



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

Courtney English
Atlanta City Council President



2021 Candidate Pre-Interview Questionnaire

*Please type your response to questions in the field provided. **Please limit answers to 300 words or less.***

1. Briefly describe your qualifications for this office and why you have chosen to run. In addition, please identify up to 5 organizations or individuals who are actively supporting your candidacy and why you believe their support is important.

These are serious times and serious, committed, and effective leadership is necessary. Today, with crime, housing prices, economic disparities, and gaps in city services all on the rise, there is not a neighborhood in Atlanta that does not feel left behind or unheard. This is a now or never moment. However, Atlanta is an audacious city that has always run toward challenge and in doing so, taught the world how to address the biggest problems we face. I'm running for city council president so my wife can feel safe, my former students

can thrive, our local businesses have what they need to succeed, and to ensure that Atlanta is exactly what we say we are - a city where all can rise together.

I have dedicated my life to serving Atlanta. I have been a classroom teacher on Atlanta's westside. Chairman of the APS Board of education where we led the turnaround of our city's schools after the largest cheating scandal in American history. During my time on the board, the district's graduation rate grew from 51% to 79%--a record high. We reduced the size of the central office, raised teacher pay, built the APS Police Department, and sent a record number of kids to college. Additionally, I led the negotiation to settle the longstanding dispute with the city regarding the Beltline. The deal we brokered keeps the project on track and ensures \$100 million in new revenue for Atlanta's students. Currently, I work for a non-profit where we are creating thousands of affordable housing units throughout metro-Atlanta, raised \$10 for eviction relief to keep families in their homes during the pandemic, and have significantly reduced crime in the neighborhoods we serve.

I have led a legislative body through tough times and have a track record of tackling the biggest issues facing our city and my experience has embedded a deep belief that there is nothing wrong with Atlanta that can't be solved by what's right with Atlanta.

My campaign has been endorsed by Former Mayor Shirley Franklin, Business leaders like Ernest Greer and Ann Cramer, the American Federation of State County Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and hundreds of Atlantans from all walks of life. Each of the aforementioned, have all served our city and are vested in its success and I am honored to have their support.

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

Stopping the current increase in violent crime. We need immediate action to:

1. Transfer all administrative functions that can be handled by civilians to other city operations. In turn, put the sworn officers who have been performing these operations back on the streets
2. Offer Incentives to recently retired officers to return to work.
3. Fully fund and staff 311 to handle non-violent and mental health calls which frees sworn officer to investigate violent offenders
4. Hold listening sessions with community members and frontline officers

5. Repair damaged police vehicles to maximize take home cars for police living in Atlanta
6. In alignment with the recommendation for the Biden administration, deploy federal COVID relief funds to address public safety
7. Request that the Sheriff of Fulton County Deputize all sworn officers currently employed by non-city agencies MARTA Police, APS PD, College Campus Police etc.
8. Engage all regional and federal law enforcement partners to ensure additional resources and coordination
9. Expand the city's police camera network
10. Appoint a public safety committee and chairperson that is serious, urgent and competent

Closing Equity Gaps

1. Identify a dedicated funding stream for affordable housing
2. Build workforce development partnerships with Goodwill Atlanta Metro and Atlanta Technical college
3. Invest in Universal Early Childhood Education
4. Refurbish Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing
5. Eliminate food deserts by investing in urban agriculture, mobile food options and partnerships with NGOs
6. Increase transportation options throughout the city, with a specific focus on areas that are starved of development
7. Ensure the zoning code encourages density in underserved areas
8. Expand after-school and summer programming through partnerships with non-profit organizations
9. Provide direct funding through grants, low interest loans, and loan guarantees to Atlanta's tech start-ups and small businesses, particularly those owned by minorities.
10. Develop a comprehensive strategy to address homelessness

Improving city services

1. Ensure that city commissioners, who are approved by council, are competent, urgent, with strong customer service skills and have a track record of getting results.
2. Prioritize service delivery in budget priorities
3. Use the convening power of the office of council president to create a policy think tank designed to find best practices to address bring them home,
4. Build an equity scorecard that rates the biggest policies before council on their ability to create a stronger,

safer, more equitable Atlanta in which the basics of city government are performed at a high level.

5. Maintain an open-door policy to hear, understand and address issues facing our neighborhoods.

3. Describe your leadership style and an example of a strategy you have used to motivate others and deliver results. [For Mayoral Only] As Mayor, what will your process be in vetting and selecting your staff and Cabinet leadership?

I will execute the way I always have — by creating a big tent. I have a lot of ideas that will bring more people into government, like creating a policy think tank designed to bring best practices home, an equity scorecard that rates the biggest policies before council on their ability to create a stronger, safer, more equitable Atlanta, and while I don't get a vote, I do get a say. I will use the platform and convening power of the office to identify a North Star and move with extreme urgency to solve the challenges we face. I've done it before when I led the turnaround of APS schools and I will do it again at City Hall.

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4. Trust in the City's service delivery and responsiveness is waning. What improvements would you make to these core service functions to restore public trust and improve quality of life for citizens and businesses in Atlanta?

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4. Build an equity scorecard that rates the biggest policies before council on their ability to create a stronger, safer, more equitable Atlanta in which the basics of city government are performed at a high level.
5. Maintain an open-door policy to hear, understand and address issues facing our neighborhoods.
6. Ensuring that the council's process is transparent and that commissioners routinely report on customer service outcomes.

5. What are your views on the Buckhead cityhood movement? What actions will you take related to this issue?

Creating a city of Buckhead would be bad for Buckhead and bad for Atlanta. This issue is borne from the idea that many residents in Buckhead feel unheard, their issues go unaddressed, and that the city lacks competency in far too many areas, particularly when it comes to keeping residents safe. We must acknowledge the frustrations of our Buckhead neighbors, listen to their concerns and move with extreme urgency to address crime and improve city services. In the end, all Atlantans want a city that is safe, clean, accessible, and an effective and responsive government, a more likely outcome, faster, with the entire city working together.

6. What is your philosophy on taxation in the City of Atlanta? What future funding streams do you believe are needed to pay for the things we need to grow? How should these opportunities be evaluated?

Generally, I believe that tax assessments need to be accurate, timely and that any growth in the tax digest resulting in higher revenue for the city should be analyzed annually to determine if said increase should be returned to taxpayers, directed to reserves or deployed for city services. Moreover, the county needs greater alignment with its taxing entities to prevent imposing an undue burden on taxpayers in the form of significant increases due to assessments not keeping pace with growth. The county should ensure that tax bills go out in a timely fashion to align with the fiscal year of the various taxing entities.

We need to maintain a competitive sales tax rate with surrounding regions, continue to fund critical needs such as school renovation, water and sewer improvements, transportation and infrastructure and create a permanent stream of revenue for affordable housing.

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

First and foremost, I must lead by example by ensuring that I follow all policies, laws and codes of conduct for elected officials. I will commit to transparency by posting all of my council office's expenses online for public review and working to hold the administration accountable for doing the same. That previous answer: The council should implement a quiet period that makes it illegal for council members to communicate with respondents to RFP's until the contract is executed. Ethics training should be mandated for all city employees and elected officials. The city should also establish an anonymous ethics hotline to make it easier to report wrongdoing. The city should also take steps to ensure that the members of review committees for RFP respondents are independent and above reproach. Finally, the council should expand the independent audit function and ensure that the office is empowered to investigate a wider range of potential impropriety. The auditor should exist outside of the traditional chain of command and can only be removed for cause. These are just a few of the many steps we took to uncover and clean up years of mismanagement when I led the APS Board of Education.

8. Describe your philosophy as to the City of Atlanta's role in implementing public safety reform. Which strategies should be prioritized, and if elected, how will you work to advance them? What partnerships are necessary to achieving success?

I believe in a holistic approach to public safety. While at APS by partnering with the National Institute of Justice, we created a public safety force that focused on both preventive and restorative practices to keep our students and staff safe. The results, fewer incidences of violence in our schools, fewer instances of physical interactions between students and law enforcement, and an improved relationship between APS PD and the community. We can do the same at city hall by:

- Paying our police officers a living wage
- Investing in building a department that believes in community policing
- Expanding the Police Athletic League and At-Promise Centers throughout the city
- Work with the county to identify, prosecute and keep repeat offenders behind bars
- Invest in universal early-childhood education
- Bring more jobs into communities in need

- Create a seamless partnership with APS to continue their positive trajectory
- Deploy steps to reduce attrition in our police department
- Utilize housing incentives to make it easier for police, firefighters and educators to live within the city.

Ultimately, public safety reform must happen in a way that acknowledges the fact that the issues we face are interconnected -- we cannot police our way to public safety alone -- food, housing, jobs — all of these are integral to safety. We must also address affordability and economic mobility in order to have a safer Atlanta. In the end, the best public safety approach is a great school in every neighborhood and access to a job that pays a living wage. That is the type of comprehensive approach I will bring to city hall.

9. What role should diversion and policing alternatives play in the City’s broader public safety strategy? How are these programs evaluated and funded?

Many above strategies could be used to explain your proposal to balance diversion and policing alternatives.

I believe in a strong pretrial diversion for the people who deserve it. For people that are consistently committing felonies, like the 67 multiple-repeat offenders in 2017 and 86 in 2018, they need a different pathway that is going before a judge, facing trial, and ultimately being held accountable for their actions.

Moreover, the city should expand 311 and provide resources for them to answer non-violent calls where a mental-health professional is better suited to address the issue than a sworn officer. Finally, the city should evaluate ways to reduce police stops where tickets can be mailed to the offenders (expired tags, some roadway violations) this will free up officers to investigate and pursue violent criminals.

10. What role should the City of Atlanta play in economic development? What is your perspective on urban redevelopment tools as the City competes for jobs, talent, and its share of economic growth?

The city has a critical role to play in economic development by ensuring public safety, functioning infrastructure, affordability, direct investment in businesses and projects that have a clear, long term benefit to taxpayers such as affordable housing developments and companies that are job creators or have the potential to be. Next, the city has to remove burdensome, often duplicative, processes in the permitting department that slow development and often increase cost. Finally, the city should leverage Neighborhood Planning Units to ensure proper community engagement, Tax Allocation Districts (TADs), Special Services Districts (SSDs) and a host of other tools to accomplish the comprehensive development strategy outlined in the Atlanta City Design Project. By deploying the aforementioned strategies, we can ensure equitable growth, density, and accessibility--all of which are vital to economic development.

11. What role should the City of Atlanta play in addressing economic mobility and the racial wealth gap? Which tools and strategies would your office advance, if elected? propose legislation to accomplish the following;

Atlanta is at it's best when we can all take part in the prosperity our city offers. To that end, once elected the office of the council president will create an equity scorecard that rates all of the major proposals before council on their ability to increase economic mobility and close long standing equity gaps. Furthermore, I will champion legislation that addresses the following:

- Identifying a funding source for universal early childhood education
- Developing a seamless partnership with APS
- Expand Investment in the arts, entertainment, technology sectors--with a specific focus on minority businesses
- Leverage TADs and other taxing incentivizes for smart growth, and attract corporate relocations provided that a well-defined, binding community benefits agreement exist
- Invest in diverse transportation portfolio that includes MARTA and bike lane expansion, increasing walkability, incentivizing telecommuting, and a department of transportation to coordinate planning, implementation and regional alignment
- Strengthen the partnership with the state government to sustain Ga.'s ranking as the #1 state to do business.
- Promote Atlanta as a global entity for trade and commerce
- Building Atlanta's workforce development agency into a world-class agency

Taken together, these strategies will decrease the wage gap by training the workforce with the skills needed to participate in the 21st century economy and ensuring that good, well-paying jobs are available.

12. As we emerge from the pandemic, what are the major challenges facing the City for economic recovery? How will your candidacy address them?

For the past year I have worked with the non-profit, business, and government sectors to launch a \$10 million eviction relief fund that has helped almost 4,000 people stay in their homes. As eviction moratoriums are lifted this work must continue to be a priority. Likewise, it's not enough to stop evictions, we must ensure that people have access to jobs that pay living wages, this means continuing and expanding investments into our tech start-ups and small businesses that serve as foundation and future of our economy. Finally, we have to make some big investments in early childhood education and remove financial barriers for Atlantans pursuing a trade, two-year or four-year degree at one of our community colleges. 90% of students who attend Atlanta Metro or Atlanta Technical College for example are Atlanta residents, but many fall a few thousand dollars short of graduation. It is in the city's long term economic interest to ensure that these students are able to graduate and participate in the economy.

13. What strategies would you implement to improve the City's supply of affordable housing? What are the barriers to succeeding on this front and how will you work to overcome them?

In order to expand affordable housing, the city should:

- Implement the existing affordable housing strategy with fidelity
- Hold the Beltline accountable for reaching its affordable housing goals through routine reporting, increased transparency and easily accessible data
- Expand the anti-displacement program city-wide
- Reform the zoning code to increase density where necessary and overall affordability
- Look to repurpose vacant property into affordable housing units. We adopted this strategy for vacant APS buildings.
- Ensure the money from the recent \$100 million housing bond is spent with fidelity
- Expand investment in transit oriented developments (TODs)
- Partner with the Land Bank, AHA, other agencies to purchase land dedicated to the development of long-term affordability through community land trusts. I have worked to create several of these partnerships throughout metro-Atlanta.
- Set a clear definition of "affordability." Consider defining it by those who pay no more than 30% of their income on housing and transportation costs combined.
- Create a dedicated annual revenue stream for affordable housing
- Ensure the City, AHA, and APS are building on the hundreds of acres of vacant land and assets
- Ensure access to job training and jobs that pay a living wage

The primary barriers to achieving long term affordability is a lack of political will and a knowledge gap by policy makers. As someone who has worked both in and out of government to increase affordable housing options, I am well suited to act with urgency and expertise to address this critical issue.

14. What strategies would you implement to protect residents from being displaced from their communities, as housing prices continue to rise and eviction moratoriums expire?

Please see #13

15. What improvements, if any, need to be made to transparency and oversight on the More MARTA program? How should candidates for city appointments to the MARTA board be vetted and approved?

First all of the project milestones should be readily accessible to the public. This includes procurement information, the project's budget and projected completion date. The council should hold regular public hearings to evaluate the efficacy of the program. Appointees should be made and approved based on their expertise, capacity, and demonstrated interest in the area in which they seek to serve. We need to abandon nepotism and ensure that the only criteria that exists is the appointee's ability to get the job done on behalf of the public.

16. Describe your philosophy on the City's current infrastructure backlog. If elected, what strategies will you pursue to ensure forward progress is made? How would you expedite project delivery in the City?

The council should perform a comprehensive review, complete with community input to evaluate which projects should be prioritized and how those projects should be funded. Please see the previous answer for how I will work to expedite project delivery.

17. How important is sustainability to Atlanta's continued growth and vitality? What sustainability initiatives have been most successful in Atlanta to-date and how build you upon them?

Sustainability is critical to Atlanta's competitiveness in the future. Perhaps the single biggest achievement to these efforts is the 2017 adoption of the city's sustainability plan. This plan outlines aggressive yet attainable targets that outline a pathway for future implementation. The city must work to implement this plan with urgency and fidelity.