



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

Kirk Rich
Atlanta City Council
District 6

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.**

Please see attached biography for qualifications. Over the past 25 years, I have crafted a unique set of skills based on my leadership positions on multiple nonprofit, community and organizational boards, including:

- Jerusalem House – As Board Chair, I was exposed to how critical housing is to both healthcare and in breaking intergenerational poverty. Of the 350 individuals in the program, almost 100 were children. By providing safe housing, multiple types of wrap-around supportive services and strategically placing the children in good school systems, we achieved a near 100% graduation rate. My position also provided me with the opportunity to work with HUD and other related agencies to provide diverse types of housing assistance to no- and low-income individuals and families. I remain on their Advisory Board today.
- Actor's Express Theater – As Board Chair of this mid-tier theater, I experienced firsthand the general lack of funding many arts organizations face despite the generosity of Atlanta's philanthropic community. I am a proponent of making a stronger connection to the arts through both increased philanthropic understanding and improved internal structures within the City to provide added support. Identifying better funding mechanisms, educational support/counseling and streamlining grant initiatives can all vastly improve the health and quality of the Atlanta arts scene, which attracts and retains high quality employers, ultimately impacting economic development as well.
- Invest Atlanta – I had the privilege to serve on the Invest Atlanta Board for over three (3) years, resigning early to run for the District 6 City Council position per ethics requirements. During my service, I chaired the Housing Committee, and was a member of the Finance, TAD (Tax Allocation Districts) and Business Development committees. This work was the true primer for many of the skillsets and relationships that will be critical to my service on City Council.

The organizations and individuals who are supporting my campaign include:

- 1) My family: I am a third generation Atlantan, born in Piedmont Hospital, and have an extensive family network located in the Metropolitan Atlanta area. They have always been supportive of my career path and community service, and their continued support of my candidacy was critical to my decision to run.
- 2) Atlanta Police Union (International Brotherhood of Police Officers): I have received the endorsement of the Atlanta Police Union, which is extremely critical and meaningful to me and my constituency, and underscores my platform on public

safety. Our policies toward our police force have room for improvement in the areas of pay, benefits, affordable intown workforce housing and streamline training, just to name a few.

- 3) Atlanta Professional Firefighters Union (IAFF Local 134): I am proud to also have secured the endorsement of Atlanta Professional Firefighters Union. This public safety endorsement, in combination with that of the Atlanta Police Union, is critical to our district. As these hard-working men and women keep us safe from unanticipated disasters, including issues like the I-85 bridge collapse, they know I will work to ensure their invaluable support of our district and our City.
- 4) The REALTORS Associations: I have the endorsement and public support of more than 6,000 Realtors, city- and state-wide. These men and women represent the backbone of all aspects of real estate from development, housing and support of education. The commercial realtors also play a key role in recruitment of corporations to the City, which provide jobs and fuels our economic engine. I will rely on the support of this professional group as we address and solve critical issues such as affordable workforce housing and diversity in housing and our workforce.
- 5) The Leadership and Staff of Jerusalem House and Actors Express: My public support from these two nonprofits are witness to successful leadership tenures at both organizations. More importantly, however, as explained above, they have provided me a unique skillset to help solve some of Atlanta's most difficult issues. Both groups are enthusiastically supporting me; validating that my leadership in their organizations will make me a strong and effective council member.

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

My vision for the City revolves around EQUITY. Several recent national articles have shed a disappointing light on our lack of success pertaining to equity. We should strive to be a city where all residents share in the success and opportunity that Atlanta is experiencing. Equity entails multiple components, which point to many of the critical issues that face Atlanta. Those issues are education, affordable housing, workforce housing, displacement due to gentrification, homelessness, addiction issues, racial and other minority bias, and downward pressure from the success of Atlanta's booming development economy. This list is long, but in need of immediate attention and outside-the-box thinking. To go into detail on this full list would be too lengthy for this format, therefore, I will provide one important example.

The BeltLine Eastside Trail has been an incredible success. However, we need to plan and be even more strategic on the BeltLine's next phases and how these phases affect the community. Prior to new segments being opened, we should identify the schools serving the areas of probable new developments to ensure they are prepared to handle the continued success of the BeltLine. By that I mean, it will be important to partner with Atlanta Public Schools (APS) and neighborhoods, so we can insure those schools are strong and equipped for those families who plan to educate their children there long-term. This planning will benefit not only those immediate areas, but also help to alleviate hyper-development from the current BeltLine stretches that are now known for exorbitant housing prices and zoning

challenges.

The Eastside BeltLine trail is in the heart of District 6. With extraordinary success has come lack of affordability for current and future residents in the district. It also has created the potential for mid-rise developments that will eventually create a “canyon effect” eliminating the unique aesthetic for which the BeltLine is known. The completion of the BeltLine will be one of the most transformative projects in Atlanta’s history. I want to make sure it is done so in the best possible way.

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 facing the City include transportation, education and public safety. If elected, I would work to solve each by:

- 1) Transportation: Immediately engaging with the appropriate city departments to finalize Atlanta’s transportation plan, setting expedited timelines to complete high priority connections. As part of the plan, I would further examine the use of new technologies, such as smart lights and other tools. I would like to see Atlanta be the front runner on implementing affordable smart technology that would improve traffic flow, as well as pedestrian and bike safety. We should engage our local universities to assist in identifying and creating inventive solutions. I think to achieve initial “quick results,” installation of smart lights throughout Atlanta’s high traffic corridors, such as the Midtown initiative, should be expedited. In conjunction with that, we should also study lane closures to make sure that vendors and developers are not blocking our roadways during rush hours or other inopportune times. These two issues alone could be implemented within the first 12 months of the new council’s term. The positive results would begin to build the public’s confidence in our new city government and our focus on Atlanta’s number one concern.
- 2) Education: Education is the key to Atlanta’s success. Even though council does not directly affect policy of the Atlanta public schools, today’s students will be tomorrow’s leaders and as a result, there are strategic ways we should partner today. For example, I would target future development areas and make sure the City is working with APS where possible to insure additional supportive services are available for children and their families within APS. As the District 6 City Council person, I have committed to hold bi-annual meetings with our civic association presidents, an additional board member from the associations (of the president’s choosing), the school board members serving our district, the NPU chairs serving our district, and myself, to meet face-to-face and discuss critical issues and concerns. This will build relationships, promote trust and improve collaboration. It is vitally important that we all work together to create a better community and serve our constituency at the highest level, beginning with our youngest constituents.
- 3) Public Safety: As council person for District 6, I would like to focus on the creation of a committee to study Atlanta police and Atlanta firefighter pay and benefits as it relates to other comparable metropolitan cities. This would allow us to clearly

understand areas where the City is meeting, exceeding or underperforming and needs improvement.

- 4) Invest Atlanta was instrumental in assisting a police officer to obtain a quality home within Vine City, where he was placed to serve that community. This is beneficial on multiple fronts from the physical visibility of an officer to help deter crime, but also, and more importantly, to create empathy between the police and the communities that they serve. I think this model should be used as one of the benefits we can offer to our public safety officials. As a result, I believe communities and our police officials will build relationships of trust versus distrust, and public safety should continue to improve.

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

Collaboration will be critical as a new City Council person going into a predominantly new City Council (with a probable majority of the seats turning over in 2017). I have already initiated conversations with other district council candidates so that when we do arrive, we have some familiarity with one another and each other's agendas around their constituents. As a board member on Invest Atlanta, and as an alumni of Leadership Atlanta, I also have built relationships with many of the current council members who will also will be valuable in our ability to hit the ground running. District 6 is a district full of success, but also challenges. Many of the challenges overlap with those of other districts. My responsibility is to serve District 6, but to do so in a fair and responsible way for all of Atlanta. As a leader on multiple boards and a 30-year veteran commercial real estate broker, negotiation and compromise have been hallmarks of my life. The number one way to be effective, however, is to make sure we, as council members, have relationships that go beyond our City Council work, so we have a holistic and complete understanding of what is important beyond our specific districts.

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?

I think the strongest characteristic of Atlanta, and a success being left by the current administration, is an incredibly sound fiscal report card. The current Mayor has been fiscally conservative creating a fiscal health that is not common to most cities like Atlanta. This, however, is also one of my largest concerns. A new and inexperienced Council and a new Mayor could certainly take damaging steps backwards. I am, and would be, conservative in my approach to city finances. This, however, would be tempered with the overarching goal of providing the absolute best city services with the best and most talented work force of any city. I will also make sure that any type of audit committees or other tools needed to ensure oversight of financial activity are firmly supported. I believe this is one of the greatest responsibilities of the new government coming in this January.

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

This subject has become front and center with the latest tax assessments. District 6 was hit very hard with illogical and unexplainable increases. While I do think the City coffers must be filled from reasonable taxation efforts, the City and Fulton County, must be careful and responsible in the way that they assess reasonable values. It is my belief that the county has been too lenient with assessments over the past decade; wanting to be too fair. It felt as though the latest assessment was an effort to “catch up” with the current market. This will remain a sore spot and a major point of discussion for the new council. It will be our responsibility to temper the City’s need for revenue with that of the constituency desire for minimal taxation. I would like to see improved communication between the county assessor’s office and the City, so that when there are changes in assessments, we as elected officials can explain to our constituents in advance so they are not be caught off guard. It is important to remember that when government jurisdictions and officials are in sync, we can help messaging to our constituents in a way that will help gain acceptance and enforce confidence in our government and its transparency.

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

Obviously, over the last several years MOST has been a critical part of funding our overdue infrastructure repairs and upgrades. With the last renewal, it continues to fund critical ongoing projects. This program is especially palatable given that it does not rest simply on the shoulders of the residents of the City, but those who use the City. I am a firm supporter of MOST staying in place and, if needed, looking to other similar ideas to allow for our water, sewer and infrastructure needs be met for a dramatically growing population.

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

The federal investigation of our city’s bribery scandal has been a wake-up call to ensure the procurement process is fair, equitable and free of controversy. With the current high level of public distrust with our city government due to the ongoing investigation, I believe the new council must review all procurement processes and research best practices from other similar cities. I would work to ensure there are checks and balances as well as improved transparency in place to regain the public’s trust on contractor selection. This would require training of staff to ensure consistent and full compliance. Council should initiate internal audits by independent firms to vet appropriate procedures and practices. This must be a high priority with the new Council, as well as with the new Mayor. Once on counsel, with a full understanding of the how the system was previously breached, I would work to develop a plan to ensure the process is equitable and transparent. I would want to make sure Council understands all ramifications of proposed changes and safeguards.

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

As stated in the previous question, I would want to initiate a thorough review of current systems and processes pertaining to procurement, but also other areas of the City's financial machine. I would be a proponent of making any and all changes needed to ensure transparency and to demand the highest ethics possible. In tandem with review of processes, I would also be an aggressive proponent of creating clearer and more concise ways to deal with unethical behavior. We need to be able to punish or remove any individual or group who is guilty of ethics violations. This punishment or removal must be swift. The public's justified distrust is a barrier to Atlanta reaching its full potential. We need to be proactive in controlling spending and ensuring we prevent any possible abuses through random audits and reviews.

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

During my time on the Invest Atlanta Board, I was exposed to the many tools for economic growth within the City. The success of Invest Atlanta over the past eight years has been astounding. As the Council person for District 6, I would want to provide future resources needed to keep this success story alive as well as oversee responsible fiscal practices. Being a commercial real estate broker for 30 years, I understand market cycles. We need to acknowledge that incentives needed in a down cycle are not the same incentives needed when the economy is healthy. Other factors to ensure economic development play into the earlier questions of making sure that our city has the best education and transportation available, as well as a well-funded arts program, to compete with other cities. In order to continue to obtain more corporate headquarters and regional offices (jobs!), keeping the livability of our city at its highest is critical.

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

As Chair of the Housing Committee on Invest Atlanta, I worked with Atlanta Beltline Inc. (ABI) to increase their budgets to more seriously hit their affordable housing targets. ABI will need further pressure to do more in the affordability arena. Affordable housing remains a very complicated riddle for our city. We are on the precipice of losing the ability to protect affordability such as San Francisco, New York and Chicago now experience. As Council person, I absolutely do not want to see Atlanta lose its opportunity to mitigate our affordable housing supply challenge. As a commercial real estate practitioner, we must find ways to work with our developers to ensure that there is an inclusionary zoning structure that requires 10% to 15% of affordable units within new high-density developments. I would also want to study best practices of other urban markets that are having success in this area so

that we may implement those strategies within Atlanta. Continuing dialogue with the development community to find solutions should be a critical and high priority.

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?

As discussed in a previous question, workforce development is a critical piece to improve equity. While studying best practices in other cities, and implementing those strategies, I would also want to work with our nonprofit community to continue partnering on training programs. The Blank Foundation, as well as Chick-fil-A, are finding ways to encourage private-public partnerships to address this deficit. With our booming \$9 billion film and music industries, there will be more opportunities to supply targeted short-term training that will provide skill sets to workers who do not have as many employment options. This is a great opportunity for the City and one for which we need to take full advantage. I also believe that we should provide more resources to technical schools and encourage young people to embrace technical degrees beyond four-year college degrees. This would have multiple advantages beyond creating a stronger technical, specialized crafts workforce. It would also produce a population with lower student debt. There would be additional opportunities to fund these types of programs by leveraging state and federal funding.

Council should also look at ways to make Atlanta Workforce Development Agency more effective. Resources do not flow as efficiently as they should which limits the agency's full effect.

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.

The three most important transportation infrastructure projects are:

- 1) BeltLine Completion: The BeltLine must be completed with light rail/streetcar as part of the final product. This is one of the most transformative projects Atlanta has seen in its lifetime, especially to create the connected city we strive to be. By finishing the BeltLine with aesthetically appropriate transit, we can address our transportation dilemma with meaning. In conjunction with finishing the BeltLine, we should, in tandem, complete the transit "spokes" to connect the interior of the BeltLine, which have been outlined on several plans.
- 2) MARTA Rail Line from Lindbergh to Avondale: With the passage of the MARTA tax and TSPLOST, we now have the funding to complete this new rail line. This is an exciting turn of events for Atlanta. Obviously, the Emory University annexation needs to be completed to move this forward. This line needs to be designed, however, with an understanding of the neighborhoods it will pass through, which will fall into my council district. We need to make sure that we create urban modeled stations that

allow for the communities to have access; not just the major stations and institutions along the line.

- 3) Continued improvement of our water/sewer infrastructure: With the current implementation of MOST and the hopeful renewal, we must continue to improve these systems, not just for our current needs, but planning for our anticipated extraordinary growth. Atlanta was caught off guard with deferring this type of work and has done a good job playing catch up. It is now time to finish catch up and get ahead of what we know will be an extraordinary growth period for our city.

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?

The main strategy I would want to initiate is to have a thorough review of our police and firefighter pay and benefits. By improving these items, we will improve not only the number of officers and firefighters coming into our system, but also lessen the number who leave. As you may know – from 2006 to 2016 we have lost in excess of 50% of our City of Atlanta trained officers to other cities based on better pay, easier jobs and affordable housing. Morale within these groups has major room for improvement. By addressing the pay and benefits with proper and appropriate improvements, this will help to both attract and retain our public safety officers. We also need to make sure that our Mayor and Council truly make them feel valued. I would also like to continue increasing the number of officers and firefighters to ensure that we are fully staffed so that we see more of our men and women in uniform on the street. By visually seeing more officers, this will help both the real and perceived sense of safety.

We must also allow our police to have the structure and tools to do their job in the most effective way possible. I think there are multiple opportunities for private-public partnership with the private security details of various organizations, as well as partnering with civic groups to make sure residents understand how to stay safe. An example that has shown benefits is the “Clean Car Campaign,” which has significantly reduced the number of vehicle break-ins. This type of crime is prevalent in District 6. The other issue for perception of visitors is that of panhandling. This is much more complicated and points back to the earlier answers dealing with homelessness, mental health and addiction. We must continue to find ways to help our homeless go beyond homelessness. This opportunity is taking hold with the closure of downtown’s homeless shelter and the advent of smaller shelters with supportive services. This also will allow for public-private partnerships, especially dealing with addiction recovery, mental illness and job training.

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?

While board chair at Actor's Express and while serving on several other arts boards the statistic quoted above is all too evident. We must find ways to fund arts programs beyond just the corporate philanthropy. We also must make this a priority and be strategic in the way that we gain public support for additional taxes or redirection of current taxes. We must find ways to partner with the state on legislative policies to allow for more creative funding. We should also study other cities that have much better track records and implement best practices.

We must also make sure the City disperses funds in an expedited way. Many of the theaters that I have been involved have experienced lengthy delays on receiving funds that have been allocated. This time lag causes unneeded financial stress.

We also should support an arts district on the Beltline. This could incorporate a theater district with entertainment options which would serve not only the City residents but also tourist.