



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

Dustin Hillis
Atlanta City Council
District 9

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 worked as a Special Projects Director for current District 9 Councilmember Felicia Moore from February 2015 until January 2017. During that time, some of my top projects involved improving public safety and addressing blight across the district. Working towards the goal of improving public safety, I managed the District 9-funded “Operation Shield” camera roll-out in cooperation with the Atlanta Police Foundation and the Atlanta Police Department’s Video Integration Center. In bettering code enforcement and mitigating blight in the district, I submitted and/or followed-up on over 1000 code enforcement cases and, in collaboration with other city departments, resolved over 800 cases, including over 100 demolitions of blighted structures. I also earned my Masters in Public Administration with a concentration in Public Sector Management in December 2016.

Additionally, I am a critical care nurse at Emory University Hospital where I work in the neuroscience ICU. I also previously served on Emory’s Serious Communicable Disease Unit, which was responsible for successfully treating four patients that had contracted Ebola Virus Disease. As a nurse, I hope to bring an important public health perspective to the City Council.

I am proud to have the support and endorsements of current District 9 Councilmember Felicia Moore, the International Brotherhood of Police Officers – Local 623, the Atlanta Professional Fire Fighters, and the Professional Association of City Employees. Councilmember Moore’s support is important because she is highly respected in our District 9 neighborhoods and has served our area admirably for 20 years. The support of our public safety and city employee unions is also very important, as I believe addressing our city’s public safety and city service issues will be on the forefront of ensuring Atlanta continues to be a world class city for all.

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

My overall vision for our city is for it to be the city that everyone can be proud of – whether it is their home, workplace, or tourist destination. As a growing, diverse city we must attend to our many current challenges and continue to implement policies that ensure a bright future for all citizens, workers, visitors, and businesses here in Atlanta.

Ensuring the city continues to improve public safety, transportation, and city services will be some of the core components in implementing my vision for our great city.

I would specifically implement my plans by focusing on what I believe are our biggest, most important challenges (outlined in the next question) and immediately going to work with my colleagues on Council, as well as our new mayor and his or her team. There will need to be new, well-thought-out legislation passed to turn these priorities into realities for our city, and I will work in a consensus-building manner with every stakeholder in that process – from the residents of our neighborhoods, all the way up to our mayor and other governments.

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

1) Managing growth & affordability – As Atlanta continues to grow, we must ensure that our city’s growth is healthy and that we do not displace citizens. We must also make the city more affordable to our public safety employees, teachers, and other city employees. I will work with my colleagues to ensure the implementation of the city’s new zoning rewrite, which will guide our city’s growth for decades to come, and that we will continue to implement meaningful policies that prioritize affordable housing units.

2) Improving public safety – While statistics may show total crime is down citywide, many challenges remain. For example, District 9 is covered by portions of APD Zone 1 and Zone 2. Zone 1 continues to lead the city in violent crimes, while Zone 2 leads the city in property crimes. Total crime in Zone 2, which covers a major business core of Atlanta, has also consistently increased over the past few years, with little noticeable effort to change that.

It is also my belief, through analysis and personal experience, APD is severely understaffed due to low police pay and resulting attrition. I have personally fielded several complaints, as former president of my neighborhood association, of unacceptable hour-plus response times. As someone who values neighborhoods and the safety of our families, I feel it is important to feel safe in our city. If something does happen, a victim should feel confident that police will be there within minutes.

To combat crime, we must implement a more community-oriented policing approach where police have smaller beats, leading to meaningful relationships with the communities they serve and improved response times. We must address repeat offenders and juvenile crime, which will require us to work hand-in-hand with our metro and state partners. I will work with colleagues and the administration to make APD a world-class police department and reduce crime in our city.

3) Addressing ethics & transparency – The city is currently embroiled in a bribery scandal due to its lack of implementation for best practices regarding transparency in local government. I will work with my colleagues and the administration to implement identified best practices to improve our city’s transparency and make the city’s most vulnerable departments (such as Procurement) less susceptible to “pay-to-play”. This includes establishing a central online portal for all the city’s financial and budget data (down to the checkbook-level) in an easily-accessible, downloadable database. Furthermore, we should place all city contracts online, as well as details and costs of all subsidies awarded to corporations.

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

While I will always value my constituents and be responsive to their concerns, I do know that my oath will be to the City of Atlanta, not just to my district. As we tackle important, possibly controversial citywide issues, I will always value my fellow-councilmembers’ perspectives and feedback. Come decision-time, I will make the decision which, based on the information available, I believe is best for the city. That will be a decision I will own and be able to explain why I voted the way I did to my constituents, hopefully helping them understand the matter better and through a citywide lens.

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?

I view the city’s current financial position as a strong one. The current administration has been able to build our fund balance to a respectable level, which has contributed to our continually improving ratings on the finance and bond markets. Having such a strong credit rating is crucial as the city seeks diverse funding solutions to address our aging transportation and water infrastructure through bonds, such as the recent Renew Atlanta bond.

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

I believe that property tax assessments should reflect the true fair market value of properties as accurately as possible. As many know, this has not historically been the case due to the lax performance of the Fulton County Board of Assessors. I believe these discrepancies must be addressed, but increasing someone’s assessment by 50-100+

percent in one year is not the answer. Fair and equitable property taxation must be a goal in our city, something that is currently not happening and cannot happen until the Board of Assessors addresses the grossly inaccurate, nonuniform assessments.

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

The municipal option sales tax is direly needed in Atlanta to address our large backlog of repairs to the aged water and sewer system, ensuring we stay on track to meet the consent decree requirements. Ideally, a municipal water and sewer system should be fully-funded through bills and user fees, but due to the long-ignored repairs, that is not currently achievable. Atlantans already pay some of the highest water/sewer bills in the nation, so I do not support increasing those rates. While day-to-day operations should be funded by bills/fees, we will need MOST and bonds to fund the large backlog of repairs and needed upgrades.

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

The current bribery scandal, if nothing else, shows that our procurement practices are subpar at best and unethical at worst. The transparency measures discussed in question 3 would go a long way in shedding light on the city's procurement and contracting processes. I would also want to research implementing other best practices regarding procurement.

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

In addition to improving the city's ethics and transparency as discussed in earlier questions, I would also look to strengthen the city's Ethics Office, Auditor's Office, and their respective boards. Previous audits of city departments have uncovered many issues with resource utilization, spending, mismanagement, and cost overruns. I believe a more robust Auditor's Office could further improve our departments and the services they provide.

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

I believe maintaining and improving the city's economic development arm (ADA/Invest Atlanta) is vital to continuing to ensure companies continue to look to Atlanta for relocation, expansion, and start-up opportunities. Furthermore, the city should strengthen its partnerships with APS and institutions of higher learning to ensure we have an able and attractive workforce. While we need to continue attracting large corporations, I would like to see Invest Atlanta offer more programs geared toward supporting and developing medium and small businesses across our city. Simply continuing to invest in our own city will also be importing, as corporations will look to the state and value of our city's infrastructure. We need that to be a benefit, not a liability.

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

One way to obtain affordable housing in the city I do not hear talked about enough is reclaiming our vacant and blighted properties and converting them to affordable housing. Currently, the city's program for addressing these properties is through either demolition or "clean & close". Either way, the city's current process allows that property to remain in the possession of the absentee owner, continuing to be useless to the city and attract more code enforcement complaints. I favor a judicial In Rem process where, upon completion, the property is transferred to a land bank (currently the Fulton County/City of Atlanta Land Bank Authority). This would allow the city to then transfer the land to non-profits, developers, and even private citizens so affordable housing can be built. A judicial In Rem ordinance has been in the city code since around 2008, but has yet to be fully implemented, having only been used recently in a pilot project in the English Avenue and Vine City neighborhoods.

I also support other strategies to improve our supply of affordable housing, such as inclusionary zoning, housing bonds, and city-funded/incentivized workforce housing.

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?

Workforce development should not end with placing someone in low-paying, low-skilled job. Our strategy should truly focus on developing our workforce, not just placement. We should prioritize follow-up and upward mobility in the workforce. When we place a busboy at a restaurant, we need a plan, training, and follow-through to get that person to be a cook, then a chef or server, then into management. I also believe workforce development will play a key role in helping our city address its homelessness and crime issues.

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.

1) Expansion of MARTA – As our city and metro region continue to grow, expanding mass transit is vitally important, especially in regards to heavy rail, light rail, and bus rapid transit. The City of Atlanta should make it a priority to work with its metro, state, and federal partners to ensure needed expansions are realized as soon as possible. The state’s recent MARTA funding and the transit TSPLOST will be extremely useful to reaching that goal, but we must ensure that improvements are based on needs and facts, not politics.

2) Replacement, upgrade, and expansion of our aging water and sewer infrastructure – Our City already faces the highest water/sewer bills in the nation; thus, we must continue to look to other funding sources, such as MOST and infrastructure bonds to bring our system into the 21st century. Complying with the 1999 Consent Decree by the extended date of 2027 is extremely important, as is continuing to upgrade our city’s aged water mains.

3) HJIA Expansion - I am confident that Hartsfield-Jackson will continue to be the world’s busiest airport and an economic engine for our great city and region. As city leaders, we must continue to make certain the expansion timetable is keeping up with demand. The future improvements/ expansion in infrastructure and customer experience at the airport is vital to ensuring Atlanta remains an important transportation hub and the busiest airport in the world.

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?

As the International Brotherhood of Police Officers endorsee for the District 9 race, I believe that to improve public safety, we must implement a more community-oriented approach to patrolling, as well as continue to invest in smart technology that aides our officers in preventing and solving crimes. I am an advocate for increasing the number of police zones in our city, which will allow us to add more police beats and more strategically located precincts – reducing beat size and improving response times. More police presence and knowing an officer is nearby will lead to safer neighborhoods, putting families and businesses at ease. However, we will not be able address this need until we resolve the pay/benefits and morale issues for our public safety professionals.

I am also a supporter of continuing to develop our public safety foundations – both the Atlanta Police Foundation (APF) and the Atlanta Fire Rescue Foundation (AFRF). Both foundations bring in vital private support to improve our city’s safety. APF and its partners have contributed so much to the safety improvements of our city. I am proud of my work

with them and APD in my former role as District 9's Special Projects Director in rolling out the district-funded Operation Shield camera devices.

We also cannot mention improving our city's safety without addressing the issues of repeat offenders and juvenile crime. It will be important for the city to continue to develop and improve relationships with the shared stakeholders that are needed to tackle these problems. We must work together with Atlanta Public Schools, Fulton County, other local metro governments, and our state legislators in order to put our city on a better path when it comes to bringing repeat offenders to justice, developing our youth so they do not turn to lives of crime, and rehabilitation of our young people who have already turned to criminal activity. Private investment, such as that which allowed APF to develop the At-Promise Youth Center, will also play an important role.

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?

One of the highlights I truly enjoy when I visit the new Fire Station 28 and the Northwest Atlanta Library, is how both projects incorporated great works of public art. To ensure continued city commitment to public art and culture, I would like to see the unrestricted portion of the Hotel Motel Tax used to fund arts and culture in our city, as many other larger cities with such a tax have done. I would also advocate for more official partnerships with art and culture organizations/endowments to support and encourage promotion of the arts and culture in Atlanta.