



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

**Erika Estrada**  
District 3 Candidate



## 2019 Candidate Pre-Interview Questionnaire

*Please type your response to questions in the field provided. Please limit answers to 250 words or less. You may also attach a resume if you would like.*

**1. Describe briefly your qualifications for this office and why you have chosen to run for 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.**

Atlanta has been my home over thirteen years and I've proudly resided in District 3 for over seven years. Some areas of District 3 have experienced unprecedented growth and transformation in recent years. In the last decade, there have been several plans that have been produced that, if implemented, position the District for further growth and transformation. Now, more than ever before, District 3 needs a collaborative leader who respects the rich history and wonderful residents of our District and can see plans through to completion that benefit our neighborhoods and residents. I have chosen to run for this office because I am deeply committed to my District and the City of Atlanta and I want to actively participate in solving the tough challenges we are facing. I have the unique combination of compassion, community involvement experience and business acumen to move District 3 and the City of Atlanta forward into a brighter future.

At the time of this writing, it has been just over one month since I announced my first-time candidacy and entered the race and I'm proud of and excited about the support I have received. My campaign has been financially supported by over 70 individuals and businesses, thus far.

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

My vision for the City of Atlanta is that we remain the cultural, economic, educational and transportation hub of the Southeast. I also envision our City maintaining our reputation as an inclusive city where all are welcome and where dreams can come true. From a forward-looking perspective, I envision our City making measurable and meaningful progress to address tough social and economic challenges facing our City such as the affordable housing crisis and income inequality. We can be and should be an example for other cities across our nation to aspire to because of our innovative and effective approach to tackling challenges.

To implement this vision, I support partnerships, organizations, new legislation and budget priorities that help us maintain our leadership status in the aforementioned areas, while not compromising our values as a City nor our future viability. Each initiative put forth or supported to help us maintain our leadership in certain areas and become a leader in new areas should be evaluated for its impact, both short and long-term, on our City's social, economic and financial health. To mitigate income inequality, I look forward to working closely with our civic, community, non-profit and business leaders on initiatives already in progress that have actionable plans and planned outcomes that will directly reduce the poverty rate in the City of Atlanta from approximately 24% according to a 2017 Bloomberg Analysis based on U.S. Census Bureau calculations. There are existing, powerful initiatives that are currently tackling these problems and I first want to strengthen and support those initiatives, if elected, before moving on to developing new ones for scratch.

**3. Please identify the three greatest issues or problems facing the City of Atlanta and specifically how you would work to solve them. Similarly, please identify three greatest issues or problem facing District 3, specifically, and strategies you would pursue to address them.**

In no particular order and all of great importance, the three greatest issues facing the City of Atlanta are 1) Income Inequality, 2) Diminished Public Trust in Our City Government, and 3) Transportation Congestion & Mobility. I would specifically like to address these issues in the following manner:

1. **Income Inequality** - Solving the issues of poverty and income inequality is going to be a long-term, multi-generational effort that will take strong, innovative partnerships to make meaningful change. In the short-term, I would work with initiatives and advocate for policies that prevent displacement of families and individuals simply because they don't have adequate income. The Anti-Displacement Tax Fund program administered by the Westside Future Fund and initiated by the Westside Community Retention Collaborative is an example of the types of private partnerships and collaborations I'd like to initiate more of to address the impact of income inequality. Also, in the short-term, I would work to strengthen existing initiatives that provide workforce training and direct pipelines to well-paying jobs. This would entail building new public, private and community partnerships that would provide funding and other resources to address this issue in the short-term.
2. **Diminished Public Trust in Our City Government** - Positive strides have recently been made by Mayor Bottoms and the City Council to address the public's eroded trust in our City Government. I am optimistic about the plans being explored to create a new Task Force for the Promotion of Public Trust and the possibility of an independent compliance office. I support initiatives that will increase transparency and ethical behavior and will help our City government regain the public's trust. If elected, I would

like to assist with the planning and structure of new initiatives adopted to make sure that they will be effective and have measurable outcomes that meet their stated goals.

- 3. Transportation Congestion & Mobility** - To become a more liveable, sustainable city that continues to attract our fair share of healthy growth, we must continue to take action that will increase safe mobility options. Expansion of MARTA coverage and investing in other light rail options should continue to be top priority for long-term projects to be funded in the future, but in the short-term there are actions we can take. With the current budget shortfall for TSPLOST funding, the renewed list of projects should be adequately vetted and prioritized to ensure that funds are allocated to projects that will provide the greatest community benefit in relation to the expenditure. I would also advocate for working with the City of Atlanta's Office of Resilience, community and non-profit organizations to increase communication and education on alternative modes of transportation, including biking or Electronic Vehicle (EV) ridesharing.

The three greatest issues facing District 3 are 1) Affordable Housing and Living 2) Blighted, Abandoned and Underutilized Properties and 3) Crime Levels. I would specifically like to address these issues in the following manner:

- 1. Affordable Housing and Living** - The direct costs of housing, including rent and home prices have continued to increase at paces that don't align with increases in wages and income. Additionally, the associated living costs, inclusive of homeowners association dues, maintenance costs, utilities and property taxes have also risen and negatively impacted District 3 residents by causing financial sacrifices and even displacement. Approximately half of renters in District 3 are spending 35% or more of their income on rent. I would like to take actionable steps that would increase the affordable housing stock in District 3 to ensure housing remains affordable for our legacy residents and for new residents interested in making the district their home. My immediate steps would include supporting or creating initiatives that would end zoning requirements that limit affordable housing options, increasing the amount of units developers are required to reserve for affordable housing or increasing the In-Lieu fees that will feed into land trusts. It is also extremely important that we define "affordability" in a way that reflects the reality of our District's residents. I would explore this further to make sure that "affordability" measures are realistically defined.
- 2. Blighted, Abandoned and Underutilized Properties** - There is a significant amount of blighted, abandoned and underutilized property in the District. These properties could be repurposed to increase the affordable housing stock our District and City desperately need, or, the properties could make way for parks and community greenspace. As an immediate step, I would like a concerted effort to more aggressively go after property owners of blighted or abandoned property in District 3 who are violating code enforcement. This effort would include a study to understand the impediments to

moving code enforcement in our District and a plan to move forward with transparency and stated goals and timelines.

- 3. Crime Levels** – To address higher crime levels, I first want to make sure that I give the Atlanta Police Foundation, the Atlanta Police Department and other community organizations with expertise in this area my full support to help facilitate change. I will advocate for ensuring that our officers have the best pay, technology and training available so that they are able to do their best. I would also support neighborhood and faith-based organizations by helping provide resources and support to allow them to help with this critical issue, as well. Strong partnerships are key to solving this issue.

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

I strongly believe that collaboration and partnerships are the only way that we can effectively solve the challenges facing our City. Many of the challenges we are currently facing in District 3, such as affordable housing and the balance of healthy growth with our existing neighborhoods' character and values are the same challenges being faced by the City of Atlanta, as a whole. So, there will often be common ground and interest to bring solutions to the table that would benefit the constituency of District 3 and the entire City. Even when there is not direct overlap in a citywide issue with District 3's needs or constituency, I will evaluate citywide policies and decisions based on their impact on all constituents of our City.

**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 believe the City of Atlanta is in a healthy financial position at this time, with strong reserves and a balanced fund budget. These are strong signals of progress and growth, especially compared to previous years. It is extremely important, however, that we protect our current financial state by making sure that we continue to make decisions that are fiscally responsible and that our leadership operates in an ethical and transparent manner. I also would suggest that priority be placed on a plan to reduce our long-term debt obligations. Effective, competent financial leadership at the City level and by the Council will help ensure that we continue to protect and enhance the recent progress that has been made.

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

Though property tax assessments are in the hands of Fulton and DeKalb counties as it relates to the City of Atlanta, I believe the City should collaboratively work with the counties to make sure that a fair, transparent and well-communicated process takes place. I also will advocate for collaboration that will result in additional exemptions for our most vulnerable citizens paying property taxes.

Municipal taxation is necessary to fund our City's support and services. Though it is indeed necessary, I believe we must be practical and responsible when evaluating taxation rates. At this time, the City of Atlanta's tax rates are higher than surrounding areas and higher than many cities' across the country. Given this we must be mindful of the impact of higher tax rates on City of Atlanta businesses when compared to competitor businesses in nearby localities, as we consider future increases.

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

I am in full support of Atlanta's MOST and would support taxpayer-approved funding similar to MOST for future funding. It is a powerful financing tool that helps ease some of the tax burden to our citizens, yet protects the long-term future of our city's water and sewer infrastructure. The funding is helping address immediate project backlog challenges and, if managed appropriately, can continue to address challenges to come and reduce future taxpayer burden.

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

To protect against "pay to play" in the current procurement process, I am in favor of having periodic, thorough, and completely independent review of the process from an outside consultant with recommendations that will be adopted and implemented. Independence is a key component of improving the process and an independent review and implementation process will be a great first step in ensuring that we are taking the right steps to improve this process. Strong commitment to ethics and transparency from leadership of the Office of Procurement will also ensure steps in the right direction, as tone in organizations is directly influenced by leadership. And, finally, utilizing technology and review and approval processes within the technology will also aid in a more efficient and transparent process.

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

As part of my campaign, I have committed to moving all of District 3 forward and the City of Atlanta, ethically and responsibly, if elected. My role in ensuring ethical and transparent management of City resources by City employees is to first make sure that my brand of ethical and transparent leadership is clear through words, actions and even perceived actions. By leading by example through my actions, my hope is that it would encourage others to do the same. I also would advocate for additional training on ethics and transparency for City of Atlanta employee's to fully understand ethical and transparent behavior and to understand that exceptions will not be tolerated.

**10. What economic development strategies (financing or otherwise) would you prioritize to ensure the City of Atlanta captures its fair share of future job growth and maintains its economic competitiveness?**

To optimize our positioning to remain economically competitive and capture job growth opportunities, we must continue to be attractive to employers and put our support behind new business ventures that want to develop and grow within the City. To attract new job growth and companies, Atlanta has to be a city that welcomes, supports and has resources for individuals and families of all backgrounds. This would entail prioritizing and dedicating resources to transportation innovation, affordable housing, public safety and education. If we don't put financial and human resources behind these areas to show that we are serious, welcoming contenders, we risk losing out on future opportunities that would provide economic stimulation for our City.

Given this, I will advocate for financing projects through private and public partnerships that will ensure that our City is producing skilled labor in areas that are attractive to incoming businesses. I will also advocate for funding in the aforementioned areas that will make the City of Atlanta a more attractive city to live and grow in.

**11. What is your view on the current community development ecosystem in District 3? If elected, what role would you play in existing civic efforts as it relates to the ongoing Westside transformation?**

District 3 is made up of uniquely diverse, tight-knit neighborhoods and communities. In my time as a resident of the District I know that our residents are active in the community, they care and they want to be heard. I want to drive stronger civic engagement from the already very active community engagement. If elected, my top priority is to be a strong communicator and collaborator with our District's residents. I would continue presence at NPU meetings as previous Councilmen have, but I'd like to take a more community-based approach and be a strong presence at neighborhood meetings and smaller community gatherings, as well. To effectively communicate the status of Westside transformation projects, I plan to use technology and the presentation of personal messages, coming directly from me, at smaller neighborhood meetings and gatherings.

**12. What strategies would you implement to ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing? What is your position on the Mayor's \$1B housing affordability pledge?**

As I noted earlier, before implementing any additional strategies, I'd first like to ensure that the way we define affordable is adequate. We need to ensure that when we address the affordable housing crisis, our lower and lowest income residents are not left out of the equation and that we have a solution that is inclusive of all in need of

affordable housing. To ensure an adequate supply, we must deploy strategies such as revisiting the new inclusionary zoning policy, repurpose blighted, abandoned and underutilized properties and seek out investors who have an interest in affordable housing projects.

I am excited about and supportive of the Mayor's \$1B housing affordability pledge. I believe public-private partnerships are critical to tackling this important issue.

**13. What workforce development strategies would you support or help implement? How will these strategies address and improve economic mobility among low-to-mid skill workers? Lastly, describe your philosophy towards WorkSource Atlanta and what you believe is needed to ensure the agency meets necessary grant deadlines moving forward and deploys these dollars in impactful and efficient ways.**

The workforce development strategies I would support or help implement are those that help develop or enhance workforce skills that are timely, relevant and provide pipelines to well-paying jobs. To best understand the skills and industries in demand and the long-term forecast of demand and to create a pipeline to well-paying jobs from workforce development, partnerships with businesses, educational institutions, and community organizations must be enhanced or newly formed. The Westside Works program is an excellent program that effectively uses partnerships to achieve the common goal of preparing workers with the skills and pipeline necessary to succeed.

The greatest need for WorkSource Atlanta is strong leadership and board oversight to ensure that the agency is meeting the stated goals and deploying dollars effectively.

**14. 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. Similarly, what do you consider to be the top infrastructure priorities for District 3?**

The three most important transportation and infrastructure projects that should occur in the City of Atlanta are:

- 1. Expansion of MARTA's Coverage** - The expansion of MARTA's rail and bus coverage will be a long-term project, but it is an important project that must be prioritized and pushed forward with our county, state and federal partners. To make our City more liveable and connected for our current residents and more attractive to future residents and stakeholders, we must move this project forward and as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- 2. Renovation of Water and Sewer System** - The City must continue to prioritize the renovation of our City's aging water and sewage system. With the reauthorization of the



MOST in March of 2016, there is additional dedicated funding to put towards renovations that should be used responsibly and in a timely manner.

- 3. Expansion of Sidewalks and Bike Lanes Throughout the City** - To become a more connected, sustainable and liveable city, increasing sidewalk connectivity and bike lanes throughout the City is critical. Increased investment in this infrastructure projects will also have community and environmental benefit by reducing single-car use traffic, increasing connectivity between our neighborhoods and encouraging more physical activity.

The three most important transportation and infrastructure projects that should occur in District 3 are:

- 1. Expansion of Sidewalks and Bike Lanes Throughout the District** - I recommend prioritizing expansion of sidewalk connectivity and bike lanes to the westernmost areas of the District, first.
- 2. Completion of the Joseph E. Lowery Boulevard Complete Street Project** - Joseph E. Lowery Boulevard is a heavily traveled corridor in the District. This vital roadway in the District and the surrounding communities are overdue for the slated improvements.
- 3. Connectivity Between the Westside Park Bellwood Quarry Park and District 3 Neighborhoods** - District 3 neighborhoods in close proximity to the park should have a walkable or bikeable trail or point of connectivity to the park given the close proximity and the desire to make our City more connected.

**15. 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 for our residents, visitors and workers in Atlanta, it is important that we engage with and support our police and fire departments and equip them with the resources they need to be successful. I would first want to work with our Chief of Police and Fire Chief to hear what matters most to them and how we can help them be successful. The initial strategies I would pursue include:

- Expansion and wide-spread support of the Atlanta/Fulton County Pre-Arrest Diversion Program
- Innovative recruitment and retention techniques to address public safety understaffing
- Support innovative methods to increase morale, pride, and training among our police and fire departments

- Prioritize investing in the technology our police and fire departments have expressed that they need to successfully do their jobs

**16. 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?**

Atlanta is a world-class leader in arts and culture and our funding levels and support should align with our commitment to retaining our position of leadership in this area. To ensure adequate per-capita arts funding, I would seek to build new public, private and community partnerships that are specifically dedicated to providing additional funding and resources to our arts and culture organizations.

**17. In your opinion, what should be done with Morris Brown College property? If elected, how do you foresee yourself playing a role to achieve this vision?**

As a graduate of a historically black college & university (HBCU), I understand the historic and cultural significance of Morris Brown College. I believe the Morris Brown College property that remains in the possession of the City should be developed in a way that pays homage to Morris Brown College. This could include a museum portion or other forms of acknowledgement of the legacy that Morris Brown plays in the City of Atlanta's history and the history of HBCU's. If elected, I see myself as a facilitator in the process that will ensure the voices of history on the Morris Brown College side are balanced with the voices of the present and future for an optimal solution for all.

**18. In your opinion, how important is sustainability to Atlanta's continued growth and vitality? What sustainability initiatives have been successful in Atlanta to-date, and what ideas would you support to ensure Atlanta remains a sustainable and resilient City for all?**

Sustainability is critical to Atlanta's growth and viability! The decisions we are making now should always be evaluated for the future impact to our City's social, economic and financial health. The sustainability initiatives I believe have been successful in Atlanta to-date are new initiatives to enhance parks and greenspaces, notably the improvements in District 3. I am also encouraged by the Clean Energy Plan adopted by the City Council in 2017. To ensure Atlanta remains sustainable and resilient for all I want to maximize use of current sustainability initiatives administered by the Office of Resilience and track their effectiveness to identify areas of opportunity in the future.

