



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

Stephon Ferguson
Atlanta City Council
District 2

2017 Candidate Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Question 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.

Biography and Qualifications

As a former United States Army Sergeant, minister, motivational speaker, author, and journalist, my experience in communication and leadership has propelled me to great success in my community. From military troops to Georgia's churches, radio stations to businesses, I have built a strong track record as a passionate and logical leader with the skills and abilities to unite people beyond their differences.

I have served on many boards and committees including the ethics commission, United Way, RSVP, and League of Women Voters to name a few. The past three years I have received the Presidential Volunteer Service Award for more than 2,000 hours of volunteer service during that period. I have a passion for the well-being of people.

I am a graduate of the United States Military Academy of Health Science in San Antonio, Texas, a holder of Associate's degrees in theater and film at Georgia Perimeter College and Georgia State University, respectively, and a current candidate for a Master of Divinity from Morehouse School of Religion - ITC

Most importantly, I have a strong commitment to my family and community. I am the proud father of a beautiful daughter, Iyanna, who is currently a student at Clark Atlanta University. I am an ordained minister at Greater Piney Grove Baptist Church. Above all, I have a wide range of experience and reputation as a bridge-builder for uplifting people and communities.

Individuals of active support of candidacy

Dr. Joe Beasley – Well known long-time community activist – Veteran US Air Force

His support is vital with his credibility as a mover and shaker who gets things done. He is a great model as well as supporter. His knowledge of the community is paramount.

Dean Lawrence Carter - Long-time professor and Dean of the MLK National Chapel at Morehouse College. His notoriety and expertise on Dr. King philosophy of love, peace,

nonviolence and unity is unparalleled and hugely significant in dealing with many of the issues we face here in King's hometown of Atlanta.

Mayor Omar Neal – As the former mayor of Tuskegee Alabama, his experience and leadership is vital to my campaign. He has served as the leader of this great city and continues to do great work in assuring the well-being of all citizens.

Lance Robertson - Former County Manager and president of the NBLC based here in Atlanta. His leadership and service to this community is second to none. He is well-known as a man who gets the job done. His leadership experience serves this campaign well.

Dr. Babs Onabanjo - Dr. Onabanjo is a professor at Atlanta Metropolitan College and teaches Internet Technology. He is also the president and CEO of the AD King Foundation. His expertise as a community leader and professor is of great value to the work we are doing with this campaign.

Question 2

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

I am running as an action-oriented optimist, skilled in uniting people past barriers of politics, race, religion, gender, or socioeconomic status. I believe the key to Atlanta's success is creating an economy that gives every person in every part of the district the opportunity to achieve. That means building the best workforce, promoting fiscal responsibility and efficiency in our government, and investing in growing industries like technology, research, and clean green energy.

I have a strong vision for Atlanta that will ensure prosperity, diversity, and exceptionalism for years to come. The first step is to boost our economy. I believe strongly that investing in a skilled labor force will allow us to reap the rewards of efficiency and success.

Atlanta is one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country, and that means we need to develop better housing opportunities for the millions of Americans who are drawn to our great state, as well as take care of the families that have spent their whole lives here.

Atlanta is getting safer by the day, but I want to take a bigger leap to make it the safest city in America. This can only be done by ensuring police departments are representative of the people they protect as well as making sure laws are just and fair to those they aim to protect. To further improve the city's conditions, I will use my communications experience to collaborate with local business and civic leaders to establish Atlanta as a leader in public safety.

Question 3

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 or problems facing the City of Atlanta are:

1. Public Safety
2. Housing: Affordable Housing/Homelessness/Blight
3. Transparency and Ethics

Affordable Housing. Homelessness. Blighted and Vacant Property

I am aware of the large income disparity in Atlanta, one of the country's highest. I know that this is completely unacceptable and will take firm measures to resolve the problems that keep all Atlanta residents from enjoying the same quality of life.

I will take measures to secure affordable and accessible housing for more residents of Atlanta than ever before. Our city is growing at an exponential rate, and we as responsible leaders of the community must ensure that both new and long-time residents are able to find quality homes to raise their families and make a living.

Solutions

- Support the creation of a Homelessness Task Force to provide recommendations for long-term solutions to the real housing problems, address mental health services, and provide for job training across the city.
- Develop a system for rapid re-housing for those that have lost their homes. By working with the Atlanta Workforce Development Agency, we can help get the less fortunate back on their feet.
- Create a Task Force that will oversee, catalog, and recommend solutions on vacant lots and blighted properties to combat the serious blight issues that the city faces and target owners of blighted properties to remediate their blighted properties to better suit the needs of the Atlanta community.
- Maintain partnerships and communication with a number of organizations to ensure that residents of Atlanta receive the best quality of life as possible. These include the Atlanta Public School system, local higher education, health services, and governmental agencies.

I know that sometimes, bad things happen to good people. That's why he will promote efforts to combat homelessness, mental illness, and substance abuse with compassion and understanding. He will use the \$25 million dollars afforded by the Housing Opportunity Bond to Atlanta's advantage by constructing affordable housing for Atlanta's lower income residents. He will commit to reforming housing in each of the 12 Council Districts so that all in Atlanta can enjoy a roof over their family's heads.

Public Safety

In the history of Atlanta, there has never been a safer time to reside in the city than today. I will go even farther to ensure that you feel safe and secure in your neighborhood at night. I will invest in smarter and newer police technologies, better training for patrolling officers, and increasing police transparency with the citizens they protect.

I will support and develop community programs for youth before and after their first encounter with law enforcement. This will allow young people to understand the seriousness of the law as well as have a better understanding of how the justice system works.

Solutions:

- Collaborate with the Atlanta Police Department, the Atlanta Police Foundation, and other security organizations to maintain a strong relationship with the people that protect us.
- Support will also provide psychological screening and training for our officers and victims, so we can make our streets safer for everyone.
- Ensure that Atlanta's finest will get the resources they need to do their job appropriately while also holding them accountable for the great responsibilities they possess.
- Ensure recruiting practices focus on hiring the best candidates this city has to offer, as well as making sure that the next generation of security forces are trained, prepared, and ready for any situation.

By providing our police with the tools, funding, and personnel it needs, Atlanta and District 02 will develop and maintain its reputation as one of the safest cities in the country.

Transparency

I support full transparency in the upcoming 2017 elections. Candidates and elected officials should disclose or be free of any conflicts of interest from businesses, lobbying organizations, and special interest groups. Timely and stringent audits will be invoked for any emergency procurements, leading to a more ethical and accountable system. Bribery and corruption will be kept at bay when I am elected to the council.

Solutions:

- Audit all contracts thoroughly to ensure the city is paying for its services appropriately and is not being overcharged.
- Implement a Pay/See policy that would allow the public to view recipients and details of any payments the city makes, as well as an establishment of a public record that anyone can use to view city contracts and partnerships.
- Provide easy-to-use online system as the best way for citizens to be able to see all city financial activities is up to, and allowing residents to become much more informed regarding city affairs.

- Ensure equipment that the city owns will be logged and accounted for in a database, protecting the city's assets and increasing the efficiency of the people's tax dollars.
- Legislate a cool-off period which will limit the number of successive city contracts a firm can receive in a short period of time, allowing for a diverse array of contractors performing city work.
- Such actions will restore the public's faith in our election system, allowing for the success of independent, clean, and transparent candidates.

Question 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 former Sergeant in the US Army, having led many soldiers on several missions and as a minister, my experience and leadership as a bridge builder and ability to unite people, will serve the citizens of Atlanta well. I have worked with many people from various backgrounds and walks of life. A key is to focus on the commonalities that we share versus our differences and looking at the situation as a whole. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Establishing a great rapport with all council colleagues is imperative and creates an atmosphere that generates unity, even with the most contentious issues.

Question 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?

Despite the alleged financial impropriety and the investigations, the city has robust financial growth and produced noteworthy reserves. Any candidate can promise the expansion of services and new projects, but it is exponentially more challenging to do so while ensuring that the city's budget remains stable and solvent.

I understand the importance of having a sensible and balanced budget for the city of Atlanta for the future of District 02. Our district's future is brighter than ever due to growing incoming revenue from Renew Atlanta and the T-SPLOST MARTA initiative, which will be instrumental to raising the equity of Atlanta's transportation and infrastructure.

I will follow the previous council's lead in boosting the economy with smart and sensible financial initiatives, and will protect Atlanta's stellar credit ratings by promoting further efforts to make Atlanta's financial affairs even more responsible, effective, and sound.

Financial Management Tools:

- Promote city relations with local businesses and job leaders to create a more hospitable and efficient economic environment.
- Hold city agencies and corporations accountable for their actions that might harm the citizens of the city. By doing so, our workforce can be more effectively distributed throughout our great city and will lead to greater prosperity for all.
- Support economic development programs that stimulate the Atlanta economy by expanding and improving our pool of workers, both skilled and unskilled. A strong and educated workforce is vitally important for any city that desires to achieve long term success.
- Invest in educating our children as the best way to create future jobs. Today's children will one day become the breadwinners of the upcoming years. If we wish to enjoy exciting opportunities that are yet to come, we must invest in our young. By improving our Atlanta public schools and turning them into places that teachers across the country want to work in, we can create a world-class generation with the skills and talents to compete in a future society.

Question 6

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

We need to look closer at the structure of how we make these assessments to make sure that they are in line with what is fair to all citizens. Many residents are grateful that the county assessments were taken back to last year's – finding many discrepancies' in that assessment. We can learn a lot from this.

Question 7

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

The MOST has generated over \$700 million since 2004, money that has made it possible for the Department to issue the bonds that largely funded Clean Water Atlanta without increasing rates even higher than they were. I think the tax has created the needed funds for long-term water and sewer operations along with the current budget.

My only concern would be ensuring the department is managed properly and we implement technology as quality control and to also decrease labor cost in the future. In addition, we most always communicate to our constituents and have measures to ensure accountability for the use of those tax dollars.

Question 8

Would you change the current procurement process to protect against “pay to play”? If so, what changes would you support? The process is okay but I would significantly increase accountability – penalties for those who go outside of the process should be greater and include the potential of the individual being removed from the council.

Question 9

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

As stated before, I support full transparency in the upcoming 2017 elections. Candidates and elected officials should disclose or be free of any conflicts of interest from businesses, lobbying organizations, and special interest groups. Timely and stringent audits will be invoked for any emergency procurements, leading to a more ethical and accountable system. Bribery and corruption will be kept at bay when I am elected to the council.

Solutions:

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- Provide easy-to-use online system as the best way for citizens to be able to see all city financial activities is up to, and allowing residents to become much more informed regarding city affairs.
- Ensure equipment that the city owns will be logged and accounted for in a database, protecting the city’s assets and increasing the efficiency of the people’s tax dollars.
- Legislate a cool-off period which will limit the number of successive city contracts a firm can receive in a short period of time, allowing for a diverse array of contractors performing city work.
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Question 10

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

As briefly mentioned above

1. Promote city relations with local businesses and job leaders to create a more hospitable and efficient economic environment.
2. Hold city agencies and corporations accountable for their actions that might harm the citizens of the city. By doing so, our workforce can be more effectively distributed throughout our great city and will lead to greater prosperity for all.
3. Support economic development programs that stimulate the Atlanta economy by expanding and improving our pool of workers, both skilled and unskilled. A strong and educated workforce is vitally important for any city that desires to achieve long term success.
4. Invest in educating our children as the best way to create future jobs. Today's children will one day become the breadwinners of the upcoming years. If we wish to enjoy exciting opportunities that are yet to come, we must invest in our young. By improving our Atlanta public schools and turning them into places that teachers across the country want to work in, we can create a world-class generation with the skills and talents to compete in a future society.

Question 11

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

I think dealing with affordable housing only addresses a part of quality housing in general. I am a firm believer that a comprehensive approach is needed because homeliness and blighted communities has an effect on development and overall value of housing across Atlanta.

Strategies:

- Support the creation of a Homelessness Task Force to provide recommendations for long-term solutions to the real housing problems, address mental health services, and provide for job training across the city.
- Develop a system for rapid re-housing for those that have lost their homes.
- Create a Task Force that will oversee, catalog, and recommend solutions on vacant lots and blighted properties to combat the serious blight issues that the city faces and target owners of blighted properties to remediate their blighted properties to better suit the needs of the Atlanta community.
- Use the \$25 million dollars afforded by the Housing Opportunity Bond to Atlanta's advantage by constructing affordable housing for Atlanta's lower income residents.

Question 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 have a strong vision for Atlanta that will ensure prosperity, diversity, and exceptionalism for years to come. The first step is to boost our economy. I believe strongly that investing in a skilled labor force will allow us to reap the rewards of efficiency and success.

Secondly, we should invest in educating our children as the best way to create future jobs. Today's children will one day become the breadwinners of the upcoming years. If we wish to enjoy exciting opportunities that are yet to come, we must invest in our young. By improving our Atlanta public schools and turning them into places that teachers across the country want to work in, we can create a world-class generation with the skills and talents to compete in a future society.

Question 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 a thriving city, people need the ability to exercise their physical freedom. The gridlock that Atlanta has become famous for is keeping hard working neighbors from their jobs, families, and lives. If we address our traffic problems, businesses and entertainment leaders will be more likely to choose the city of Atlanta for their relocations. While automobiles consist of a majority of our transportation in Atlanta, we have to invest in clean, green, and dependable solutions.

Marta Expansion

The MARTA system is one of the jewels of Atlanta, as it provides a diverse array of transportation solutions to millions of passengers a year. However, we can do better. Atlanta needs to expand service and other transit opportunities to as many residents as possible, and that starts by building new stations, enhancing regional express options, and building trails and sidewalks to better fit the needs of our city.

Quality Roads

Atlanta should improve the quality of road surfaces and call for a zoning audit to ensure that new estimates of population and density are taken into account. By doing so, bottlenecks and major traffic jams will be solved and residents will be able to join their families at home at a more reasonable hour.

Beltline/Bike Culture

It is important because of the original presentation of the idea of the Beltline was an excellent way to connect all of the various Atlanta communities without another public transportation options. Equally, I think there should be an Increase in the number of bike lanes and sidewalks

in the city, as well as close gaps in the existing network to ensure that it is safe to ride a bicycle to work every morning and evening.

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?

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Solutions:

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Question 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?

The entertainment industry is a key component of Atlanta's economy, and it must be protected, applauded, and invested in. Brands and entertainers all over the globe come to Atlanta for its beautiful venues, receptive audiences, and aura of culture. I will work to make Atlanta the #1 destination for art and culture in the world, and that starts by celebrating what the city has to offer today. Funding for the arts is declining in other cities, but I will ensure that artists, athletes,

and entertainers get the financial support they need to continue their passions and share them with the city.