



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

Nick Hess
Atlanta City Council
District 4

2017 Candidate Pre-Interview Questionnaire

1. Describe briefly your qualifications for this office. In addition, please identify up to 5 organizations or individuals who are actively supporting your candidacy and why you believe their support is important.

I've run a local nonprofit for 15 years, and I've worked with my NPU for about 5 years. I'm currently employed as a software architect; as a result, I tend to think in terms of systems, interfaces, and contracts – of how systems like cities interact with people and businesses.

2. What is your vision for the City of Atlanta and how would you implement it? Please be specific.

I envision a prosperous, progressive city where residents of all communities, rich and poor, have the power and opportunity to have their issues heard.

I would implement this vision by:

- making it easier for citizens to find their local representatives, NPUs, and neighborhood associations;
- increasing access to NPU meetings by offering support for parents, elderly, carless, and second-shift workers;
- working within the community to ensure that every neighborhood has an association working to represent its interests;
- implementing participatory budgeting to allow neighborhoods to set their own budget priorities

3. Please identify the three greatest issues or problems facing the City of Atlanta and specifically how you would work to solve them.

- Citizen's lack of trust and faith in their municipal government
 - This is crucial. Without civic trust, city services cannot operate at full efficiency – police need civic trust to operate, our infrastructure require bonds and taxation to continue to improve, schools need parental support to experiment, and so forth. After multiple scandals, both in the city and out, it is up to us to give better transparency and accountability to our citizens. I would work to create a process for citizens to track the outcomes of their 911 calls; work to ensure that the Council fully adopts the recommendations of the 2009 Auditor's report on Council Expenditures;

- Continued infrastructure deficiencies in transportation and water
 - The City cannot grow on old infrastructure. Water, in particular, is crucial, and should be given priority for rapid upgrade. I support funding multiple modes of transportation for citizens and goods – not just roads, but transit, sidewalks, and bike lanes.
- Income immobility
 - We still have two Atlantas – and the Beltline is pulling them closer together. I will prioritize education and job training, encourage small-business growth, and simplify and streamline the process for people at the very bottom of the economic ladder to obtain the credentials and identification necessary to reenter the workforce.

4. As a City Council member, how would you manage collaborating with your colleagues on difficult citywide issues versus representing your own constituents?

With great delicacy.

5. How do you view the City of Atlanta's financial position? Should the City of Atlanta have additional tools in place to ensure financial management going forward?

Thanks to reforms started under the Franklin administration and continued by the Reed administration, and boosted by the national trend of people moving back into cities, our financial picture is pretty healthy. Booms don't last forever, however, and we should resist the temptation to whittle away at our rainy-day fund in the name of lower taxes.

6. Please describe your philosophy regarding property tax assessments and municipal taxation.

Property taxes form an enormous and irreplaceable chunk of municipal revenue; however, the shock from overdue and rapidly increasing property tax assessments creates an understandable fear for residents, and creates a policy conundrum for municipal taxation. We cannot simply push back on valuations, because eventually the City will threaten its fiscal position by having out-of-date valuations. I propose that the City guarantee timely assessments – ideally, every year – and use a rolling average of property values instead of the point-in-time assessment. This would give land owners time to adjust to changes in their property values.

7. What is your opinion of Atlanta's MOST, and what approach do you support to fund long-term water and sewer operations?

Clean water is critical for human life; we cannot cheap out on it. Atlanta has the highest water and sewer rates in the country; should continue with the MOST until the infrastructure repairs are completed.

8. Would you change the current procurement process to protect against “pay to play”? If so, what changes would you support?

Absolutely. I support the CBA’s call for an external oversight committee of procurement processes.

9. If elected, describe your role in ensuring ethical and transparent management of City resources by City employees?

10. What economic development strategies would you prioritize to ensure the City of Atlanta captures its fair share of future job growth?

We must continue to diversify the sources of economic growth within Atlanta; unlike many older cities, Atlanta had no natural reason to exist except as a crossroad, and we’ve been reinventing ourselves constantly. We should strengthen our communities to have a City that enjoys *general* prosperity, which will help create hothouse conditions for new business and industries to develop.

11. What strategies would you implement to ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing?

I propose that we increase the Real Estate Transfer Tax from its current super-low 0.1% rate to something significantly higher on high-value real estate sales, and use the money from this tax to incentivize the construction of affordable housing. The tax would

modestly decrease demand at the high end and help increase the supply at the low end, which would help counteract the speculative market forces that fuel gentrification.

12. What workforce development strategies should the next administration prioritize? How will these strategies address and improve economic mobility among low-to-mid skill workers?

13. What are the three most important transportation/infrastructure projects that should occur in the City of Atlanta? Please rank them by importance and urgency and explain your reasoning.

14. What strategies would you pursue to improve the safety – both real and perceived – of all residents, visitors, and workers in Atlanta? What partnerships are needed to realize these strategies?

15. Georgia ranks 49th among states for per-capita arts funding. What actions would you take to ensure our arts and culture organizations have the funding they need to thrive and enrich our city?