



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 3-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 X.)

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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?

I believe that Atlanta's three greatest issues are the following: (1) public safety; (2) raising taxes and other fees; and (3) non-transparent fiscal management.

Public Safety

As a lifelong Atlanta resident, I am deeply concerned about crime and my office continues to receive comments from citizens that crime is worse now than crime has ever been. The public safety issue impacts our homes, places of worship, schools, and businesses.

Recently, my colleague, Councilmember Ceasar Mitchell, was carjacked at gunpoint while leaving his mother's home and former world champion boxer, Vernon Forrest, was senselessly murdered. In addition, City Council President, Lisa Borders, experienced a home invasion and her home was burglarized twice. My home was burglarized over two years ago and my mother was shot by a stray bullet while watching television in her apartment. As a member of the Public Safety Committee, I continue to seek ways to increase Atlanta's public safety effectiveness while seeking creative solutions to fund our city's growth.

Some things that we can do to address the public safety issue are the following: (1) the next police chief needs to be fully engaged in Atlanta's police matters and there needs to be a clear career path for new officers to address officer retention issues; (2) adopt proactive community policing to foster effective police and community dialogue; (3) create incentives for officers to live in the city (*i.e.*, home buying assistance program, rent subsidies in coordination with apartment complexes, take home vehicles, etc.); (4) get Atlanta to the 2,500 sworn officers which the Police Foundation's report says is necessary; and (5) reopen closed recreation and community centers to provide constructive activities for youth.

Taxes and Other Fees

Recently, Mayor Franklin's proposal for a property tax increase came before the City Council. I, along with several of my colleagues, voted against the property tax increase. I voted against a tax increase because citizens contacted my office to share not only their strong opposition to a tax increase but also to ask how Atlanta could operate more efficiently.

Currently, Atlanta has one of the highest tax rates in the United States and Atlanta also has one of the highest water rates in the nation. I did not believe that now was the right time to raise property taxes when homes have lost value and businesses continue to grapple with a challenging economic environment. One method of closing that budget gap would have been by closing the city jail which could save the city approximately \$38 million.

Non-Transparent Fiscal Management

Atlanta has faced systemic fiscal management issues for many years. The city under our current Chief Financial Officer has experienced the highest level of transparency I have seen in my eight years on council. However, our city cannot produce accurate financial statements at a moment's notice.

Under our current governance model, the Mayor proposes financial and contract issues to the City Council for approval. At times, this process can be frustrating because councilmembers may not be adequately informed about certain issues prior to voting. This lack of communication leads to a lack of transparency in the fiscal management of our city.

Our office has worked hard and has had some success with obtaining information before hand to ask the right questions to determine whether we are being good stewards of the citizen's dollars. My office is currently evaluating whether there are any other alternatives to a proposed multi-year lease agreement for commercial office space for the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs. Instead of leasing office space in Peachtree Center, the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs may consider retrofitting closed facilities that the city of Atlanta currently owns and is not using. This type of creative problem solving is critical to a future environment where increased city of Atlanta revenue is uncertain.

Another key issue is transportation. The lack of a coherent and coordinated transportation policy impacts business development because companies are unwilling to relocate to a city with a congested traffic infrastructure. In addition, congested traffic infrastructure leads to lost employee productivity and increased public health issues which increases healthcare costs.

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.)*

While my formal education plays a role in my qualifications for holding this office, graduating from Northside High School, earning my undergraduate degree from Morehouse College BA – Urban Studies with a concentration in Management, my MS degree in Management & Policy Analysis from Carnegie Mellon University's H. John Heinz III School Public Policy & Management, and my law degree from Boston College Law School, my track record in the community as a member of the board of directors of Techbridge, the Southwest YMCA, Breakthrough Atlanta, and Wesley Community Centers helps me understand different neighborhoods and constituencies.

As to my professional experience, currently I own a successful and growing law practice in addition to my duties on the Atlanta City Council. My prior professional experience includes serving as an attorney with the Federal Aviation Administration, a public sector information technology consultant with Deloitte & Touche, now Deloitte Consulting, and a researcher with the RAND Corporation.

I believe an essential qualification for me holding office and being effective is that I am committed to Atlanta. As a lifelong resident of Atlanta, I am uniquely aware of the current and future challenges facing our city. Because my wife and young children live and work in our city, I have a vested interest in Atlanta. I am working to ensure that city government does not overtax and overburden our citizens, we have a police force that is properly trained and equipped to ensure the safety of all citizens, and we have a solid infrastructure that provides critical services to our city. My campaign theme "Committed to Atlanta, Committed to Service, Committed to You" underscores my commitment to our city.

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

The event that most shaped my decision to run for office was returning to Atlanta after law school and finding a city that was in need of significant work. Also, as a longtime member of Cascade United Methodist Church, in the words of scripture, I believe that to whom much is given much is expected. I ran because I wanted to bring a new perspective to City Council. I wanted to integrate what I learned in the classroom, working in government consulting, and as an attorney to make our city better.

The thing that has sustained me during my initial run for office and until this day has been the support of my wife, Dr. Kamili Willis, my children, Kayla and Henry, and my mother, sisters and other family members. I ran for Post 3-At Large because I believe that Atlanta can be better. I continue to serve and seek re-election because I know that while our challenges are significant as Atlantans we can meet and surpass those challenges.

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

- 1) Reverend Walter L. Kimbrough
- 2) Members of The Atlanta Urban League Young Professionals Group
- 3) Members of The Atlanta Business League
- 4) Members of The Atlanta Commission on Women
- 5) Herman J. Russell of H.J. Russell & Company
- 6) Jim Borders of the Novare Group

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

The projected budget shortfall was \$56 million and we largely closed that gap by raising property taxes. I believe that the City of Atlanta could have closed the projected \$50 million budget shortfall in two ways. First, Atlanta could have either closed, privatized, or transferred authority of the city's jail to Fulton County. This alternative would have created a projected savings of \$38 million per annum. Councilmember C. T. Martin and I proposed legislation that could have accomplished that, eliminating a major liability from the city's budget.

Atlanta is one of six major cities in the United States that operates a city jail. The jail costs Atlanta more money than it generates revenue annually. Also, the majority of the inmates in the jail belong to Fulton County and to the federal government which leases jail space.

Next, because \$20 million of the projected \$50 million in revenue shortfall is attributed to the city's reserve fund. I believe that our city needs to work with the State of Georgia to

explore investing in different asset classes which can deliver a higher economic return and create a robust investment system that favors local managers to manage and grow our assets. Our office has done research and other leading public pension funds are increasing their asset allocations towards alternative investments. Atlanta needs this type of flexibility to fuel our long-term growth.

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 goal of increased police presence in our city. However, the number of 2,000 police officers needs to be reevaluated given our current and expected future growth. The 2,000 police officer goal originated during Mayor Bill Campbell's administration. It was a goal that Mayor Campbell set for the new millennium seeking to have 2,000 uniformed officers by the year 2000.

Mayor Franklin picked up this challenge and the 2,000 additional police officer goal has become a number that is frequently cited. My office has consistently asked the Atlanta Police Department for an accurate number of police officers that a city of Atlanta's size needs. For example, Washington, D.C., a city with a population similar to Atlanta, has over 3,400 uniformed police officers excluding federal police officers and federal security forces. I believe that the true need of police officers is at least 2,500 police officers, and is more likely 2,750 to 3,000.

I would pay for additional police officers by seeking creative funding approaches such as privatizing, closing, or transferring authority for the Atlanta's city jail and evaluating what assets Atlanta could repurpose to meet current and future city demands.

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?

I would develop a program similar to what has been done in cities such as New York and Philadelphia to support desirable redevelopment projects in the years ahead. Decades ago the city of Philadelphia, through its Philadelphia Housing Authority, became one of the main property owners in the 1970s and 1980s. Philadelphia acquired homes through foreclosures after owners failed to pay their mortgages or taxes. Philadelphia learned that too many subsidized renters did not create the type of communities that lead to increased civic involvement. In the late 1990s, Philadelphia and New York discovered that the most effective way to encourage neighborhood development was transfer or work with private sector developers to transform communities.

I would create a program that allows experienced private real estate developers to develop quality residential housing for our police officers, firefighters, and school teachers. The Atlanta Housing Authority, the Atlanta Development Authority, and other not-for-profit organizations could work to coordinate efforts with financial institutions and private sector developers to define the program's scope and mechanics. Since the Atlanta Housing Authority is a national leader in redeveloping properties, existing Atlanta Housing Authority resources could be leveraged to support this program.

This program has three immediate benefits. First, it allows our city to deal with the current home foreclosure crisis by transferring unproductive residential lots to private

organizations that have a track record of creating successful communities. Second, it creates a mechanism to incent our critical service providers (police officers, firefighters, and school teachers) to live and work in our city. Third, this program allows for the development of more cohesive communities which can address issues of crime and provide direct opportunities for youth mentoring.

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.

Two initiatives that would address the traffic congestion issue are the Atlanta Street Car and the Beltline within the next four years. While these projects will not be completed within a four-year timeframe, the two of these entities could be to public transportation what I-285 and I-20 are to automotive mobility for current Atlantans. I believe that our city should continue to aggressively push forward with the agenda for the Beltline and the Atlanta Street Car.

Not only will both of these projects ultimately reduce transportation management issues, each project will increase Atlanta's standing as a major residential and commercial destination for individuals and businesses. With the current difficulty of private sector organizations to access capital markets, philanthropic organizations have contributed more than \$30 million to assist with Beltline greenspace and trail development and the non-profit Beltline Partnership is raising money to address the Beltline's capital needs.

In addition to philanthropic and not-for-profit support, it will be incumbent upon the City Council and the Mayor to work with the State of Georgia and the federal government to access public sector funds to address Atlanta's transportation challenges. My office continues to work with local, state, and federal elected offices to develop relationships and expand our dialogue on issues that impact our city's growth. The main issue that Atlanta, the State of Georgia, and other growing cities in the Southeast must address is traffic management. The Atlanta Street Car and the Beltline present two sustainable solutions to address this current challenge.

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) **Traffic/Public Transportation.** Atlanta needs to develop a comprehensive regional solution to address our growth needs and smart planning around automobile mobility. One of the reasons our state was unsuccessful in attracting Volkswagen is because of the company's concern over our congested traffic infrastructure.
 - 2) **Water.** Atlanta needs to work with the State of Georgia and our federal elected officials to ensure that Atlanta has adequate water resources for existing and future homes, houses of worship, not-for-profit organizations, and businesses.
 - 3) **Identification of City of Atlanta Real Estate Assets.** Atlanta needs to identify all of its real estate holdings to enable substantive discussion on Atlanta's future growth and management options. When access to capital markets returns Atlanta could use currently unproductive real assets as a means to fund city operations without raising taxes.