



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

**Matt Westmoreland**  
Atlanta City Council  
Post 2 At Large

## 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 am the District 3 Representative on the Atlanta Board of Education. In that capacity, I've served as chair of our Budget Commission, overseeing the development of a \$1 billion annual budget, and as Legislative Liaison to the Georgia General Assembly, working with officials in both chambers from both parties. I also helped lead the school system's campaign for the E-SPLOST renewal and the development of our Turnaround Strategy. I am Program Director for the Horizons Atlanta, where I supervise a team of nine site directors, and was appointed by Governor Deal to the Georgia Commission on Service and Volunteerism. I'm an Atlanta native, graduate of Grady High and Princeton University, and was a 2010 Teach for America Corps Member at Carver Early College High School in Southeast Atlanta.**

**I am grateful for the active support of John & Mary Brock (Former CEO, Coca-Cola Enterprises and Owner, Atlanta Dream), Alicia Philipp (President, Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta), Egbert Perry (Chairman and CEO, Integral Group), Jennifer Freeman (President, Atlanta Planning Advisory Board), and the city's three largest professional organizations (AFSCME Local 1644, IBPO Local 623, and IAFF Local 134). These individuals and organizations represent a diverse cross-section of the city's corporate, philanthropic, non-profit, civic, and neighborhood leadership.**

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

**My vision for Atlanta is to be equitable, inclusive, and diverse for all who call this incredible city home. I want to help build an Atlanta where our children attend quality schools, jobs pay a living wage, and neighborhoods are safe, affordable, and vibrant. I want our city to continue becoming more and more of a global leader, for *all* of our residents to have meaningful choice in life, and for the opportunities of Atlanta to be accessible to everyone. I want Atlanta to have a local government where people from different neighborhoods and diverse backgrounds can come together to solve problems and achieve progress.**

**The first step in beginning to realize that vision for Atlanta is by electing a mayor, a council president, and a city council that will tackle the challenges we face and make tough decisions in the best interest of our families, our residents, and our communities. It will be critical for all the members of the city's new governing team to first get to know one another and then build strong relationships built on trust to move the work forward. It will also require that**

**governance team to call the business, philanthropic, nonprofit, faith, and higher ed communities to the table for a collective conversation about issues facing the City-- because each of them has a critical role to play in the solution.**

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 challenges facing the City of Atlanta are ensuring all residents have access to economic mobility, a quality education, and safe and affordable housing. Inequities in all three of those areas are what's led Atlanta to be named the city with the highest income disparity in the United States over the last three years. I include specific strategies and ideas on addressing these concerns in my answers below.**

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

**As an At-Large Council member elected citywide, I will be responsible for representing all of Atlanta's citizens and working with my At-Large and District colleagues to collectively move the entire city forward.**

**I would come to that work with four years of doing exactly that as a member of the Atlanta Board of Education. While elected to a District seat, my colleagues and I swore an oath to make decisions that were in the best interest of all students and the entire school system. I've worked incredibly hard over the last four years to build strong relationships with all eight of my colleagues-- learning about our different districts, the challenges and opportunities they face, and providing support and assistance where I could. My work at the State Capitol as Legislative Liaison, on the system's finances as Budget Commission Chair, on developing a Turnaround Strategy for our chronically struggling schools, and many other issues have always required collaborating with colleagues while maintaining a citywide focus.**

**Finally, while there is an open seat for the Council District in which I live, I'm deliberately running for the At-Large position because I believe my knowledge, skills, and mindsets all lend themselves better to a citywide position. And I have a track record of building relationships with elected officials from across the city to advance a common agenda.**

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?

**With an estimated \$175 million in reserves and an AA+ credit rating, the City of Atlanta is in its strongest financial position in recent memory. The city's general fund budget and various enterprise funds are also in very good shape. With passage of the Renew Atlanta bonds and City T-SPLOST over the last two years, the City will be responsible for overseeing the**

**responsible expenditure of several hundred million dollars over the next five years. I believe it will be important to continue the effective financial management we've seen from this Administration and Council, and we must obviously continue the policy-making that maintains our improving credit ratings.**

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

**I believe Atlanta needs and deserves a competent and effective Tax Assessor and Board of Assessors at Fulton County (and DeKalb County) who are capable of accurately and fairly determining the value of property on an annual basis. I believe property tax assessments should reflect the fair market value of a piece of property.**

**I also support the existing sales taxes in place to help providing funding for regular city operations, our water and sewer systems, our school system, and our various transportation infrastructure needs. One of the benefits from levying a sales tax (versus a higher millage rate) is the ability for visitors, tourists, and workers to help shoulder the burden of those taxes rather than simply citizens covering the cost through a higher property tax bill.**

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

**I have voted as a citizen three times -- in 2008, 2012, and 2016 -- to extend Atlanta's MOST to support water and sewer upgrades. Our existing sales tax is slated to sunset on September 30, 2020, and I will support another extension at that time. I appreciate the fact this sales tax allows visitors and workers who use the City's water and sewer infrastructure but do not pay City water/sewer bills to help provide funding to upgrade and maintain our infrastructure.**

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

**I support commissioning an internal audit of all procurement procedures by an independent firm and implementing new ethics and procedure training for all City employees who handle sensitive financial matters. I'm also supportive of an external oversight committee to regularly review procurement practices.**

**I'd be open to banning (or limiting) political contributions from entities or individuals doing business with the City or seeking to do business with the City-- as well as for a year after an entity or individual has completed doing business with the city.**

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

For the last three years, I have served as Chair of the Budget Commission for Atlanta Public Schools. In that role, I was responsible for working with the superintendent to develop and monitor implementation of annual budgets totaling roughly \$1 billion. Each fall, we created a calendar of the various public meetings and community hearings across the City we would hold to ensure a transparent budget development process. All draft and final documents, in great detail, are posted online for review by stakeholders, and each month the system's CFO provides any and all budget adjustments that the administration believes need to be made. The system also two different stakeholder advisory groups (the Budget and Finance Advisory Committee and the SPLOST Advisory Committee) made up of parents and community members who help ensure district employees are managing the system's resources in an ethical and transparent manner.

In addition to the steps I outlined in my response to Question #8, I believe there are lessons from our budget development process at APS that we should implement at the City. Citizens and stakeholders deserve to have a say in how City dollars are being spent. And they deserve to have a role in monitoring our expenditure of City resources, and to know that a professional, independent entity is doing the same.

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

The current administration and Council have done impressive work over the last few years around attracting new jobs and investment into the city. There are several strategies I believe we need to employ in the years ahead to ensure the City of Atlanta remains economically competitive in the region and in the nation:

- The City of Atlanta and Atlanta Public Schools must improve and deepen their relationship. A quality public school option and an educated workforce are essential to attract businesses looking to relocate to Atlanta. That begins with expanding Early Childhood Education opportunities from Prenatal-to-PreK across the city.
- We must make thoughtful investments in public transit and in our transportation infrastructure. Thanks to the decision by Atlanta voters in 2015 and 2016, we know have considerable resources at our disposal to make meaningful improvements on these fronts over the next 5-10 years.
- The City of Atlanta is also in the midst of rewriting its zoning regulations. We must protect our tree-canopied neighborhoods while also encouraging density along our main thoroughfares and our transit system.
- We must continue to ensure we are maintaining competitive tax rates compared to other counties around the state and other cities around the country.
- One of Mayor Reed's greatest accomplishments in office has been the relationship he's developed with Governor Deal. I think it's critical that Atlanta's city government

continue to work with our state's chief executive (regardless of party) after the 2017 and the 2018 elections.

- We must focus our economic development opportunities on City's Southside. For far too long, this part of Atlanta has not enjoyed the growth and development seen on our North and East sides. This must change.

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

A look around the City and Region shows that ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing is an increasingly urgent challenge. Home ownership rates are down while home prices and rents are rising significantly faster than wages-- due in part to dwindling supply caused by a lag in residential construction. To make matters worse, most low-income housing is located in areas with limited economic opportunities, which continues the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

Fortunately, there are a wide array of strategies that Atlanta can use going forward to ensure housing affordability across the economic spectrum:

- Working with the Atlanta Housing Authority, which owns a considerable amount of empty land across the city, to continue redeveloping their properties with mixed-income housing for those at all levels of the economic spectrum
- Partnering with nonprofit developments to convert suitable surplus city properties/buildings into affordable housing units (Much like APS is doing with it's empty buildings through a task force created last December).
- Ending minimum parking requirements for new construction (which can add significantly to the cost of housing)
- Revising long-standing zoning requirements that limit the quantity and type of housing choices, which limits supply.
- Expanding programs through Invest Atlanta where residents receive assistance in making down-payments on new homes
- Expanding the use of land banks and community land trusts
- Create an Affordable Housing Trust Fund
- Target vacant and abandoned homes and code enforcement violators to revitalize existing housing stock
- Continuing to require construction projects with any public funding to set aside a certain percentage of affordable units (and giving incentives to the developer with strategies like upzoning).
- Consider determining and using the "Area Median Income" for the City of Atlanta itself rather than relying on the one determined for the metro area.

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?

**The former Atlanta Workforce Development Agency (now known as WorkSource Atlanta) has long been plagued by challenges around effectiveness and efficiency. One of the first priorities of the next administration needs to be appointing a first-in-class executive director who can continue the agency's turnaround.**

**It will also be important for WorkSource Atlanta to establish a meaningful partnership with Atlanta Public Schools, which graduates roughly 2,500 seniors each year, many of whom are heading directly into the workforce.**

**Last year, the school system partnered with Kauffman Tires to build a \$150,000 automotive training facility at South Atlanta High School. Now, when students graduate from South Atlanta, they can also leave with a certification that would send them into a quality, skilled job that pays a living wage. We need the next administration and the new Council to be advocates for expanding partnerships like these for those entering the workforce.**

**For those already out of school, WorkSource Atlanta needs to expand and improve job training and recruitment programs throughout the city-- especially in the growing film industry. Frankly, it's unrealistic that a single location in Peoplestown that isn't served by a MARTA rail line would be able to meet the significant workforce needs of the city. We need to establish satellite offices across the city-- especially those accessible by our public transit system.**

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) Hartsfield-Jackson is the economic engine for the region, for Georgia, and for the Southeastern United States. It's direct and indirect impact on the economic health of our City is unrivaled, and it's critical that it stay that way. With that in mind, continued growth and expansion of Hartsfield-Jackson will always be the most important transportation/infrastructure project. In March 2016, the airport announced a \$6 billion, multi-year expansion that will likely include a sixth runway, the construction of Concourse G, a new hotel, and significant upgrades to the existing facility. It will be the responsibility of the next mayor and Council to ensure this critical project continues on schedule and on budget.**

**2) The Atlanta Beltline is one of the largest economic development and transportation efforts in the country. Completing right-of-way acquisition to create the full 22-mile loop is an important next step in continuing this project, which is already transforming the city in many**

ways. This was one of the projects outlined in the city's 2016 T-SPLOST referendum, and I fully support purchasing the land needed to complete the loop.

**3) The "Clifton Corridor," home to Emory University, Emory Hospital, centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Children's Healthcare, and the Veteran's Administration Hospital, is a critical piece of the Atlanta Region. And with the expected annexation of the University and the surrounding area City of Atlanta later this Fall, it will then fall within the city limits. The proposed Clifton Corridor Light Rail Transit project that would connect MARTA's Lindbergh Center to it's Avondale Estates station, linking these huge job centers and economic hubs to our regional transit system by rail.**

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?

**Atlanta must continue working toward having a fully-staffed, well-trained, competitively-paid and community-focused police force. While the current administration and department leaders have made solid strides in stemming crime over the last eight years, we've also experienced severe attrition. I see similarities between strategies needed here and those we have employed over the last four years at APS with our teaching force. Recruiting and retaining the best talent requires salaries competitive with the region, providing workers with the equipment and resources they need to do their job well, and opportunities to grow in their role or advance into new roles through meaningful career pathways. Currently, APS salaries lag behind peer departments across the region, resulting in the department losing younger officers after we've made the investment in resources and time to send them through the academy.**

**The Atlanta Police Foundation has been a critical partner to the City in improving safety (real and perceived) for residents, visitors and workers. Recently, I worked with Dave Wilkinson and the APS administration to ensure an old APS property in English Avenue could be used as the APF's first @Promise Center to help youth before (and immediately after) their first experience with law enforcement as an alternative to jail. Thanks to strong support from the corporate and philanthropic community, the Foundation has also been instrumental in supporting technology upgrades for APD across the city. It will be important to continue strengthening these partnerships in the years ahead.**

**We also need to strengthen our relationship with the County as it relates to reforming our practices around repeat offenders and with the State as it relates to statutes around removing vacant and abandoned homes in neighborhoods that create blight and provide both real and perceived challenges to public safety.**

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?

**I support returning to the Georgia General Assembly and asking for authorization of a referendum to raise the sales tax by one-tenth of a penny to provide an estimated \$10 million to \$15 million annually in arts funding. That alone isn't enough to ensure our arts and culture organizations have the funding they need, but it will signal to the region's corporate and philanthropic communities that the City is making an investment-- and encourage them to do the same. As Legislative Liaison for APS to the Georgia General Assembly, I've spent the last four years working with members of the Atlanta delegation from both sides of the aisle. I will use that experience and my relationships to bring this proposal back during the next legislative session.**