

**Committee for a Better Atlanta  
Candidate Pre- Interview Questionnaire**

**Attachment for Yolanda Adrean, Candidate for District 8**

1. The three greatest challenges to Atlanta include (1) achieving financial stability and long term strategic planning, (2) investment in infrastructure for water and traffic and (3) public safety.

**Financial Stability and Long term planning:**

Our City needs to develop short and long term strategies to achieve economic stability and raise the bar on how decisions are being made. Poor accounting over the last several years has resulted in reducing our general fund balance to dangerously low levels and have resulted in a decline in bond ratings. According to a recent report released by Deloitte Consulting, our City lacks the technical capacity to write and follow a budget. In order to restore confidence with both taxpayers and the bond markets, our City has got to have the right leadership and management to correct an accounting system that is not working.

In order to grow our tax base, we need to be competitive with other Southern cities and surrounding counties. We also need to be purposeful in protecting and leveraging the strengths we have including our diverse business community, in town colleges and universities, quality in town communities, parks and greenspace and civic and philanthropic agencies

Our city needs to make sure it is giving businesses and citizens superior services compared with other cities. That means competence at every level of government. I am told by small business owners that they get better services at more affordable prices in adjacent counties. That has got to stop.

We do not have our own Chamber of Commerce; it is a Metro Chamber. The city relies on Atlanta Development Authority to be its "marketing arm" yet ADA has no marketing budget. All the money raised by ADA goes into capital development. There is an enormous difference between development and retention. Both are important. If the city truly wants granular growth, they need to both serve the businesses we already have and while attracting new capital and businesses.

**Crime**

Crime is an over arching factor that affects the quality of life for all of us and for those who travel here for conventions, tourism and trade. While violent crime is down, property crimes are up and many neighborhoods and businesses are spending

hundreds of thousands of dollars on private security. We need investments in our public safety that are strategic and we need the right leadership to get accountability for the investments we make in public safety. It is not enough to throw more money at a department without a careful measurement of results.

### **Investment in Infrastructure for water and traffic**

Traffic is unmanageable. Our city cannot manage multiple events with the present infrastructure. For instance on nights when there are sports venues and a concert or convention, the highways and surface streets are choked with traffic. Hours are spent in wasted commutes not to mention the pollution that is created with choked passageways. On a recent summer night, a soccer tournament had our highways and surface streets clogged for hours.

And, at the neighborhood level, there are multiple hot spots which aggravate drivers and negatively impact passage through neighborhoods constantly choked in traffic. Examples in District 8 are the Moores Mill corridor, Collier Road and Howell Mill Rd.

Alternatives to cars are extremely limited and bicycle and pedestrian connectivity are very limited as well. It is simply not safe to walk or ride a bicycle in many parts of Atlanta.

Atlanta needs to be a leader in developing a long term strategy to managing the scarcity of water resources for our growing city. We must partner with other counties, the state and federal government to come up with a long term sustainability plan.

Watershed management has got to be better managed. The complaints from citizens and businesses are simply not acceptable and the cost of the department is growing unchecked while our citizens are faced with among the highest water bills in the country.

**2.** I have been deeply involved in our civic life and neighborhood activities for nearly a decade, serving as President of the Mt. Paran – Northside Citizens Association since 2005, Member of the Buckhead Council of Neighborhoods, Task force member for the renovation of Fire Station 27, Chair of the Finance Committee for the Tax Allocation District Advisory Committee for the Atlanta Beltline, volunteer for Atlanta Fire Foundation and President and Treasurer of the North Metro PTA which serves Atlanta area students with severe emotional and behavioral disorders or autism.

I have demonstrated an outstanding work ethic and leadership skills along with determination, competence and the ability to deliver results. I am also known as a strong team member.

As a CPA, I bring unique skills to City Council, particularly during a time of profound economic challenges and the need for strategic financial planning, budgeting and financial controls.

3. I am running because Atlanta faces enormous challenges. We must impose strong fiscal controls and 21st Century management standards on City Hall, to enhance public safety, ensure delivery of services, promote smart growth, tame the traffic tie-ups, and get better value for our tax dollars. Without real change, businesses leave and quality of life in our neighborhoods deteriorates. My professional background as a CPA alongside my hands-on experience working for our neighborhoods positions me well to tackle these crucial issues.

4.

Mark Elliott Chairman, Northside Youth Organization\*

Michael Wagoner, President, Berkeley Park Neighborhood Association\*

Lynne Moscow, Board Member and former President, Mt. Paran-Northside Citizens Association\*

Eric Ranney, Chairman, NPU-C\*

Jud Ready, President Wildwood Civic Association\*

\*These organizations are noted for purpose of identification and do not imply the endorsement of the above listed organizations.

5. The budget gap our city faced this year is part of an overall systemic issue that arises from a lack of financial and budgetary controls and the inability to write and follow a budget. A few years ago the city had reserves of nearly \$150 million and those funds were depleted by over spending year after year. Accordingly, the City's budget woes must be approached in a multi-dimensional manner. First there must be an exceptional CFO who will implement and manage appropriate accounting systems, controls and oversight. Next, staff needs appropriate training and technical support for using the accounting system and finally a multi year budget and cash flow analysis must be done. I would then do a department by department analysis and fund the most important priorities. It may be necessary to use hiring freezes and temporary furloughs in non essential services to close the budget gap. I would explore vigorous collection of receivables and outstanding fines, consider selling assets and deferring new initiatives until the economy strengthens.

Recently, Council approved a tax increase of three mils. The majority of the new tax dollars will be used to strengthen the balance sheet. Had our resources been managed

properly to begin with, we would not have to use new tax dollars to put \$27 million back into reserve balances and begin to pay back Watershed management \$16 million per year for the next ten years. I would have opted for a tax increase of one mil only for the purpose of restoring investments in public safety. The steps I enumerated above need to be taken prior to asking tax payers for more money.

Finally, our city needs to leverage available federal dollars for initiatives such as stabilization of neighborhoods, transportation, and public safety.

**6.** Property theft is up and that many neighborhoods are having to spend tens of thousands of dollars on private security for their neighborhoods. And many businesses are hiring private security forces as well to ensure that their customers can have a safe experience at their place of business. This means that the city has failed in one of its core missions: public safety.

The issue is two fold; it is not simply a question of head count. First we need effective leadership. It is imperative that we hire a superior Chief of Police who has demonstrated experience in managing a police force and who will focus on retention of experienced officers, recruitment of appropriate resources, proper training and deployment of resources and the ability to maintain morale. It is critical to match the number and types of specialized police officers to match the crime patterns and types of resources that our City most needs.

Undoubtedly this will require an additional investment of resources in our public safety. However, this is an essential investment necessary to maintain quality of life, maintain public order and safety and to provide the assets the department needs to effectively deliver safety services to all who live, work and visit our City.

Recently City Council passed a three mil increase in taxes to help fund the budget gap. The gap in public safety could have been funded by a one mil increase so I would have supported that option and not a three mil increase. Citizens clearly value and deserve a properly funded and managed police department.

**7.** TADs are common tools used throughout the country to fund development and they can be very effective, particularly when the economy is growing. During a recession TADS are more difficult to manage because the growth in the tax increment is not as assured. Further, while TADS fund capital improvements, local governments have to fund the incremental operating costs associated with new developments. For instance, Atlantic Station has a new Fire Station but with present budget constraints, the station is not manned. Similarly, Atlantic Station is funding much of its own security.

TADs are managed by the Atlanta Development Authority and while city government approves the TADs and all bonds associated with the TADs, the scope, negotiation and execution of the development are managed by ADA. This directly impacts citizen

engagement and transparency. Presently, the Beltline TAD is the only TAD with a citizens advisory board. (Tax Allocation District Advisory Board, or TADAC). This board is comprised of citizens and stakeholders and gives voice to neighborhoods which are impacted by the Beltline. TADAC has been instrumental in raising the bar on citizen engagement and accountability of bond proceeds.

I am concerned about the rate at which we are creating TADS. In the last few years we have added 4 more TADs. Ideally, the portfolio of TADs would be added over a longer period of time so that the City can have access to the incremental tax dollars in a more measured time frame. Right now we have ten TADs that will mature between 2024 and 2031.

Given the commitment the city has already made in ten TADs which already cover most of the under served and under developed areas of the City, I do not believe we have the capacity to use new TADs as a tool to drive any new investments until some of the other TADs have matured. Further, I think it is more important for the City to focus on absorbing the inventory of office and retail space that is unoccupied prior to pursuing new initiatives Housing incentives should be used to stabilize neighborhoods with high levels foreclosures rather than focus on new housing.

8. In the short term, we must manage our existing transportation infrastructure better, so we can increase its carrying capacity, moving the existing volume of traffic more efficiently, because no matter what major investments in new infrastructure we may be able to afford, the lag time between design and implementation is daunting. Traffic relief is needed sooner. We can manage our traffic better by implementing a series of relatively inexpensive and common-sense solutions, such as identifying top “hot spots” and develop traffic calming measures to mitigate tie ups. Examples include turning lanes, real time traffic signals, sequencing traffic lights on busy corridors. I would convene with the largest in town office spaces, government agencies and universities to explore incentives to reward carpoolers, use flexible work arrangements to stagger traffic patterns, reward employees who use MARTA and reward employees with the most creative commuter options. A company like UPS could provide unbelievable insights given their expertise in moving goods and materials effectively and efficiently.

9. The greatest infrastructure issue for Atlanta is lack of state and federal support for investing in the aging infrastructure issues our city faces including **water, sewer and traffic**. With a population that includes nearly 25% of its residents at or near poverty as well as many other property owners taxed at a level that challenges their willingness to continue to reside or to do business within the city limits, it is inconceivable to expect dramatic increases in funding to occur at the local level. And, if these infrastructure issues are not addressed, Atlanta will not be in a position to grow, attract new investments, and improve its tax base. Our citizens have already taken on the \$4 Billion investment in clean water and sewer improvements with little or no help from the state or federal government. Relief of traffic congestion will take extraordinary investment in multi-modes of transportation including roads, light rail, MARTA and safe

pedestrian and bicycle options. Though the Beltline is a project designed to provide greater connectivity, its \$2-4 Billion cost is staggering as well. The tax digest cannot grow fast enough to make this project a reality. It is critical that leaders at the City, county and state levels forge alliances to gain access to stimulus funds. We are shovel ready. We have the needs and the projects.