

Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

Cesar Mitchell
Mayoral Candidate



2017 Candidate Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Please type response to questions in the field provided. **You may also attach a resume or other description to provide us with additional detail**

- 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 am uniquely qualified to serve as the 60th Mayor of the City of Atlanta. I have won four city-wide elections, (2) as an At-Large Councilmember and (2) as Council President. Additionally, as President of Council, I am the second-in-command at City Hall. I resume the role of acting mayor in the event the current Mayor becomes incapacitated or when he travels outside the city.

Five individuals/organizations who support my candidacy:

- Ambassador Andrew Young* - former Mayor of Atlanta who has endorsed Atlanta's last three Mayors.
- Joseph E. Lowery* - Civil Rights icon who is a key influencer in Atlanta politics.
- American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)* - one of the largest employee unions who was instrumental in my fight to increase the minimum wage for city employees to \$15.00 per hour.
- Professional Association of City Employees (PACE)* an employee worker union who helped me develop sustainable compensation strategies such as longevity bonuses and were key members of my Employee Compensation Technical Advisory Group.
- Tech Latino*- dedicated to increasing, elevating, and retaining Latinos in the tech industry. I will work with Tech Latino and other Hispanic organizations to increase Latino participation at City Hall and city contracts.

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

My vision for the city is to create an Atlanta that truly works for and includes all of its residents. My vision can be summarized in three topics.

- A. Education must be paramount.** The city can no longer sit on the sidelines and watch our school system continue to struggle. As Mayor, I will create a strong partnership with Atlanta Public Schools to develop strategies to improve our education system. Through this partnership, we will work with the business community to offer free

early child education to ensure all of our children receive the same strong start. Also, we will create comprehensive afterschool programs that bridge the concepts and principles students learn during the school day with 21st Century skills that will make them competitive and successful in tomorrow's economy.

- B. Safety.** Crime continues to top this list of concerns for City of Atlanta residents. To improve public safety, I will create the most well trained, well compensated, and well equipped police force in city history. Additionally, I will take a holistic approach to public safety. Currently, there are fire stations housed in all major quadrants of the city. I am developing a strategy that connects police officers and firefighters to optimize the use of our law enforcement personnel and provide first-in-class comprehensive public safety services.
- C. Affordability.** While new development is a great indicator of a strong local economy and will always be welcomed in the City of Atlanta, we must send a strong message to developers that Atlanta's residents are its greatest resource. As Mayor, I will work to create Displacement Free Zones to place annual property tax caps in underserved communities that are susceptible to gentrification to prevent residents and small businesses from being priced out as their neighborhoods become more attractive to developers and investors. Additionally, I will explore partnering with the city's stakeholders to create Community Land Trusts to create permanent affordable housing and rent control programs to keep rates affordable for low and moderate income residents. Lastly, I will encourage homeownership by rewarding residents who have remained in their homes for over 10 years and experienced significant increase in property assessments over the previous year.

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

The three greatest issues facing the City of Atlanta are:

- A. Affordability.** None of the progress the city has experienced made over the last decade will count if residents cannot afford to live in the city or stay in their homes. As Mayor, I will make Atlanta affordable by increasing the amount of affordable housing options in the city and increasing the city's affordable housing thresholds. Currently, the city requires new developers of residential property to set aside 10% to 15% of its units as affordable housing. However, I as Mayor, I will require all new developers receiving city funding or subsidies to set aside at least 20% of its units as affordable. Also, I will bring light to blight by transforming over 5,000 of the city's most blighted and dilapidated vacant and abandoned homes and turn them into affordable housing option for low-income families, educators, recent college graduates, and law enforcement.
- B. Crime.** Crime statistics are meaningless if people do not feel safe to walk in their own neighborhoods. Under my administration, Atlanta will become the safest

metropolitan city in the U.S. I will achieve this goal by creating the most well trained, well compensated, and well equipped police department to attract new and retain old talent. Additionally, I will strengthen the police department's Community Policing Program by providing more opportunities for officers to move beyond their offices and squad cars to engage in meaningful interactions in order to develop strong relationships of mutual trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

- C. **Transportation.** Atlanta can never truly move forward if its residents are stuck in traffic. I will create a culture that is less dependent on cars but will still allow residents to move about the city easily. In 2016, voters overwhelmingly voted to impose a half-penny sales tax for transit expansion and enhancements. The tax is estimated to collect approximately \$2.6 billion, which would allow MARTA to make major investments in transit infrastructure, including high-capacity rail improvements, new rail stations, new buses and routes, and adding more frequent services and new bus routes. As Mayor, I will work with MARTA to expand rails within the city and to the suburbs around the city. I will also work with MARTA to add transit options to the Beltline.

4. As Mayor, what would be your goals for your first 100 days in office and what would be your approach to achieving them?

As Mayor, my goal for the first 100 days in office will be to conduct an immediate audit of all major city contracts to ensure that the city is not being overcharged or is overpaying for city services. Next, I will create an inventory database for equipment used by each department to ensure that all city property and equipment is properly accounted for and logged. Lastly, I will create an accounting process for all of the city's major taxes (i.e. MOST, T-SPLOST, MARTA, and Renew Atlanta Infrastructure Bond) to determine the amounts collected and spent to-date, reassess projects, and reprioritize current projects according to greatest need.

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?

The City is in great financial position. The City has a bond rating of AA+/Aa1, we continue to adopt balanced budgets, we have close to \$175 million in cash reserves, and we have well over \$600 million to fund improvements for bridges, streets facilities, and transit. However, I believe there must be better oversight of the sales tax dollars received and transparent in the form of dedicated project management for the current and future projects funded through city taxes.

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

Last month, thousands of Fulton county residents received extraordinarily high property tax assessments from the Fulton County Board of Assessors. Eventually, Fulton County voted to freeze residential property assessments at 2016 levels, providing temporary relief to residents who may not otherwise be able to afford to pay the increase in assessments. However, that relief is only temporary and does not address the larger issue.

Through my leadership and as Chair of the Revenue and Finance Committee for the Georgia Municipal Association, I encourage my colleagues to create a taskforce to develop more sustainable and permanent policy recommendations to address defects in our state law which made the massive tax hikes possible in the first place. Additionally, I am calling for more frequent and routine tax assessments to prevent surprise massive tax hikes. Lastly, as Mayor, I will implement a 5% cap on how much property tax assessments can increase from year-to-year.

While assessments and municipal taxes are necessary from time to time to carry on the city's business, all available options should be exhausted before we put additional burdens on residents.

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

In 2004, voters overwhelmingly voted to authorize a penny sales tax to fund improvements to our water and sewer infrastructure. In 2016, voters authorized an extension of the tax, which is set to end in 2020. I believe that the MOST was a good start, but the city has a lot of work to do with regards to water and sewer improvements.

The city has not reached its tax capacity as set by State Law. As Mayor, I will explore petitioning the State Legislature to determine whether it would be adventitious of the city to initiate another Municipal Option Sales Tax. However, the unlike the tax first authorized in 2004, I will petition the legislature to include funding for storm water improvements through the new tax. Additionally, I am interested in setting aside a portion of the Department of Watershed Management's budget to fund improvements to the city's water and sewer infrastructure.

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

I would absolutely change the current procurement process to protect against "pay to

play” deals by ensuring fair, transparent, and ethical dealings with all city contracts. All businesses should have equal access to the city’s contracting process, not just a selected few. I will safeguard against bribery and corruption by placing city contracts and vendors online for public inspection and implementing a “cooling off” period for vendors to prevent the same contractors from monopolizing city contracts.

Additionally, I will restrict the use of no bid contracts to only emergency situation where there is a threat to the public health, welfare, or safety of residents to help restore the integrity of the city’s procurement process. Lastly, I will place all city contracts and information about any individual or entity receiving city funds, online for public inspection.

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

Ensuring ethical and transparent management of city resources is not a role I will wait to assume when I am elected Mayor. I am fighting for a more ethical and transparent City Hall right now, in my role as City Council President. I am the first elected official and only mayoral candidate in Atlanta to place all of their office financial expenditures online for public view. As Mayor, I will continue this practice, by placing all city expenditures online. Residents have the right to know how their tax dollars are being spent.

Additionally, I will reorganize the city’s Office of Compliance, to provide greater oversight and work in concert with the Ethics Office, Internal Auditor’s Office, and Contract Compliance Office to ensure that the city is in compliance with all local, state, and federal rules and regulations and to effectively investigate all allegations of fraud, waste, abuse, and corruption in city government.

Lastly, I will enhance the city’s ethics rules to create a culture of openness and accountability throughout the city. I will amend the city’s ethics code to create a comprehensive Whistleblower Statute that covers any individual who reports misconduct or unlawful behavior committed by a city employee, officer, or contractor. The Whistleblower Statute will provide monetary rewards to encourage individuals to provide information leading to the termination or arrest of individuals engaging in unethical conduct and will include a “Zero Tolerance” Retaliation Policy to prevent retaliation.

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

Atlanta’s regional economy has grown dramatically in the last few years, but far too many residents find themselves on the margins of that growth. To ensure that all

residents have the opportunity to participate in the City's growth, I will allocate funds to Invest Atlanta to create more Economic Opportunity Funds to incentivize businesses to open, relocate, and expand their operations in the southern region of the city, to create more jobs and economic development in that area. Additionally, I will leverage city resources to offer tax credits to local businesses to hire and retain residents from high unemployment neighborhoods. The same tax credits will be applied to businesses who utilize the city's Workforce Development Agency to satisfy their labor needs.

Lastly, I will create production-related educational and training opportunities and facilitate employment of local talent to provide a sustainable workforce for the city's thriving film and entertainment industry.

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

To ensure adequate supply of affordable housing, first, I will revise the city's affordable housing policies to increase the availability of affordable housing throughout the city by requiring real estate developers receiving grants, incentives, or subsidies from city funds or through an economic development authority operating under the purview of the city, to open up units for lower to medium-income residents.

The current policy requires developers to offer 10% to 15% of its units as affordable housing options to police officers, firefighters, teachers, and hard-working families. However, as Mayor, I will require developers of residential projects that receive financial assistance from the city to set aside at least 20% of their total units as affordable housing options.

Additionally, I will partner with the Atlanta Housing Authority, Habitat for Humanity, the Atlanta Land Bank Authority, and Invest Atlanta to transform over 5,000 of the city's most blighted and dilapidated vacant and abandoned homes into affordable housing options for low-income families, law enforcement, recent college graduates, and educators.

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?

To prioritize workforce development strategies, I will create a 5-Star Alliance with the city's workforce development agency and with the city and its agencies, the business community and chambers, labor, institutions of higher learning, and Atlanta Public Schools to elevate the agency into a place where job seekers can find a career instead of

merely a job. Instead of focusing on getting residents jobs, the agency will focus on the market's current needs and equipping applicants to supply those needs.

Far too often, we ask our most economically vulnerable residents to fend for themselves when it comes to getting the training they need and connecting them to existing job opportunities. As a solution, I will create what I call "Opportunity Villages" to bring job training, adult education, and local employment opportunities provided by the agency to the communities that need them the most. Services provided through the Opportunity Villages will include: GED preparation, resume workshops, computer literacy and data input classes, job assessment and readiness training and interview skills.

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.

The three most important transportation/infrastructure projects that should occur immediately are as follows:

- A. **Infrastructure Improvements**. The T-SPLOST, which took effect on April 1, 2017, added an additional four-tenth of a penny to fund about \$300 million worth of projects over a five-year period. Through the T-SPLOST, I will conduct an immediate assessment of all the city's streets, roads, sidewalks, and bridges to prioritize repairs and concentrate spending according to the greatest need.
- B. **Light Synchronization**. One of the component of the T-SLOST is light optimization/synchronization for all of the city's traffic light systems to improve the flow of traffic and keep vehicles moving.
- C. **MARTA Expansion**. I will work with MARTA and the city's regional and state partners to develop transportation strategies and solutions to reduce traffic and improve connectivity and mobility to make Atlanta more attractive for start-ups and companies desiring to relocate.

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?

To improve safety, I will first ensure that our officers are adequately compensated. To accomplish this goal, I will permanently reconvene my Employee Compensation Technical Advisory Group to develop competitive long-term compensation strategies, educational and bilingual incentives, law enforcement workforce housing, tuition reimbursement, and succession plans to incentivize new law enforcement talent and reduce attrition rates within the department. Additionally, I will work with mental health and wellness organizations to provide therapy and psychological screening

services for law enforcement personnel to help them cope with the high stressful situations they encounter daily.

Next, I will invest in the latest equipment and technology such as first-in-class simulation training, a state-of-the-art training facility, bullet proof vest, body cameras, interactive data and records system, and high tech fire uniforms to ensure that our law enforcement have all of the resources necessary to protect and serve the community.

I will strengthen APD's Community Policing Program to strengthen the relationship of mutual trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve. To accomplish this goal, I will also reinstate my Community Policing Training and Preparedness Program to require all new recruits with the Atlanta Police Department to spend at least 8 weeks on foot patrol to get familiar with the community and its residents immediately after graduating from the academy.

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?

In addition to continuing the Office of Cultural Affairs Contracts for Arts Service program where the city provides public funding for arts, I will look for ways to create a designated funding source for arts and culture organizations. I will accomplish this goal by partnering with the business community and philanthropic organizations to fund arts in Atlanta.