



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

**Jason Dozier**  
Atlanta City Council  
District 4

## 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.

As an Atlanta native, public school graduate, community activist, daily bicycle, bus, and train commuter, and as a director at a 7M/year national non-profit organization, I believe that I am uniquely qualified to take Atlanta's challenges head-on. My educational background supports my professional experience--I hold a Master of Public Administration from the University of Georgia and a Master of Science in Real Estate from Georgia State University--I believe that I have a strong grasp of the competing public- and private-sector interests that define our city.

Organizations supporting my candidacy include:

- American Federal of State, County, and Municipal employees (AFSCME)
- Professional Association of City Employees (PACE)
- National Association of Government Employees (NAGE)
- Atlanta Professional Firefighters (APF)
- International Brotherhood of Police Officers (IBPO)

Our campaign has enjoyed a broad coalition of support. The people whose livelihoods are in the hands of the decision-makers on city council are fully behind us, and I think that message resonates well with voters looking for leadership that can be effective on Day One.

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

My vision for Atlanta recognizes the importance of our communities in our city's decision-making process. Valuing our communities encourages Atlanta to aggressively champion our neighborhoods, our historic institutions, and our working families. Atlanta's position as a center of culture, heritage, and history must be preserved, and that preservation can only happen when our city's residents and institutions can afford to remain in the city. An aggressive community-based agenda would work to preserve this legacy.

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

### **Housing Affordability**

Affordable housing is the number one issue facing the City of Atlanta. Rising housing costs have displaced many families from the city. In light of this, we're fighting to ensure that the families that have been the organizational backbone of our communities for decades can continue to shape our city's cultural legacy as we gain new residents. We must act with urgency as Atlanta is expected to grow by another 1 million people over the next 35 years.

District 4 serves as a microcosm of this issue. With a median household income of only \$24,533 (the second lowest in the city), District 4 is home to some of the most economically vulnerable

residents in the city. Furthermore, 42.7% of homeowners spend more than 30% of their monthly income on housing (the national standard for housing affordability). Again, this is the second highest in the city, making District 4's residents among the city's most vulnerable.

To ensure that all Atlantans have an opportunity to live, work, and thrive in our city, I am fighting to:

- Employ market-driven solutions, such as ending minimum parking requirements for new construction and removing traditional zoning requirements which would expand housing choices.
- Aggressively target blight and code enforcement violators, which would increase the supply of available housing and open more opportunities to families across the city.
- Expand Invest Atlanta's home down payment assistance programs, strengthening the pipelines available for residents to become homeowners.
- Work with county-level partners to develop new property tax exemptions for cost-burdened property owners
- Expand funding for land banks or community land trusts, which would stabilize land costs and promote economic diversity in neighborhoods by ensuring community stewardship of land.
- Adopt mandatory inclusionary zoning practices for transactions involving the sale or transfer of publicly-owned property.

### **Connectivity and accessibility**

Nearly 40% of households in southwest Atlanta don't own or have access to a car as their primary means of transportation and have to rely on alternative forms of transportation to get to work, school, daycare, and everything in between. Atlanta's job centers are clustered in the northern reaches in the city while many of our working families must spend hours commuting via bus and train in the early hours of each day. There is an imbalance, particularly as the communities that need alternative transportation amenities the most have the least amount of access to those amenities. Myriad sidewalks and bicycle lanes adorn northeast Atlanta, while children must walk in the middle of the road to unsheltered bus stops in the southwest. Equitable investment in safe transportation infrastructure is key to ensuring to bringing all Atlantans together.

To ensure that all Atlantans have access to our city's rich assets and amenities, I am fighting to:

- Expand Atlanta's bicycle infrastructure to ensure that access is safe and equitable.
- Treat sidewalks as shared resources and commit the city to invest in fixing the backlog of sidewalk repairs while investing in new pedestrian infrastructure.
- Partner with MARTA to identify opportunities to enhance existing bus stops with benches and shelters to make multi-modal transportation seamless

### **Government Transparency and Accountability**

This year, the City of Atlanta has been embroiled in one of the largest scandals in recent memory. Bribery and misconduct resulted in the acquisition of city contracts valued in excess of \$10 million in payments from the City of Atlanta over five years. This recent controversy has drawn renewed attention to ensuring that our elected representatives consistently act in the best interest of our city.

To ensure that our city's government remains transparent and accountable, I will:

- Champion an open, honest, and responsive government that values citizen input and community engagement.
  - Post checkbook spending for my office online so that constituents can see how their needs have been prioritized
  - Fight to ensure that these same transparent practices are implemented citywide
  - Commit to routine and predictable town hall meetings with neighborhoods across the District
  - Support implementing new regulations to stop abuses such as auditing procurement procedures through an independent, external body would be a great way to ensure that abuses are limited.
4. As a City Council member, how would you manage collaborating with your colleagues on difficult citywide issues versus representing your own constituents?

Constituent representation is an extremely important responsibility, but so is collaboration. District 4 is in a unique position due to the fact that it serves as a microcosm of the massive changes happening across the City of Atlanta. Whether we need to develop a strategy to discourage mass feedings in South Downtown and help guide our homeless neighbors into shelters, or whether we need to aggressively address blighted and abandoned properties in Oakland City, District 4's needs and challenges are Atlanta's needs and challenges, and I believe there is a terrific opportunity to collaborate with colleagues to implement comprehensive citywide strategies that would also positively benefit District 4. I already have a wonderful relationship with many of our current and prospective City Councilmembers, and I believe that positive relationship will allow for effective collaboration if elected to City Council.

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 Atlanta's financial position as strong and I recognize that difficult financial decisions were made in order to ensure the city's fiscal solvency. However, we must be willing to continue to invest in our city so that we can meet future challenges head-on.

The Government Finance Officers Association argues that cities should reserve at least two months of regular general fund operating revenues. With a \$175 million reserve fund, the city has nearly four months available. Cautious reinvestment of some of this reserve funding could be beneficial to the city in the long term.

The development of five-, ten-, and 15-year financial plans would help the city sustain its strong financial footing. Reductions in force are all too frequent in local government--better long-term planning would ensure that financial stability of both the City of Atlanta and its employees.

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

Residents are in still shock after the distribution of tax assessment notices to homeowners across Fulton County earlier this year. Though the appraisals and assessments were rescinded, they foretold of things to come. Property values had gone up for nearly every household, and some even found that their values had more than tripled since last year's assessment. While

home values have always fluctuated with the larger economic cycle, this year's assessments were particularly worrisome.

District 4 is home to some of the most economically vulnerable residents in the city, so this sudden increase in tax burden would distress many families. This is especially disruptive considering that the average assessment valuation increase for residential properties across District 4 was 69.87%. While this could seem like a blessing for some, unfortunately only 35.4% of the District's housing units are owner-occupied, a rate which is the second lowest in the entire city. In other words, because so many of our neighbors are renters, increased appraisal or assessment valuations don't necessarily mean a windfall for our families.

These increased valuations are even more burdensome when you consider that District 4's median household income is \$24,533 (again, the second lowest in the city), and that 42.7% of homeowners spend more than 30% of their monthly income on housing (which is the national standard for housing affordability). Again, this is the second highest in the city, making District 4's residents among the city's most vulnerable.

This impacts both our renting and our home-owning families. An owner-occupied \$100,000 home assessed at 40% would yield a tax bill around \$500. Because homestead exemptions only exclude the first \$30,000 of assessed value, that bill skyrockets to nearly \$1,800 assuming the aforementioned 69.87% increase in assessment valuation. Remember, 69.87% is just the average—many homeowners had their values increase more than 200%. And if you're renting that same house, you're still likely to absorb your landlord's tax liability—meaning that you absorb the costs that are passed on when the tax bill jumps to more than \$3,000 since there's no homestead exemption for renter-occupied housing facilities.

This all to say that whether you're an owner or a renter, property taxes can be extremely burdensome for many of our families.

Recognizing that Fulton and DeKalb Counties hold the majority of the power as it pertains to the appraisal of property across the city, the City of Atlanta needs to work with our county partners to identify opportunities to introduce new exemptions and other protections for disabled, elderly, and low-income residents across the city. At the very least, the City should lobby County and State partners to ensure that counties like Fulton can't raise appraisals this high in one year, especially since it was the county that artificially depressed the appraisals in the first place. A cap or stair-step will better protect our families. In the interim, the City should reevaluate its millage rates to help offset some of the tax liability facing communities expecting to see fourfold increases in property values.

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

I believe that the MOST has been a necessary financing instrument because it helps reduce the cost burden placed on our residents. Atlanta's water bills are already some of the nation's highest and the MOST tax ensures that our water system's infrastructure repair costs are shared with commuters and visitors.

However, MOST is a sales tax, which means that it disproportionately negatively impacts low-income residents. The inequity is worsened by the city's poor enforcement of water bill payments. In some cases, high-priced condos in upscale communities have escaped enforcement. In others, elected officials have managed to get away without paying their water

bill balances in full. This is not to say that MOST should be abolished, but it seems as if low-income residents are shouldering an unfair burden when it comes to improving our water infrastructure.

In light of this, I support establishing a stormwater utility in the City of Atlanta--this would serve as a distinct fiscal entity which would provide a consistent source of revenue to help manage the city's stormwater needs. Atlanta's consent decree-driven infrastructure costs won't last forever, and we need to ensure that we remain committed to acceptable water quality standards. To ensure fairness, the utility could link the fee to the amount of stormwater runoff generated by impervious surfaces on a parcel of land. By placing a cost on this runoff, property owners would be encouraged to capture and reuse runoff before it's emptied into the watershed.

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

I support implementing new regulations to stop this abuse. Auditing procurement procedures through an independent, external body would be a great way to ensure that abuses are limited. However, I would take it a step further and explore potentially passing legislation that would prohibit government contracts (valued at specific amounts) with companies that donate to elected officials. Furthermore, greater regulation and monitoring of campaign contributions at the local level would provide a degree of oversight. ensure this happens.

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

Firstly, the City of Atlanta needs to post checkbook-level spending online in an easily searchable and accessible portal. Transparency is key to accountability, and we can ensure that by making city's spending practices available to the public.

Open data portals would assist in this process. Many city departments lack the resources and manpower to aggressively tackle some of the challenges facing the city. By committing to open data, citizens, nonprofits, and private companies can help the city identify unseen efficiencies.

Secondly, I would continue to invest in our employees. Providing additional training, resources, and professional development opportunities tied to a uniform code of ethics would make it less likely that city workers will break the public trust. In particular, ethical dilemma training would give our employees opportunities to identify breaches of trust before they manifest into serious issues.

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

We can ensure job growth and continue to diversify our economy by prioritizing the following economic development strategies:

- Partnering with Atlanta Public Schools and ensure that the city remains committed to sustained investments in K-12 education. Atlanta has to show companies that their employees can raise their families in the city.

- Our city's greatest economic asset is Atlanta Hartsfield Jackson International Airport, and we must continue to invest in the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of these facilities.
- Atlanta must continue to aggressively pursue company headquarters relocations and fintech industries as growth markets.

Though not an explicit strategy, I also believe that Atlanta must remain committed to ensuring that our city remains a beacon of tolerance and inclusion in light of the hostilities expressed towards LGBT, immigrant, and racial minority communities across our state. As state leaders pledge energy and resources to implement RFRA and other discriminatory legislation, we must reaffirm our commitment towards diversity.

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

As indicated earlier, affordable housing is the number one issue I seek to address if elected to Atlanta City Council. Strategies to address this include the following:

- Employ market-driven solutions, such as ending minimum parking requirements for new construction and removing traditional zoning requirements which would expand housing choices.
- Aggressively target blight and code enforcement violators, which would increase the supply of available housing and open more opportunities to families across the city.
- Expand Invest Atlanta's home down payment assistance programs, strengthening the pipelines available for residents to become homeowners.
- Work with county-level partners to develop new property tax exemptions for cost-burdened property owners
- Expand funding for land banks or community land trusts, which would stabilize land costs and promote economic diversity in neighborhoods by ensuring community stewardship of land.
- Adopt mandatory inclusionary zoning practices for transactions involving the sale or transfer of publicly-owned property.

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?

I believe we should prioritize the following workforce development strategies:

- Internships, apprenticeship opportunities, and work experience for students to aid in career exploration and development of soft skills.
- Implementation of improved coaching and mentorship opportunities for workers seeking assistance with AWDA. An individualized, personalized approach has been successful with organizations like Hire Heroes USA (which placed 6,320 veterans into jobs last year alone), and I believe that same model could be replicated at AWDA.
- Development of public private partnerships to develop career pathways. Employers need to be engaging with educational systems at all levels to create pipelines that send students to in-demand fields while earning skills necessary (typically referred to as stackable credentials).

- Partnering with APS and non-profit programs to transition away from an education system that is only geared to 4-year degree programs.

I would also add that many of the existing workforce training programs are great, however our transportation infrastructure affects our residents' ability to take advantage of these opportunities. I would continue to support investment in expanded transportation alternatives which will help those most in need to get to training and jobs.

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.

### **Expansion of Atlanta's bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure**

Nearly 40% of households in southwest Atlanta don't own or have access to a car as their primary means of transportation and have to rely on alternative forms of transportation to get to work, school, daycare, and everything in between, and they need to be able to do so safely.

Investment in pedestrian, cycling, and transit infrastructure is critical to ensure our citizens can successfully and safely navigate across our city and our region. In 2013 alone, over 900 bicyclists were killed across America, and there were an "estimated 494,000 emergency department visits due to bicycle-related injuries". And as recently as 2014, metro Atlanta ranked #8 in pedestrian danger. This is especially stark considering that 16.9% of Atlanta's households have no vehicle whatsoever.

I believe that ensuring a diversity in transportation options will work in the best interests of all Atlantans.

### **The expansion of rail along the Beltline**

The Beltline must be more than just a pedestrian and bicycle path. A route that is only accessible to the physically-abled in good weather is not inclusive. Rail is critical for getting people to destinations efficiently and effectively, and at volume. As our city is expected to grow by 1 million people over the next 35 years, we need to ensure that our transportation corridors can handle this volume.

### **The conversion of Bellwood Quarry into Reservoir Park**

As cities around the world seek to tackle climate change, resiliency has become much more important for us to plan. The conversion of Bellwood Quarry into a water reservoir is an instrumental step towards ensuring clean and safe drinking water access for our citizens. As extreme weather events become more frequent and as the city's water use continues to be litigated in federal courts, having a continuous supply of water will be key to sustainability and growth. By transforming this reservoir into a park, this investment can help catalyze development in one of Atlanta's least dense communities.

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?

Real or perceived, how we address crime and public safety affects the livelihoods of all Atlantans. Addressing this issue in a comprehensive, holistic manner would work not only to

ensure that our communities are safer, but also to positively shape the effects of economic development investments in our communities.

Here's how we can make our communities safer:

- Strengthen community policing by working to change the culture of policing as it pertains to foot patrols. Security measures are much more effective when those charged with maintaining order are seen, heard, and are available and accessible to the recipients of their services.
- Aggressively address issues related to police retention and morale. Low pay and minimal benefits implies police officers are undervalued and encourages our best and brightest to leave for neighbouring jurisdictions.
- Invest in rigorous and sustained professional development and training opportunities to improve police-community interactions, ensure the deescalation of conflicts, and promote better customer service.
- Create pathways for homeownership for police officers by offering bonuses and incentives to encourage officers to live in our communities.
- Invest in tools and technologies to make our police force more efficient and effective in their work.

It's one thing for Atlanta's police to be at the forefront of innovation with regards to integration of technology, community relationship-building tactics and strategies, and officer diversity; but it must be difficult to sustain these relationships if veteran officers quickly jump ship to neighboring communities that offer better pay and benefits with greater safety. I learned many of these lessons firsthand while serving as an Army officer through two overseas tours. Our military members face a [similar challenges](#) at the end of each year-long deployment: a rotation's worth of experiences and relationship-building are thrown out the door as the people with the most intimate knowledge of a community are replaced by new units with new leaders and new sets of priorities.

Though the relationship between the APD and Atlanta's citizens isn't completely analogous to that of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the principle largely remains the same. The best way to address this perception issue is to ensure that police are actively seen in the streets, interacting with local citizens. Officers need to focus their time and energy by walking through communities, not behind the wheels of a police cruiser.

Our citizens must know our police officers if we are to trust them and respect their judgement. And we can't know our police officers if they continue to leave the city at such a high rate.

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 believe that the art centers, public murals, and local galleries must have pathways to funding and opportunities to showcase the amazing talent that comes through their doors. Earlier this year, the City lobbied to have a sales tax implemented to accomplish this task. Because sales taxes are regressive and place unnecessary burden on low income residents, I would not have supported this as a financing measure. Rather, I believe developing a revenue stream

generated from property tax assessments would be more equitable, especially if milled appropriately. Much of the Parks department's funding is done this way. When we look at millage, the City of Atlanta estimates that one mill will generate \$21 million in revenue in 2017. At a millage rate of 0.5 (which is the same as the revenue directed to City of Atlanta Parks expenses), that would generate \$10.5 million in a single year. Impacts to individual households would be nominal--an individual, non-exempted property modestly valued at \$100,000 results in \$20 of funding each year. That's much less impactful to a low income household than a sales tax.

Beyond funding, we must be committed to protecting our arts infrastructure, particularly one that is reflective of Atlanta's diversity. I am committed to:

- Through collaboration with the Office of Cultural Affairs and the Department of Parks and Recreation, work to develop programming anchored by our recreation centers and nonprofit organizations to encourage more of our youth to participate in multidisciplinary arts programming.
- Preserve our existing artist communities by working to identify and expand affordable housing solutions.
- Work with stakeholders to develop weighted funding scales to ensure that small, diverse, equity-focused arts organizations have greater access to public funds than larger, more established institutions.
- Oppose unnecessary regulations that curb artistic expression. Elected officials must support, rather than stifle, the inherent creativity within the arts community.