

Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

Liliana Bakhtiari
Atlanta City Council
District 5



2017 Candidate Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Please type response to questions in the field provided. You may also attach a resume or other description to provide us with additional detail

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'm an Atlanta native. My father has successfully run a businesses in downtown Atlanta for the last 2 decades, and I have been a small business owner in the city of Atlanta for 5 years.

I also sit on a board of a local organization called Dream Warriors Foundation, that has over 14,000 members. It is specifically tailored to women, and is focused on highlighting female business owners/entrepreneurs, and we've created a grant program to help women with launching businesses and startups in Atlanta.

I have endorsements from Firefighters and PACE. Having support from city employees and our hard working public safety officials is important because these are people who ensure that our city runs efficiently, and helps to ensure safety for our growing population.

I also have support from owner of Avenue Realty Shane Little , Andy Alibaksh and Brad Cunard with Cabbagetown/Reynoldstown Business Association, Armando Celenteno and Victoria Park with East Atlanta Business Association, and President of Common Ground Real Estate, Justin Ziegler.

Having endorsements from our small business and residential real estate brokers is important because we all know in Atlanta small businesses create more new jobs than larger companies, and as our next City Council member and a small business owner myself, I am passionately dedicated to making sure our city continues its enviable economic growth and solid job creation numbers.

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

I envision an Atlanta that continues to build on the growth and success of the past while addressing the challenges we currently have: more affordable housing, better public transit and narrowing the income inequality seen throughout the city. As a successful small business owner who is also the daughter of a long-time successful small business

owner in Atlanta, I envision a city that maintains our international profile while doing a better job of taking care of every Atlanta child's education and makes sure every senior can get to the store. I want to help ensure that Hartsfield-Jackson stays the busiest airport in the world but also does more to promote female entrepreneurs, the largest segment of new business owners. I envision an Atlanta that serves as a magnet for not only more Fortune 500 companies but also leaders in the IT industry, so that we are not just growing jobs but growing good paying jobs with good benefits that will help create stronger families.

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

Atlanta needs to do a significantly better job of increasing affordable housing within the city in order to stabilize our workforce and do so closer to their employer. It would decrease traffic congestion and increase employee morale. We also need to do a better job of expanding public transit, not only by expanding MARTA but also by doing a better job of incorporating heavy and light rail, because it would similarly decrease traffic congestion and commute time and also ensure more residents are able to be independent - like seniors going to the store or to see the doctor.

Atlanta should also do a better job of making our neighborhoods safer. While it is true major crimes have seen a 30% dip at the beginning of this year as compared to last year, we still have a long way to go before every senior feels safe in their home and every child is safe walking home from school. A safer city is good for tourism, corporate relocations, and obviously for every hardworking family already living here.

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

At the end of the day, district lines are a political construct and Atlanta families live work and play across multiple neighborhoods. It is crucial that we be able to work as a team on city council to push our city forward, collectively. At the same time, I believe that listening is my greatest asset. As a City Councilperson, I will always be thorough in my research around each decision, remain sensitive and open to the needs of my constituents, and willing to yield to expert opinions when necessary.

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?

Atlanta is able to boast a long-standing strong economy. Our investment ratings are high, our debt is low and we have experienced long term economic growth. This is largely thanks to strong municipal, non-profit and private industry leaders who have invested in

making sure Atlanta remains the economic engine of the Southeast. As our next member of Council I will do all I can to make sure we maintain this strong economic growth.

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

Atlanta has the highest sales tax in Georgia, and we must adopt a philosophy moving forward that we cannot tax our way to economic growth. We just passed a TSPLOST to help with getting our water and sewer systems upgraded to 21st century standards, but the County completely bungled the property tax assessments this year, throwing the city into turmoil. While the City of Atlanta has voted to roll back millage rates each of the last 7 years - a move I support - we must ensure that the county updates its tax assessments and never again tries to make up for nearly a decade of tax assessment stagnation at the expense of our families and small businesses.

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

While I am highly sensitive to Atlanta's ranking on tax issues, I support the MOST tax as the only viable option to finally update Atlanta's 19th century water and sewer systems. Atlanta must have a modern, dependable water and sewer system to keep attraction top-tier companies to our great city. Our current water and sewer bills should be sufficient to maintain the systems after the repairs are made, but I would support any plan that helped move the systems to financial sustainability without the need for additional taxation.

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

I largely believe the system is currently working with the exception of the most recent arrests at City Hall. I believe we will need quite a few good will measures to earn back public trust, which is why I fully support the transparency legislation currently before Council that calls for not only the City's budget to be put online but also all department budgets and check-book spending.

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

We live in the age of technology, and our city is still catching up. I would like for public meetings, including city council meetings, to be live streamed rather than recorded and broadcast on a hard to find city station. I would like for all city spending to be put online,

accessible to any member of the public. It is in our best interest to create a city that new residents want to invest their time and resources in as it will help ensure our continued economic growth.

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

As a small business owner and the daughter of a long-term successful small business owner in Atlanta, I am extremely invested in making sure Atlanta does a better job of encouraging small business ownership. I fully support our clearly successful efforts to bring numerous Fortune 500 companies to our great city, but I would like to see our City do a better job of reaching out to minority business owners, including women, and help the large list of small businesses we have in Atlanta expand and create more jobs on the community level.

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

While I wholeheartedly support the solid work done by the Council in identifying blighted properties, walking them through the condemnation process and then demolition to alleviate crime magnets and help protect property values, the cost of the process is staggeringly high and the timeline is achingly slow. I'd rather we also consider creative uses for some of these properties like the \$1 giveaways recently announced in an effort to move long vacant properties. We should also consider moving "open and unused" properties to the County or City Land Bank for use by nonprofits or developers. I'm personally interested in taking a look at recent proposals for the use of vacant APS property, as well as the new R5 zoning for "tiny houses" to better serve our impoverished population.

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?

Atlanta could do a better job ensuring every child has access to the best possible education that will ensure the brightest possible future. Our business community across the board could do a better job partnering with our schools to make sure we are not only breaking the school to prison pipeline but building the school to industry pipeline. Atlanta should do a better job of fixing the gender pay gap. Atlanta should do a better job of fixing the income inequality we are currently stigmatized with.

I believe the quickest way to address economic mobility is to continue to work with employees after they've been put in a position. Securing employment is great - getting them ready for the next promotion and raise is even better.

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.

Top priority to me is expanding MARTA. We need to build out transit lines, including bus, heavy and light rail lines, and we need to simultaneously incentivize development along those lines.

We know all roads lead to Atlanta and we know all products travel through Hartsfield-Jackson, so we need to make sure that while expanding MARTA and our heavy and light rail, we are also making sure that our airport is keeping pace and expanding as our city densifies so that we stay the busiest airport in the country.

I would also like to see an overhaul of specific corridors, for example Memorial Drive and Dekalb Avenue in my district, including alternative transit in those decisions, and doing proper studies to plan for the anticipated population growth.

With each of these projects, the goal is to get ahead of the population and economic boom in order to create a foundation that allows for sustained growth.

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?

Fully hiring out our police force at previously agreed upon levels would be a good first step. Once we secure those additional officers, we should make sure we keep them, ensuring that we are not bleeding money when it comes to our firefighters and officers. Too often, we invest hundreds of thousands of dollars in training our public safety officers, only to repeatedly lose them to surrounding counties and larger cities. We have to make sure we have competitive pay, preferably in combination with a COLA formula so that officers and firefighters can afford to live in the city. Also, we should institute more community policing - our neighborhoods want it and our police officers want it. It's a no-brainer. It decreases crime and increases morale.

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?

When budgeting, we need to take into account that for each dollar invested in the arts, we see a \$7 return. Frankly with this kind of return I'd like to see us much higher on the list, given how much revenue the arts creates. Public art brings neighborhoods together,

it creates a sense of community, it can revitalize abandoned structures, it can increase homeownership interest in a transitional neighborhood - the list goes on and on. When used creatively investment in public art can be an incredibly strong urban planning tool. We know that public art installations decrease crime and increase tourism. I'm incredibly proud of my role in the Atlanta arts community, and I currently sit on two different arts boards in Atlanta. It's an area I'm incredibly passionate about, both as an artist myself (photographer and filmmaker), and as someone whose partner is a full-time professional artist.