



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

**Carla Smith**  
Atlanta City Council  
District 1

## 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.

I am serving my fourth term as an Atlanta City Councilmember and live in the Woodland Hills neighborhood. As the District One Councilmember, I have worked tirelessly for this district. I take great pride in representing the people who live in the southeast Atlanta neighborhoods. As a legislator, I advocate for good development, safe, and green neighborhoods.

As a legislator, I have authored and co-authored some of the city's most notable legislation including; the Atlanta BeltLine, Public Memorials and most recently the Housing Opportunity Bond, and I sponsored the Projection and Wrapped Signs for the Entertainment and Downtown Districts.

I currently serve as a member of the Fulton County Board of Health, Villages of Carver YMCA Advisory Board of Directors, Grant Park Conservancy Advisory Board of Directors and Aglanta CEA Taskforce.

- 1) Paul Zucca - He has served the city in many areas including: Grant Park Neighborhood Association President, NPU-W Chair, and has served many times on the Elected Officials Compensation Commission and the Human Relations Commission.
- 2) Apostle Matthew Norwood - Southeast Atlanta Resident and Bishop-of-the-House of Bibleway Church. He serves a world-wide ministry allowing him to serve the Body of Christ nationally and internationally.
- 3) Larry Dingle, Attorney - Wilson, Brock & Irby - Mr. Dingle is a well-known attorney in the City of Atlanta. I have a deep respect for him because he has worn many hats over his professional career including: Director of Atlanta City Council, Atlanta Police Department Officer and Zoning Attorney. I seek his counsel on many issues and he is always there with impeccable advice based on his breadth of knowledge and experience.
- 4) Captain J.L. Booker, President, Thomasville Civic League; and Michael Fears, Chair of Norwood Manor - These are just two of the neighborhood association leaders that publicly support me. Having a good working relationship with neighborhood leadership is of the utmost importance to deliver services and resources on the neighborhood's behalf. They know I can be reached 24/7 and vice-versa.

- 5) I have wide and deep support among my District One neighbors as shown by the hosts and co-hosts who opened their homes across the communities; to see their names, photos and complete coverage of District One neighborhoods so supporting me, please visit the meet and greets page at [www.CarlaSmith2017.com](http://www.CarlaSmith2017.com).
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 one where our diverse communities are celebrated, supported and everyone acknowledges that there is room for us all.

I work toward that vision every day as a community organizer and elected leader. Achieving this requires hours of direct engagement with our citizens, business leaders, community leaders, other elected officials at the city level, on the school board, the county and the state. There is no shortcut. Progress takes constant patience and care and attention. It takes work. My vision of good government is ongoing and hands on.

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

1) Income inequality

Atlanta is a prosperous city, but that prosperity is not shared by all or even enough of our residents. We can do better. We need to work with the school system and with adults to give them more access to education, jobs, job preparation and readiness.

We need to work more effectively with Atlanta Metropolitan College, GSU and other higher learning institutions as well as AWDA.

Recently we increased all City employee salaries to \$13 per hour, and over the next two years we will get everyone to \$15 per hour. I was instrumental in getting this passed. I worked with all stakeholders up to the last minute to enable passage.

2) Affordable housing and Workforce housing

This can be achieved through Neighborhood Stabilization and redevelopment. We can partner with leaders such as the Urban Land Institute, private developers and non-profits. One tool we can use in these partnerships to provide land and/or money that comes from the recently passed Homeless Opportunity Bond.

In 2006, I introduced the first voluntary inclusionary zoning paper; while it did not pass, it sparked a conversation that continues to this day.

3) Transportation

Atlanta is one big traffic jam. The metro area needs better connectivity and simply speaking better public transportation. If the city is to achieve #1 and #2 above we must provide public transportation. We must provide multiple methods of transportation to move people about with connectivity. We recently overwhelmingly passed a half-penny referendum to expand MARTA which will create 2.5 billion dollars over the next several decades which is something everyone agrees with. We must support MARTA's initiatives.

Utilizing the funds from the Renew Atlanta Bond and TSPLOST (over \$500 million) will improve infrastructure and people mobility. One of the projects important to me is two light rail lines traversing Southeast Atlanta connecting north-south and east-west. The north-south line runs from downtown to the BeltLine on Hank Aaron Drive through the new Turner Field neighborhoods redevelopment. The east-west line runs from the West End MARTA station to Zoo Atlanta. Zoo Atlanta is currently going through major changes with a 1,000-seat convention facility (Cyclorama building), expanded elephant exhibit and new gateway project. In the interim we are looking at bus/rapid transit through Southeast Atlanta.

We need to look at alternative modes of transportation, making biking and walking friendlier in the City of Atlanta. In District One we have added many bike lanes, bike share locations and a newly installed parklet. The Parklet was my project partnering with the City of Atlanta (COA) Chief Bicycle Officer, COA Parks department, COA Transportation department and abutting neighborhood businesses. This parklet was an idea which started in April 2016 quickly coming to fruition with a ribbon cutting in October 2016. One notable point of interest: the street space where the parklet is located was previously unusable space due to parking restrictions. Working with the PATH Foundation to create multi-use trails will connect neighborhoods, parks, and the BeltLine. Currently we have two trails located in District One which will eventually connect to the BeltLine. This will allow us to utilize these methods more effectively.

As a City, we need to work to improve special event traffic plans, technology and synchronization of red lights which will enable us to change flows of traffic as it arises and on demand.

I believe we should create an Office/Department of Transportation with its own Commissioner focusing on its own initiatives and desires. The current Office of Traffic and Transportation is out dated. Having its own department is the future.

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

As a Councilmember, my record of collaboration is second to none. I work well with each of my current colleagues and look forward to working with the newly elected Councilmembers that will be new to the government process. I have been a bridge builder between the City Council and the Administration, effectively brokering compromise on key issues such as Turner Field redevelopment, infrastructure investment in Peopletown, fair salary adjustments for the city's public safety personnel among others.

As an example of my ability to get things done and break log jams at critical moments, I authored an amendment stating no funds would ever come out of the general fund to finance the Mercedes Benz stadium via the tourism tax on the floor of Council during the discussion for the final vote. The amendment facilitated the final vote on Council and was critical to its outcome.

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's financial position is stronger than it has been in decades. I am proud of the work this Council has accomplished, along with the Administration, in growing our cash reserves to more than \$175 million and to passing a balanced budget every year for the last 8 years without raising property taxes. Being fiscally responsible and keeping our credit rating high ensures when approaching Wall Street for bonding, our rating will save us millions over the life of the bond payments.

I have an indelible reputation for making sure we never waste a penny. It's how I approach my work as a Councilmember, a candidate and a family member. It comes naturally to me. For example, my campaign reuses previous election year yard signs to reuse, recycle and save money. My campaign is painting a "2017" over the "2013" on my yard signs from the 2013 election year. I pinch every penny.

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

The city deserves a decent tax base in order to maintain itself. We must balance property tax, sales tax, and fee revenue in case of a declining tax roll which can destabilize our budget. In light of the 2007-2009 financial crisis when so many homes were in foreclosure it became patently clear we were overly dependent on property tax revenue, having to increase taxes during that crisis. Since this time, we have increased antiquated fee prices in various departments. One example is we keep the Office of Buildings' permit fees in their department to better balance fees and property tax revenue.

By having a good relationship with the State of Georgia, Atlanta can engage in the conversation. I have recently spoken with my State Representative, David Dreyer, regarding capping property

tax assessments at 30% so we don't repeat the fiasco recently done with Fulton County assessors where property taxes soared to over 300% in some cases. We should also consider not increasing taxes on homes that have not been rehabbed, seniors and those living below the poverty line. This can also help maintain affordable housing.

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

Atlanta's MOST is a critically important tax and a way for the city to recover some revenue from non-resident users of the system. Atlanta's population has hovered between 450,000 and 475,000 over the last five years, but our day time population of workers and others swells to right at 1 million per day. The MOST sales tax is an important tool for the city to realize revenue from individuals who are certainly impacting our water and sewer system but do not receive a water bill at their home. If we lose MOST tens of thousands of Atlanta residents might find the city unaffordable, leave the city, which would have a devastating effect on the economy instituting a downward spiral in tax revenue.

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

Early in the procurement process, above a minimal threshold, we should put as much information as possible on-line for public inspection.

We need to work with the legislature to enhance campaign contribution disclosures making more transparent what interest contributors have in doing business with the City.

Also, an external oversight committee of trusted ethical business, financial and education professionals to review procurement procedures and randomly picking a past procurement to be audited with a microscope not just a magnifying glass. Looking for conflict of interests and biased scores.

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

Under the Franklin administration we passed the most stringent rules of ethics of its time; creating an Ethics Officer with an independent office at City Hall. I believe we should keep our Officer and Office independent. It is time to review and improve our ethics policy and look at best practices that have worked in other cities. Going forward we need to include more stringent ethics training for employees handling the procurement processes.

Ethics has to be something that is lived. For example, I won't let anyone with any interests in the City even buy me a cup of coffee. We have to be willing to do without the services of people that can't live this way.

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

One reason Atlanta thrives is because people want to be here. Our quality of life and the experience of Atlanta streetscapes matter. It's not just opening a factory. We must make it so people opening a cafe is not onerous. This attracts business and more people to live in our fine city.

We must continue to support Invest Atlanta which is the official economic development authority for the City of Atlanta. It is our public/private arm of government for the City of Atlanta to attract and develop businesses.

We must continue to support the mission of the Metro Chamber of Commerce and Central Atlanta Progress. An example of my working with Central Atlanta Progress is my recent sponsoring and passage of the Projection and Wrapped Signs for the Entertainment and Downtown Districts legislation.

For future job growth, education should be a priority. Atlanta City government needs to work with Atlanta Public Schools, neighboring county school systems and workforce agencies to create goals and initiatives that will improve public education for workforce readiness.

We must continue to reform our private public partnership with AWDA.

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

As a Councilmember, I have supported the City's push for affordable housing requirements when taxpayer money is given to a developer. When Invest Atlanta works with a developer on any of its bonding or TAD capabilities, they require an affordable housing component. No other bonding agency working in Fulton County requires this. I believe all public investment dollars should be required to provide affordable/workforce housing.

We also have several TADs, the Housing Opportunity Bond, and the BeltLine Affordable Housing Trust Fund (BAHTF) which can leverage more affordable housing dollars.

An affordable housing example in District One that I worked on with the community and a public/private partnership between Atlanta BeltLine, Inc., Invest Atlanta, Georgia Department of Community Affairs, BAHTF and the WODA Group, Inc. redeveloped a crumbling affordable apartment complex in Peoplestown. It brought newly renovated units, new amenities - a community room, fitness center, computer center, laundry facility, outdoor grilling area and state of the art playground. The tenants returned to their upgraded apartment homes with no increase in rent.

I also think we need to do more to discourage predatory buyers/investors from coming into gentrifying neighborhoods and buying out long-term homeowners. One policy I am considering introducing would eliminate city property taxes for all seniors who earn under the federal poverty limit and reside in their home.

I educate seniors by showing them examples of predatory behavior i.e., all those postcards and letters received in the mail along with people knocking on our doors scaring us and trying to buy our homes. We discuss how to react, ignore and fend off these predators.

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 Atlanta should prioritize apprenticeships for low and mid skilled workers. It's a proven method in many high-wage European countries and has not been used nearly enough in the U.S. Federal workforce dollars continue to be cut and the city's share of approximately \$7 million annually is a drop in the bucket. Many companies are willing to share the cost of training employees and are implementing apprenticeship programs. Atlanta has not made good use of these programs in the past, but our workforce agency is embarking on a turnaround program.

In addition to apprenticeship programs, I believe the City should expand on the TechHire program and leverage the \$4 million in Department of Labor funding with private funders to train and place employees in the IT industry.

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) Light rail connecting downtown to the new Georgia State University/Turner Field area. The north-south line runs from downtown to the BeltLine on Hank Aaron Drive through the new Turner Field neighborhoods redevelopment. The east-west line runs from the West End MARTA station to Zoo Atlanta.

Reasoning: New development is coming to the Turner Field area and public transportation is integral for quality of life, jobs, affordable housing, etc.

2) Upgrade our crumbling bridges and other heavily traveled roads/streets.

Reasoning: The Department of Transportation (DOT) recently scored and inspected bridges in the City of Atlanta. One of the bridges that failed inspection is the Capitol Avenue bridge, located in District One, which connects GSU to Downtown. The replacement of this bridge is currently underway. I am working with the DOT to ensure it is replaced in stages; not replaced in its entirety at one time closing the corridor for months. The DOT will ensure one lane of traffic is open at all times.



3) Hartsfield-Jackson Airport is in the beginning stages of building the 6th runway.

Reasoning: Our Airport is the economic engine for the entire Southeast United States and we must work and continue good policy with airport leaders to ensure this engine runs smoothly.

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?

Atlanta's crime rate is the lowest it has been in over a decade. Increasing the size of the force has made a difference in the City of Atlanta. We need to continue to support efforts to recruit, train and retain the highest quality officers and deploy them in a community-focused way. Officers on bikes on the BeltLine, at neighborhood events and visible in ways that demonstrate respect for the citizens they serve is important.

Our police received raises last year. I was central in working with the City and the different levels of the police force i.e., Lieutenants, Sergeants, etc. on these pay increases.

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?

Our City tries to sell itself as a business and tourism industry. One thing that makes us different is our multi-faceted arts scene. We're not doing enough to ensure that tourists know about the cultural arts we do have.

We need to show the outside world how thriving our arts community really is.

Reasonable investment in publicity pays off. Nashville advertises "come here for the arts, the music, the beauty..." We should make the arts a part of our pitch. In some parts of our city we have more starving artists than Greenwich Village. We are a cornucopia of artist endeavor. The more the world knows this, the more people will come here and spend money on the arts.

The City of Atlanta currently has an Arts Bond which can leverage for additional funds for the arts. Also, with the coming of the sixth runway 1% of all construction costs at Hartsfield/Jackson Airport must go to support the arts. We can do a better job at letting local artists know about these two City of Atlanta funding mechanisms.

As an example of spending some Arts Bond money we will have artist rendered skins placed on the concrete walls of the new Zoo Atlanta parking facility. This was wise investment in both the arts, a new City facility and a beautiful amenity for the Grant Park neighborhood in District One.