in addressing our traffic woes. Therefore, the city is losing millions of dollars in potential revenue, in addition to potential jobs for unemployed families. Furthermore, the lack of bi-partisan consensus between the City of Atlanta and the State limit the support Atlanta has received on a regional level. Thus, the opportunity lies in building bi-partisan relationship with the state and regional partners to fund a light rail system.

Note * However, the greatest challenges in district 12 for the last two decades have remained a lack of economic development, violent crime, foreclosures, and unemployment.

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.)

I believe my professional experience and business acumen uniquely qualify me to serve effectively as the next representative in district 12.

As an eight generation, native Atlantan I have developed extensive relationships in the district 12 community where I was reared and continue to reside. I have dedicated much of my time to public service as both a community organizer and advocate for the district 12 community. My professional background working for both the Small Business Association (SBA) and the Department of Homeland Security (FEMA), I have gained hands on experience critical to tackling issues such as public safety and fiscal management which are challenges for the city and district 12.

At FEMA, I served as a Congressional Affairs Liaison responsible for working with Members of Congress and their staff in addressing congressional concerns following federally declared disasters. After college, I gained insider knowledge of mortgage lending laws and consumer finance while working for a major lending institution.

My greatest accomplishments include assisting hundreds of homeowners with the American dream of homeownership. At the Small Business Administration, I facilitated loans to many small businesses to help them grow, create new jobs and nourish the economy. During my tenure with SBA, I formed relationships and gained professional expertise that provided her with a superior understanding of the needs of small and large business owners while balancing those needs with residential communities.

Active in many local community and civic based organizations, I am a board member of the Atlanta Commission on Women, a graduate of the Atlanta Leadership Institute, a former Democratic Party Post Seat Holder, and a former board member of National Women's Political Caucus-Atlanta Chapter.

I am keenly aware of the infrastructural needs of the business community and neighbourhoods and can facilitate a vision to move our community beyond the challenges we have faced the last two decades. My record of civic service, strong business acumen, and professional experience will allow me to make an immediate and significant contribution to the City Council and residents of Atlanta.

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

For the last two decades district 12 has remained a "red light district" and the dumping ground for the City of Atlanta. District 12 is desperately in need of effective bi-partisan and competent leadership that will reflect the voice of the district and work with state and regional partners to bring needed resources to the community. The next district 12 representative must vote and make decisions that are in the best interest of the district while balancing the needs of the entire city. For this reason, many district 12 homeowners and businesses have voiced their discontent with the recent decision of the incumbent to vote in favor of both a 3 mil property tax increase and water rate hike at a time when many families have fallen on hard times due to unemployment or foreclosures.

Consequently high crime, poverty, corruption, and scandals have further disenfranchised the district causing many small and large businesses to relocate to thriving communities or close due to decreasing revenue streams. Several of district 12 major employers have closed or relocated their businesses: Airport Chevrolet, Georgia Clean Air Campaign, State Farm Valerie Primas, Wonder Bread, Blockbuster, Pizza Hut, and Arby's. This divestment further disenfranchises the community taking away needed employment opportunities, a potential tax base, and leaving residents with limited businesses in the community. District 12 also lacks a healthy competitive retail market thus driving up the cost of food and other goods and services. Ex. Kroger grocery store is the only major retail grocery store in the district serving 15, 000+ residents.

Thus redevelopment of Fort McPherson creates a unique opportunity to attract retail, commercial, and industrial development to the district. I believe my professional experience and business acumen uniquely qualify me to serve effectively as the next representative in district 12.

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

Former County Commissioner HD Dodson
Former Atlanta City Council member Vernell Mosley
Paul Lockhart, Union organizer
Residents of Lakewood Christian Manor
Members of the Atlanta Commission on Women

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

6.

I would support implementing the following measures to close the \$50 million dollar budget shortfall, improve fiscal accountability and make the city solvent:

a. Atlanta residents and businesses are been taxed to death yet the city has not been good stewards of the public dollars entrusted. For this reason, I support the following measures to improve fiscal accountability and make the city solvent:

b. Continuous audits of every department with city government

c. Partnering with Fulton County and the State to stream-line government services to eliminate duplicate services and conserve resources at a time when all agencies are experiencing shortfalls.

d. Compiling an accurate comprehensive list of all city assets and real property to encourage the liquidation of assets and property in prime markets that are vacant, unused, and/ or underused. The costs to operate many of these older facilities are a costly liability and can potentially become revenue streams.

e. Work to implement measures and procedures to collect outstanding revenue owed to the city

f. Review all city contracts for goods and services to determine if they are cost effective to taxpayers

g. Take full advantage of Obama's Recovery and Reinvestment Act to supplement budgetary shortfalls

h. Privatize and outsource city services such as payroll, sanitation, and fleet management by leasing vehicles.

i. Invest in economic develop in Southside communities of Atlanta, which could potentially yield a new tax base for retail, commercial, and industrial development.

7. 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 this goal. Additionally, I support enhancing the compensation packages of public safety officers and teachers through homeownership initiatives in high foreclosures neighborhoods. District 12 is home to numerous foreclosed and abandoned properties. This provides a great opportunity to address two major challenges in Atlanta by utilizing the resources at hand. In short this investment will be good for the city because it will create new tax revenue streams and work to adequately compensate our law enforcement officers and teachers.

We must also utilize and take full advantage of federal grants from Obama's Reinvestment Recovery Act and the Department of Homeland Security grants to supplement budgetary shortfalls.

8. 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?

I will continue to support tax allocation district and abatements to encourage development. However, I would also encourage intense oversight over the use of federal dollars like the ACoRa funds to ensure the funds are being fully utilized and properly invested in communities where the need is great.

The most recent debacle of the potential loss of the \$30 million dollars in federal dollars ACoRA funds (formerly Empowerment Zone funds) to disenfranchised communities like district 12 is unacceptable and reflects a lack of vision from the current leadership. This potential lost investment into district 12 could have been used to create new affordable housing facilities for seniors, provide job training to unemployed residents, and provide down-payment assistance to new homeowners and families considering relocation to the 12th district.

Investing in economic development projects on the Southside of Atlanta could potentially create jobs and yield new untapped tax revenue streams for retail, commercial, and industrial development. District 12's vast amounts of green space, large vacant commercial land tracts, low-cost real estate, and close proximity to downtown and the airport make the district an excellent location for future development.

9. 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.

One of the leading reasons for traffic congestion in Atlanta is the high number of single occupant commuters from suburban areas who drive into the city daily. The Beltline project and Connect Atlanta will work to provide some relief over the next 4 years. However, I also support progressive measures that encourage and provide incentives to businesses and corporations that offer flex work schedules and tele-commuter work from home alternatives where possible. This must also include utilizing modern technology to synchronize our traffic signals and use of mediums in dense and high traffic corridors. Ideally the City of Atlanta must work with the state to find regional transit solutions in the form of a light rail commuter system. This will address air quality issues, create jobs, and attract new businesses and corporations that may have overlooked Atlanta due to our traffic congestion.

10. 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. The lack of bi-partisan consensus between the City of Atlanta and the state of Georgia
Importance –high Urgency – medium (long-term project)
2. Continuous fiscal mismanagement, bureaucracy, and waste
Importance – critical Urgency – high
3. The need to find regional transportation solutions
Importance – high Urgency – medium (long-term project)