



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

Rohit Ammanamanchi
Mayoral Candidate

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 you will see in this questionnaire and in the coming months, I have a comprehensive approach to solving Atlanta's most pressing issues. As a Civil Engineer from Georgia Tech, I am up to date with sustainable practices in transportation and housing and I can think about solutions from the inch-scale (such as curb design and tree restoration) to the regional planning scale (such as next generation transportation technology and integrated intercity and intracity transit connectivity). Here is where I excel above the other candidates, as I can innovate with new technologies to apply them to the public sector. Also, as an engineer that is not completely indoctrinated with the engineering jargon, I can communicate complex ideas in a way that makes the benefits immediately obvious to regular people.

I just launched my campaign recently, and I am scheduled to participate in my first forum later this week. So I will describe the populations of people I will have support from and why that is important.

Millennials are the future of economy, and due to being brought up in the internet age, we have a very different lifestyle than the current built environment can support. I will make changes to the city operations and the physical foundation of the City that will deeply resonate with what millennials desire to see when deciding where to live and raise a family.

I will undoubtedly gather support from Georgia Tech as an alumnus and current graduate student. This is crucial because GT is the anchor for most of Atlanta's current and future pioneering technology innovations, and it isn't one of the top schools in the world for nothing! Some of the brightest minds and cutting-edge resources are at Tech, and I will be able to leverage those connections, and bring some of the best aspects of our beautiful campus up to a citywide scale. By that I mean anything from specific state-of-the-art facilities such as the Invention Studio and Clough Commons, to programs such as temporary housing for homeless students, and much more.

I seek to gather support from the elderly and disabled, who are disproportionately disadvantaged by the damaged infrastructure. Loss of mobility means loss of freedom, therefore, my vision of restoring the condition of sidewalks and improving transit connectivity means that these people will have much greater access to the City in which they live.

As an extension to the previous group, I will certainly get support from any current or potential future resident who hates traffic! The horrible congestion is the single largest deterrent to attracting new residents and new business, but people would be hopeful if the Mayor was competently addressing this issue citywide.

The last group I will mention is the minority population. As I'm the only candidate that is neither white or black, I can clearly address the issues of both without bias, and also represent the issues that are uniquely faced by minorities in America. These range from cultural differences to difficulties faced by the lack of familiarity with English.

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

Top priority: Rapid restoration of everything that is broken, along with redesigns of last century designs up to today's standards of resiliency and sustainability. This includes:

- Connectivity improvements
- Walkability
- Transit that is faster than driving (cooperation with MARTA to streamline routes with infrastructure improvements that optimize for buses along transit corridors)
- Strategic PPP to get a lot more stuff done
- All the broken sidewalks get fixed, missing sidewalks added, and curbs redesigned to work better for everyone, from walkers to drivers to the environment as well. This can be accomplished quickly and cheaply with the use of rubbery asphalt ramps, pervious pavement for drainage, and the use of actual brick or stone paths so that individual stones can be replaced when they are inevitably damaged.
- Crime goes down simply because of top-down and bottom-up changes in culture that bring us all closer as a city and a community. Mutual respect between people that are different from each other reduces animosity and violence. To cite specific things, I would prioritize police training on conflict de-escalation and prepare all the infrastructure and manpower necessary for the success of the pre-arrest diversion initiative.
- I would finally get us going on housing the homeless in actual houses, as it has been proven to cost less for the city, and is considerably a better living situation than homeless shelters, especially for women and children.

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

Transportation: We have been assessed to have a billion dollars in maintenance backlog. Renew Atlanta only had 250M and didn't all go towards backlog. TSPLOST has 379M and most of it is going towards backlog, but not all (notably, 66M is going just towards ROW purchase for the Beltline). I would prepare a second round of the Renew Atlanta Bond in 2020 with shovel-

ready projects that focus on the most neglected parts of Atlanta. I would also detail updated design codes for new designs that allow rapid implementations of sustainable practices that have been shown to work in other cities. Also specifically, I would scrap the old outdated zoning policy and start a new one based on overlay districts that provide requirements and prohibitions depending on distance from a facility or neighborhood. For example, parcels or roads within ¼ mile of a school, transit corridor, or park must allow for a continuous sidewalk. Buildings within a certain neighborhood must conform to certain architectural standards to help preserve community character. I won't belabor the point here.

Housing: Specific actions stem from my perception that Invest Atlanta has horrible priorities and an ineffective strategy for building “affordable” housing. I would direct the Housing Authority to hire architects and construction workers and get to building housing units that are uniquely designed to fit the community. Currently, Atlanta is losing more affordable housing units than it is gaining, and private developers do not have the incentive to build smaller buildings that may not necessarily turn a profit. Atlanta the City, however, can spend tax money *already allocated for this purpose* to build multifamily housing and multiplexes that are designed specifically for people on a tight budget who won't mind sharing a bathroom or kitchen.

Crime:

As I mentioned before, I would heavily push the pre arrest diversion initiative and re-prioritize police to focus less on incarcerations for non-violent crimes such as personal use of marijuana and regular sex work. Additionally, I would introduce Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) into the design standards of Atlanta's infrastructure and building architecture. This policy passively inhibits crime through natural surveillance and a positive community environment, and has been widely shown to be effective.

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

Sign the ordinance to reduce the penalty for marijuana possession. It's time to end unfair incarceration for non-violent offences

Restructure the Departments of Public Works, Planning, and Watershed Management to create a Department of Transportation (DOT). This new department will incorporate elements of each department and recruit people working in regional agencies to improve collaboration between the various agencies that manage infrastructure in Atlanta. Department of Planning will still lead planning, Watershed management will be dedicated to Water Resources, and Public Works will be a division of the DOT.

Rewrite zoning policy to be sensitive to the context of the community and nearby facilities when determining the restrictions and permissions of a parcel. Overlay Districts and SPI zoning is a good *start*, but the entire zoning policy should be rewritten to streamline the language that applies rules based on which neighborhood the parcel is in and its proximity to features such as a transit corridor or a major employment center.

Update parking policy to reflect the needs of this generation and the next generation. Uber is already disrupting the parking demand, and Automated Vehicles will fully eliminate the need for parking to actually be located at a residence or place of work. Among other changes to be deliberated, developments should have maximum requirements instead of minimum, and a tax should be paid by existing developments for each parking space

I would freeze certain public projects that are backwards steps from my vision (of connectivity and multimodal mobility), such as the Bankhead Ave Bridge demolition and the Zoo Parking Deck.

I would create a Climate Action Committee to prepare a plan with specific actionable items to reach our goal of 100% clean energy by 2035.

Most importantly, start reprioritizing Invest Atlanta and the general category items of TSPLOST and Renew Atlanta for citywide sidewalk and roadway repairs, connectivity improvements, and multiplex construction.

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?

We need to stop bragging about the \$175M in reserves, because the Mayor sold City assets despite massive public opposition, and it's not even that much money compared to the nearly \$7B of Atlanta's debt. On the flip side, I am excited to spend that "rainy day" funding to make one-off repairs like installations of sidewalks, drainage features, intersection redesigns, bus shelters and benches, new parks, new plazas, etc.

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

Significantly, I would reallocate property taxes to apply to the facilities in your neighborhood, and then redistribute funding across neighborhoods where tax revenue is greater than the need. If the total need exceeds the revenue (which will be more evident with this new model), then we obviously need additional funding. I would first raise the hotel/motel tax to charge visitors with their fair share of use for the city. Then I would look into bonds that are backed by a source that directly relates to what the bond is funding. After those options are exhausted, I would raise sales tax and then property tax, in that order. The property tax is only considered high because the effects of the spending is not seen by residents. Instead they see broken roads and wasted parks. That's why I would reallocate the way taxes are spent specifically to make it clearer how that money is being used.

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

What the MOST is being spent on is not very transparent, but I believe it is being spent on DWM operations. Well my opinion is negative, because after being sued for \$1.1B of neglected maintenance, the first thing we did is build a giant tunnel to steal water from the Chattahoochee River. So, once that project is complete, I would redirect the MOST funding to repair all the broken drainage inlets and invest in natural stormwater filtration using tree roots and pervious pavement. As for long term funding, we have to wait for the invention of a tunnel machine that can chew the combined drainage and sewage pipes and spit out two separate pipes without much disruption of water services or traffic, until that happens, the massive project of splitting the combined sewer without abandoning in place is not feasible, unfortunately.

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

Yes. I will utilize Google Drive to the fullest extent to allow all City operations to be publicly accessible in real-time. All responses to an RFP will be submitted through a Google Form, and the responses spreadsheet will be publicly viewable. So, for any city sponsored project, anyone can see which contractors submitted a bid, for what price, and an abstract of the proposal.

With this revolutionary amount of transparency, the City can be immediately held accountable to defend the choice of any proposal over another proposal. I am certain that many contractors will squirm at the idea of their submission being open to the public, but the City of Atlanta is a public agency. They will have to learn to deal with it.

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

Transfer all communications between the city and the citizens to Google Drive. This way, all documents concerning city operations and responsiveness from officials will be always publicly available and real-time. Any "request for information" would be just as easy as google searching. Any public official can be immediately held accountable for any comments or lack thereof.

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

“Fair share” is a funny phrase to use here. It sounds you are trying to say “you get what you deserve”. So instead, I will answer the question “What can Atlanta do to deserve more job growth?”

Increase the diversity of retail spaces to promote various small business tenants.

Build more mixed-use low rise apartments, where you can legitimately live in the upper floors of the same building where you work if you wanted to. This living situation would be attractive to the millennial crowd and to retail workers.

Remove the roadblocks that hinder new small business owners.

Take charge as a City in choosing to contract new businesses, minority or LGBT owned businesses.

Invest in tech startups by encouraging anything from web dev to IoT-based entrepreneurial ventures as a path following High School graduation

Build more public makerspaces equipped with cutting edge technology such as VR/AR, body gesture recognition, 3D Printing, Laser cutting (wood, metal, plastic), computers built for data-processing, etc. (Obviously not all are necessary in the same place, as woodworking draws a crowd of more artistic types and data processing is more for scientific types)

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

Set a realistic goal for housing units and rent price, from the perspective of balancing the amount of housing with the amount of low-wage jobs. Currently, the lowest 30% of earners can only afford 7.2% of housing in Atlanta. This shows that Atlanta has only one-quarter of the affordable housing that it needs.

Here is some simple math to demonstrate my definition of “affordable”: A minimum wage worker at \$7.25/ hr should only have to work 40 hours a week and pay no more than 30% of their income on rent (the threshold for rent overburden). So, ideally, we should have enough housing units for each minimum wage job in Atlanta so that *at most*, it should not cost more than \$348/month to rent a unit. ($\$7.25/\text{hr} * 40\text{hrs}/\text{wk} * 4 \text{ weeks} * 30\% = \348). This is probably unreasonable with current construction costs, but deliberate process and design decisions can be made to reduce the cost of building one unit.

First, Atlanta should get in the business of constructing housing, instead of relying on private developers. This housing authority should build more multifamily houses and multi-plexes, as sharing plumbing reduces costs, and those making the lowest incomes won't mind sharing a kitchen or bathroom with several people. We should also continue this trend of rehabilitating useable vacant buildings.

Remember, I'm not even talking about rent subsidies or Section 8 housing, this is affordable housing for *minimum wage workers*. I envision that people making even the lowest income should be able to afford a house if they work 40 hours a week. If \$348 / month is still too low a price to build a room for rent, then we must consider raising the minimum wage, because simple math determined that the federal minimum wage is not high enough to afford any housing in Atlanta.

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?

There will be a huge growth in the amount of “green jobs” and “blue jobs”, and the city will take charge in creating and hiring for such jobs. Green jobs include food forest planting, invasive species removal, replacement of impervious pavement with pervious pavement. Blue jobs include quality testing and maintenance of creeks and lakes. These jobs will be paid competitively.

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.

In order of importance:

Armour Station: It would be a major transit hub, connecting the MARTA heavy rail, Beltline, Clifton Corridor Lightrail, and potentially Amtrak. It would also add resilience to the Armour district by providing another way of transporting people in and out, where the only point of entry currently is Armour Drive.

Boone Station: This would provide connectivity to the Beltline, but more importantly, it would fill a gap where there is a large distance between two stations in a very transit-dependent part of Atlanta.

North Ave Streetcar/Trolleybus: This is the project that would be the first major transit investment this generation that truly connects the east and the west without disruption. I mention the trolleybus because it would be 10x cheaper to build than the streetcar, and is even more viable now that the City just repaved an entire two mile stretch of North Ave without putting in the streetcar rails.

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?

I've described most of my intent in an earlier question, so I will summarize here:

Pre-Arrest Diversion Initiative (Partner with Social services)

Rearrange Police Priorities

Pay Police higher salaries

CPTED: Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (Partner with Department of Transportation)

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?

Simple: Devise and implement systems where art and music is profitable and sustainable for an individual who ventures into art.

- Makerspaces: Encourage art-incubators where people can come and create anything with whatever materials and equipment are available, and collaborate with whoever happens to be there. The Makerspace could charge users based on perhaps an hourly rate or by amount of materials used. Here, I am imagining more of an open space for arts-and-crafts rather than the prototyping and innovating high-tech makerspaces I described in the answer to question 10.
- Have more Art Exhibits and more Art Museums. Exhibits allow different art works and different artists to get exposure as the exhibits cycle through.
- Similar to exhibits, allow public art works (like murals and sculptures) to cycle through, instead of leaving one piece up for decades (as in Folk Art Park)
- Pioneer new forms/media of art by innovating with technology. Digital Cyclorama and Virtual Reality Experiences come to mind.
- Support the use of Patreon!!! This is a platform to sell digital creations online, and fund creators of digital content. With Patreon, the whole world can be a customer of your art.
- Encourage the idea that Arts boosts other businesses <http://news.wabe.org/post/study-shows-nonprofit-arts-mean-big-business-atlanta>
- Slightly unrelated, I want to boost the support for arts and music education in public schools.