

Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

**Dr. Georgianne Thomas**  
Atlanta City Council  
District 11



## 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 qualified for the position of Councilmember, District 11, because I am a leader with a history of leadership, timeless experience, a foot soldier from the past marching into the future, a servant-leader, and a breast cancer survivor since 2002. I am a former NPU Chair, former Vice-Chair of the Atlanta Planning and Advisory Board (APAB), Creator of the APAB Institute, in conjunction with the University of Georgia Fanning Leadership Center. Creator of the Atlanta Commission on Women, in association with The Honorable Mable Thomas and C.T. Martin. Creator of the Atlanta -Cotonou Sister City Program and Founding Chair of the Committee. Convention Co-Chair with the late Lou Zakas, and Chair of the Sister Cities Commission, a Mayoral appointment. We successfully hosted hundreds of international people in Atlanta (pre-Olympic) for the first and only International Sister Cities Convention. Former Manager for the Temporary Protective Order Program, Atlanta Municipal Court. Former Manager for the installation of the Enhanced 911 System, City Hall East, Atlanta Citywide Radio System (ACRS), in conjunction with TRW Integrated Engineering Division. I co-created the behavioral objectives and implemented the Train-the Trainer Program. I am an Adjunct Professor at Clark Atlanta University and at Atlanta Metropolitan State College. I am the first African American to work in the Public Relations Department, Delta Air Lines, Inc. I retired from the Local Airport Training Department. I have a plethora of awards, too numerous to mention, including the highest award from the City, the Phoenix Award. I am Trustee-Emeritus, Big Bethel A.M.E. Church. I am a mother of one daughter, Rev. Alvelyn Sanders, an accomplished media professional, instructor, and clergy. My daughter and I produced the award winning, PBSATL showing of the movie, *Foot Soldiers Class of 1964*.

The five organizations that are actively supporting my candidacy are my Church Family at Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church; members of my Sorority, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.; my Neighbors and the leadership of our Neighborhood Association; my Family; and colleagues on faculty with me at both Universities where I teach. Their support is important because it represents a community of people whose lives I have touched and who have known me in my best and worst times. These are the people who can validate my character, my sincerity, and my servant-leadership style. They understand and have seen me practice a desire to serve first, not expecting a reward or awards. They have witnessed my desire to ensure other people's priorities are served

for the good of the community. They are collectively praying for my win, contributing to my support, volunteering to serve and sharing a clarion call for my success. .

**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 it remains a *City Too Busy to Hate*. I envision citizens who live, work, and play in their communities, eliminating the need for more cars that grid lock our busy streets. I want to see a city divided into commercial and cultural zones, all unique to its area but representing the diversity and international aspect of the entire city. I envision the Beltway expanding in order to celebrate the many parks and trails that will connect Atlantans to all Atlantans, city-wide. I envision a cross-cultural cooperative, collaborative, and creative people to people connection and sidewalks that help enhance the process. Visitors can explore 131.4 square miles of entertainment, theater, art, restaurants, amusement parks, museums, parks, rivers, golfing, shopping, business, apartments, and housing, instead of concentrating in a few square miles because other sections of the city are not yet prepared to receive tourists' dollars.

In order to implement this vision, each district would develop a master plan and in each master plan would be a bridge, a street, a walkway, a trail, an archway, or some signage that allows the adjoining district to connect the dots. This comprehensive land use plan must link in its development plan, residents and employees to shopping and dining, using sidewalks and bike trails, which would help eliminate the need for so many cars in the City. Less road building; more walkable avenues. I would revisit some of the zoning laws to inspire developers to cluster more live, work, play areas near rail lines so people can eliminate the need to have a car and can experience shorter commutes. I would encourage signature identities for neighborhood clusters and promote through the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau a schedule of tourist driven events that coincided with the various neighborhoods. In other words, there would be many "Buckhead's", shopping, restaurants, entertainment, amusement, the arts and luxury living along with affordable housing, but with different cultural themes. Right now, the tourists have a one-sided view to a multilayered city. To coincide with these identities, I would ask the business community to adopt schools throughout the city and provide the resources needed to enhance the learning environment so that other major businesses will want to locate their offices throughout the city and the employees will feel comfortable sending their children to any magnet, International Baccalaureate, or Charter school anywhere in the city.

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

One issue is we are still fighting the civil war in Atlanta. Not as egregious as what happen in Charlottesville, VA but a hidden war, nevertheless. The southside of the city is the closest to the economic engine that continues to propel the growth and economic strengths associated with Atlanta and the region, and that is Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport. Most southside residents live less than ten-fifteen minutes away, none to little traffic and non-highway driving. In spite of the large middle class black population of dedicated professionals, resplendent with beautiful homes and manicured lawns, there is no meaningful economic development on a large scale that would bring tourists dollars south, luxury condos south, and upscale restaurants and shopping south. I want to fix this. A more improved MARTA system that connects work, play, live for shorter commutes. More housing, restaurants, amusements connected on improved rail lines. Mini fuel-efficient buses that connect specific senior commuters to specific shopping districts within the community. Targeted economic development to the southside that will encourage developers to build upscale communities with available affordable housing. All of which will bring tourist dollars to the southside and help grow the economy south and add balance to the overall look of the City.

A second issue is crime which is a prevailing issue in many large cities. Unfortunately, most of the crime has found its home on the southside of Atlanta. Issue two can be solved by following the points in issue one. If there is a concentration of blight, poverty, joblessness in the middle of an African American community of well-heeled professionals, the blight, poverty and joblessness will get lumped into one statistic and the entire area will not grow. Why? Race is still an issue when it comes to the perception of failure. Unfortunately, the less attractive statistics are promoted and growth does not happen on the southside. I will encourage developers and upscale restaurants and shopping to review another set of statistics and that is the hidden wealth nestled between secret conclaves of trees, manicured lawns, streams and lakes. In changing the approach, you change the economics. I would also join with Atlanta Public Schools because we need to provide an extensive wealth building engine of collaborative partners in business, faith, and sports to divert juveniles from criminal activities to wealth building activities engaging the mind, body and soul in a wholistic approach to juvenile behavior issues

My third issue is traffic. Thankfully, my vision for Atlanta is already the vision of commercial real estate for development. Yes, TODS. Transit-oriented development. Developing properties owned by MARTA for living, working, and playing spaces. What a brilliant economic development tool to provide walkable urban spaces. More walking promotes health; more walking promotes less driving; less congestion; and more walking promotes cleaner air; less pollution. Other traffic solutions involve smart technology to improve traffic flow in real time depending on traffic conditions, including one-way traffic signals during rush hour. Not to mention, basic repaving and restriping to enhance driver safety. On a regional level, I would love to work with the State and encourage the building of a fast rail system that travels around 285 and one that connects the shippers of Savannah with

the Airport in Atlanta. Hopefully the City of Atlanta Department of Transportation will take over, plan and implement the needs of the City's transportation projects over the next five years, to include congestion mitigation, special events traffic plans, and alternative travel modes.

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

District 11 sits in the City of Atlanta. We are one city with one goal and that is the preservation of the City and the protection of its citizens. The administration of the day-to-day operation lies with the executive branch and the legislative authority lies with the City Council. Therefore, it would behoove each City Council member to collaborate and cooperate as a unit because each ordinance will have wide spread consequences since the law will impact citizens irrespective of districts. We are a connected array of neighborhoods fighting for our share of services, goods, and attention. Unfortunately, the southside is still in a slow growth pattern and I believe this will change with the new Council. We are each obligated to speak for the needs of the communities that elected us but different voices do not mean the requests are different. When all is said and done, the voices will blend into one voice that speaks for the good of the citizens all across Atlanta.

**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 of Atlanta has an excellent credit rating. The present administration has built a solid fiscal foundation in partnership with a conservative business community and thus the City has been good stewards of its financial resources. Any additional tools would include the expansion of the present sound fiscal policies and effective financial management. This could include a robust strategic fiscal plan; clear financial goals and policies; securing sound reoccurring revenues; continuing responsible spending and adjustments; keeping credit worthiness so investors will be willing to invest in Bonds; transparency in all levels of City operations; the continuous upgrading of technology to ensure effective accountability; and reduce the over reliance of property taxes by diversifying reoccurring revenues. In addition, there should be a commitment by Council to develop policies that do not put the City's strong Standard and Poor's excellent credit rating at risk.

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

I stated in question five the need to reduce the overall reliance on property taxes. Unfortunately, this primary source of revenue is necessary based on the city and county's tax digest and their budgeting needs. When there was a spike in the property taxes, many homeowners felt a pinch in their financial pocketbook. Inconsistent tax hikes and playing catch up by jumping to a higher fee, hurts the people you need the most-taxpayers. Adjustments using *Property Tax Circuit Breakers* and State Property Tax Credit Programs offer some relief to the taxpayer. However, eliminating the property tax would allow true home ownership, it would eliminate sheriff's sales and the forced sales, help prevent foreclosures, restore real estate values, attract even more businesses, and stop costly reassessments ([www.ptcc.us](http://www.ptcc.us)). The bottom line, cities need money to run and to provide services to its citizens. More than often, the people with less are the people who pay the most. If we can remember to be equitable in our assessments, restructuring where needed, eliminating when plausible and it makes good sense, and approach revenue issues without the over-criminalization of the least of these in our communities, we would gain the trust of our citizens, attract long term residency, and municipal revenues would rapidly grow.

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

Municipal Operation Sales Tax is imposed inside the City of Atlanta limits. This 1% tax, according to sources, is applied to all retail sales of tangible personal property delivered to customers and retail taxable services, all within the city limit. This tax is necessary because those visitors and businesses who do not pay for water or sewer infrastructure have an opportunity to help defray the cost for clean water and the maintenance of the overhauled infrastructure so needed in a decaying water and sewage system. In the long run, it makes fiscal sense to ensure proper maintenance. I would continue MOST as well as, potential sources of federal and state financial assistance to help build, rehabilitate and maintain critical water infrastructure (lists available at EPA, Water Infrastructure Funding Options, <https://www3.epa.gov/region1/eco/drinkwater/pdfs/waterfundletter>).

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

Yes. I totally agree with your aspirational statement: *Simply commission an internal audit of procurement procedures by an independent firm and implement new ethics and procedure training for City employees who handle sensitive financial matters. An external oversight committee of procurement practices would be appropriate and build public trust.*

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

Rebuilding public trust begins with the elected official being transparent in all her/his dealings with the City of Atlanta. Every aspect of your public life becomes an opportunity to be transparent. Whatever happens from election day forward has to follow a policy of total transparency. If the elected official does not follow this policy, how can anyone expect the staff to follow the policy? We all need to have a training class from the Ethics and Standards Federal, State and local offices, as well as sign a pledge to ensure our commitment to clarity and transparency. We should develop a workforce that understands the importance of restoring integrity and rebuilding trust with our citizenry.

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

Sources say, an important component of effective economic development is ensuring that a skilled workforce exists to support business and economic growth. The primary goal of workforce development is to build the skills and credentials of workers and connect them to jobs with family supported wages and benefits. That can advance and align with economic development because it provides a supply of labor that meets existing employers' needs and spurs the growth of new businesses. K-12 Education must be a top priority for Atlanta. Your Aspirational statement said it all, *Economic development prospects won't come here or expand unless they believe they can fill their needed positions from an available talent pool.* We know that *pool* needs to be educated and competent to build a thriving community. Occupational and job training could include but not limited to *Sector strategies focusing on training workers for a particular industry sector; Certification of Job Skills, by helping employers identify qualified workers; Apprenticeships; and Career and technical education ([www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)).*

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

Atlanta citizens need access to affordable workforce housing throughout the City of Atlanta. The younger worker wants the true urban experience but does not want to commute for an hour. MARTA is meeting those needs with the TOD, Transit-oriented Development Initiatives. Companies applaud more employee density homes with retail and greenspace all in one stop. Affordable housing is encouraged by developers to meet the needs of a workforce that is more urban and prefers a walkable community. Not only are developers investing in this trend, but there are federal grants available to help increase quality housing options for Atlanta's workforce. We should, according to the Aspirational statement, *Make affordable housing an integral part of the City's regular general obligation bond issuance, like other basic infrastructure.*

**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 passage of the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act of 2014(WIOA)* created an important opportunity for states to align workforce development activities with their strategies for economic growth. The next administration should focus on the workforce development strategies that connect workers to jobs with good wages and benefits, while economic development that connect firms to a pool of skilled workers.

Strategy: Supporting collaboration between employers and education providers to build workers' skills.

Methods: Career pathways, education incubators, and apprenticeships programs.

Strategies: Uniting behind sector strategies to fill in-demand jobs; Use of technology and data to connect employers and the workforce

Methods: Sector strategies and industry partnerships; economic development data tools and longitudinal data systems ([www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org))

The above strategies, taken together and coupled with a joint task force among the regional city and county schools, would improve public education and provide a dynamic workforce comparable to none.

**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. Traffic Congestion (taken from question 3) . Thankfully, my vision for Atlanta is already the vision of commercial real estate for development. Yes, TODS. Transit-oriented development. Developing properties owned by MARTA for living, working, and playing spaces. What a brilliant economic development tool to provide walkable urban spaces. More walking promotes health; more walking promotes less driving; less congestion; and more walking promotes cleaner air; less pollution. Other traffic solutions involve smart technology to improve traffic flow in real time depending on traffic conditions, including one-way traffic signals during rush hour. Not to mention, basic repaving and restriping to enhance driver safety. On a regional level, I would love to work with the State and encourage the building of a fast rail system that travels around 285 and one that connects the shippers of Savannah with the Airport in Atlanta. Hopefully the City of Atlanta Department of Transportation will take over, plan and implement the needs of the City's transportation projects over the next five years, to include congestion mitigation, special events traffic plans, and alternative travel modes. I

ranked this first because sources say, this is the number one complaint when it comes to bringing businesses to Atlanta. Employees do not want to be in the Atlanta traffic. This type of sentiment impacts our bottom line for expansive growth and development in Atlanta.

2. Expanded MARTA rail system around 285, following the expressway and to Savannah, to connect both major ports. This is my second priority because we are spending too much time in cars and not living, working, and playing in the same space. We are also missing revenue dollars from the Savannah Atlanta bullet train.

3. As stated by you, strong governance and oversight must be established within City Hall to ensure the effective expenditure and implementation of the resources dedicated to transportation improvements. Therefore, careful attention should be given to MARTA Board appointees.

**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?**

We must ensure safety for all the citizens, visitors and workers in this great City. Some things are not broken and do not need fixing. I said that to say, smart policing is already in place with emphasis on cutting-edge technology; there is police visibility; and the City offers first class leadership and training opportunities. We need to continue our partnership with The Atlanta Police Foundation and its established youth programs. In order to remain competitive, we need to recruit top talent which would require competitive salaries, the best equipment and opportunities for advancement including succession planning to ensure consistent development of the round of department.

**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?**

As a Humanities instructor, it is painful to read those statistics when it comes to art and culture. Atlanta University, now Clark Atlanta University, the home of six Hale Woodruff murals and an exceptional number of invaluable works of arts in the basement of the Trevor Arnett Building is enough for all of us to support such funding. This is a no-brainer. I support the arts and will push for legislation to ensure we keep Art and Culture alive and well in Atlanta.