



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

Erika Estrada
Atlanta City Council
District 3



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.

The Atlanta City Council and the District 3 council seat, in particular, needs collaborative, visionary leadership who can work with a sense of urgency to find solutions to the tough issues we're currently facing while also maintaining a forward-looking focus. I have chosen to run for this office, and at this time, in particular, because I want to offer my experience and lifelong dedication to service to solving the urgent issues facing our City and my District at this time, as well as set strategy and direction for a better future.

I'm a proud 10 year resident of my District and have grown my career, business and family here in the City of Atlanta. I care about and am deeply vested in the future of our City. I have a unique combination of soft skills and technical skills that I have acquired through my community involvement and business experiences that will bring meaningful change to District 3 and the City of Atlanta.

At this time, the two most influential endorsements I have received are from the current District 3 councilmember, Antonio Brown, and The Black Slate, an independent committee. Councilmember Brown's support, as well as The Black Slate's support is important as both are influential figures with constituents of District 3. They have allowed me to present myself and platform priorities to members of the community who I may otherwise have not reached.

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

The three greatest issues facing the City of Atlanta at this time are : 1) Income Inequality, 2) Public Safety, and 3) Service Delivery of the City's Departments. I would specifically work to solve these issues through the following principles:

Income Inequality - The impacts of income inequality are devastating to our lower-income residents and to our City, overall. Income inequality has concerning impacts that extend to areas such as crime, housing, education, health, and economic mobility, to name a few. While solving the issues income inequality creates will be a long-term effort, there is much that can be done in the short-term, while maintaining a vision and strategy for long-term solutions. In the short-term I would like to focus on partnerships between the City and the business and education community that will create training and education pipelines to well-paying jobs to individuals and communities who haven't historically had those opportunities available to them simply because of where they live or went to school. These partnerships should be established and maintained with SMART goals and data to show whether meaningful change is occurring.

Public Safety - While I believe that there will always be ongoing public safety challenges that will arise, we are currently experiencing a time where most Atlantans I know live in fear of becoming a victim of crime or running into issues with law enforcement officials. And, on the other end of this spectrum, I personally know law enforcement and social services workers who feel overwhelmed and demoralized more than ever. I look forward to working through this tough issue by engaging both the public and our first responders to find solutions based in community-policing and better training and educational support for first responders.

Service Delivery of the City's Departments - Now, more than in recent times, residents and other stakeholders are voicing their concern and outright complaints about poor levels of service delivery from some of our City's departments, ranging from obtaining permits to waste and recycling pickup, and more. We owe it to our residents and stakeholders and the City employees who work in these departments to understand the root cause of poor service delivery levels. As a first step, I would advocate for special, independent review of selected City services' effectiveness to identify root cause issues and people, process and technology improvement recommendations to increase service and satisfaction levels.

3. Describe your leadership style and an example of a strategy you have used to motivate others and deliver results.

My leadership style is direct, collaborative and inclusive. In previous leadership experiences, I have found it important to be straightforward in my manner of speech and communications to those I'm working with or leading in order to bring out the best in them and myself as I am working with them. Also, in addition to being direct and straightforward, I also seek to be collaborative and inclusive, as this builds trust and cohesiveness.

As a small business owner, with a small team, I've used the three aforementioned core values of being direct, collaborative and inclusive on many occasions to drive projects forward with good outcomes for all involved. For example, as the COVID-19 crisis began in early 2020, I found it more important than ever to have constant communication around how the pandemic was adversely impacting our business, but how we could also work together as valued individual members of a team to press forward with the delivery of our services in non-traditional ways.

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?

To improve the City's service delivery in reality and in perception by the public, I recommend a concerted effort around understanding and addressing the root causes of service delivery issues. At present time, the impacts of COVID-19 on staffing are certainly a large part of the problem. But, I believe a thoughtful evaluation and study of other issues such as processes deployed, technology improvements and leadership would also reveal areas needing improvement that could be addressed by better technology and hiring for certain skills.

I also believe the departments and citizens could benefit from more proactive and thorough communication from the City's departments would also help improve the public's perception and trust. City departments do provide updates on NPU meetings, but it would also be worthwhile to explore other ways to engage with and proactively communicate with residents and stakeholders to improve expectations and outcomes regarding service levels.

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

I am saddened by the momentum that the Buckhead cityhood movement is gaining at this time. I understand the frustrations of those seeking a Buckhead city, but the creation of such city does not need to be the solution to the root causes of the mounting frustrations. The frustrations and issues being raised by the Buckhead community deserve to be heard, respected, and ultimately addressed by the City of Atlanta. I look forward to working with our City's Mayor and other leadership to work through listening sessions and ultimately potential solutions that address the root causes of the movement and improve the community's perception of the City of Atlanta.

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?

Municipal taxation is necessary to fund our City's support and services but we should remain practical and thoughtful regarding increases that cause unnecessary burdens to taxpayers or that would drive away potential business or other opportunities that would benefit our City.

Other future funding strategies I believe we should consider before or along with increases in taxation include increased or new fines for certain violations and monetization of revenue from some of the City's assets that will be utilized by outside parties. These opportunities should be evaluated by modeling how much potential revenue could be generated, who would be impacted and whether there are any unintended biases or discriminations caused by implementing such strategies.

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

As a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) and the daughter of two former U.S. Marines, integrity and ethics are of the utmost importance and not up for debate for me in any business and professional setting. My most impactful 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. Additionally, if elected, I believe it is also an important part of my role to regularly report findings to constituents on the state of ethics and transparency in our City's operations.

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?

The City of Atlanta has a leading role in implementing public safety reform. Before implementing ANY strategy, the City should work closely with the members of the public, including neighborhood leaders, the NPU and APAB system's Public Safety chairpersons, faith leaders and the business community alongside law enforcement leadership to strategize around non-violent, community policing efforts. The public and community members must be involved in creating innovative solutions for implementation. In District 3, in particular, I would create such a coalition to meet on an ongoing basis to recommend and implement innovative solutions specific to our District that could be piloted in other areas of the city, should they be successful. The only way we will achieve any success is for the “ public” to be included in “ public safety” strategies and solutions.

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

Diversion and policing alternatives are critical, non-negotiables that must be part of the broader conversation around public safety strategies. We must address the root cause of crime and other public safety issues to reduce crime in the long-term. We can ’ t continue to apply band-aid solutions to crime. By having a strategy to adequately fund and implement diversion, social services, mental health and community development programs long-term, we are improving the quality of life for Atlantans, as well as ultimately reducing the burden of our law enforcement and first responders to perform duties that are outside of their scope and training as law enforcement officials.

At the present time, I recommend that these programs be funded through a combination of federal, state and City of Atlanta budgetary funding, private philanthropic efforts, and through partnerships with health care providers.

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 of Atlanta should play a leading role in economic development, but with input from residents and stakeholders, as well as the business community. As the City competes for much needed economic growth opportunities, it is important that we deploy tools that produce the maximum benefit for the community in terms of job creation and community investment. If incentives and other concessions are needed to best compete for economic growth opportunities, they should generally only be deployed if the project would not have come to fruition without incentives or concessions. The City must demand that we be a "partner" in such arrangements and not a passive participant.

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?

The City of Atlanta should take an active role in addressing economic mobility and the racial wealth gap as some of the issues within these two areas were likely caused by some of the City's policies and services or lack thereof. If elected, I would look at this issue in phases of life from an individual's birth to their passing, to identify points of impact. For example, a stronger partnership between the City of Atlanta (and my office, if elected) and Atlanta Public Schools could create strategies and policy that leads to better educational outcomes, which directly impacts economic mobility. And, another example would be for the City of Atlanta (and my office, if elected) to have a stronger partnership with nonprofit organizations and small businesses that provide job training and creation opportunities, in order to pass those opportunities along to my young adult constituents. Stronger partnerships to drive solutions that will provide meaningful impact could change an individual or families trajectory along the economic mobility spectrum.

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

The impacts of the pandemic were devastating to many communities and continue to adversely impact small businesses, housing, the job market and other economic areas. With the current rise in COVID-19 cases, the City should be more proactive in preventing further economic devastation. There are many challenges the City is facing as a result of the pandemic, but I feel the major challenges facing the City for economic recovery include supporting the businesses, especially small businesses, who are still recovering from their pandemic financial losses as well as supporting residents facing eviction and other housing issues due to pandemic-related income losses.

I will use my candidacy to address these issues by increasing awareness of the City's existing programs to support small businesses and residents facing eviction and housing crisis. Specifically, in my District, I plan to hold at least monthly sessions in the hardest hit communities, ensuring these impacted populations are aware of and take advantage of resources currently available. If elected, I'd further address this issue by working with Invest Atlanta and private partners for additional programming and funding to expand resources for our businesses and residents. .

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?

To improve the City's affordable housing supply, I would start with advocating for and creating solutions around: 1) an increase in the City's Housing Opportunity Bond, 2) the repurposing of vacant or underutilized city property and, 3) the expansion of housing subsidies through government funded resources, as well as through private philanthropic partnerships.

The main barrier to succeeding in this area remains the same - funding! When an initiative is funded, that often means another initiative is not funded. The best way to overcome this barrier is to make sure that we are always selecting affordable housing projects and initiatives that will yield the greatest value in terms of number of affordable units, for the amounts being expended.

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?

Displacement is a high-priority issue I'd like to address, if elected. In the short-term, I would work with private entities and non-profit organizations, where possible, to create partnerships that provide long-term funding sources for legacy residents who are being displaced from their communities due to increases in housing prices. An example I always highlight and would like to replicate, is the Anti-Displacement Tax Fund program administered by the Westside Future Fund and initiated by the Westside Community Retention Collaborative.

I would address the crisis around the expiration of eviction moratoriums with a slightly different strategy than my proposal described above for legacy residents impacted due to housing price increases. I would also seek to implement partnerships with private entities and non-profit organizations, but due to the sense of urgency around this issue, I would seek short-term strategies to ensure that as many people as possible who have been impacted by the moratorium have immediate and safe shelter to go to if they are evicted.

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?

I would like to see the City of Atlanta and MARTA continue to work collaboratively under the established IGA, but in terms of transparency and oversight, an independent committee should be established. This could possibly be the Atlanta Beltline's role or a committee of independent citizens. This independent committee should objectively evaluate the program, its progression against milestones and project and financial status to relay to the public in an independent manner.

City appointments to the board should be vetted and approved by an independent committee, as well. This committee would be specifically assembled for the purpose of vetting qualified and independent board members before they are presented to the MARTA board for vote.

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?

To address the City's infrastructure backlog and ultimately expedite project delivery in the City, the City should first consider funding a programmatic overhaul to evaluate areas where new technologies and processes could be implemented that would ultimately streamline processes and eliminate waste and inefficiencies contributing to the backlog. This would also require leadership that is well versed in innovative technology and process solutions, including Lean principles.

To ensure progress is made, I will also advocate for regular, strategic review and evaluation of infrastructure projects by the City of Atlanta's Transportation Department and members of Council to ensure that prioritization of infrastructure projects continues to make sense and will provide the best outcomes with the available funding.

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 continued growth and viability and we must not overlook it's importance any longer. The decisions we are making now should always be evaluated for the future impact to our City's social, economic and financial health. The City's initiatives to enhance parks and greenspaces, such as the stormwater runoff project for the Rodney Cook Sr. Park in District 3 is a great example of forward-thinking, innovative project that not only created beautiful greenspace but addresses an environmental issue for the community. Future greenspace projects should also be evaluated for similar opportunities to address environmental and sustainability issues, simultaneously.