



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

**Courtney English**  
Atlanta City Council  
Post 1 At Large

**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 have served on the school board since 2010 and was elected chairman in 2014. During my time on the board, the district's graduation rate has grown from 51% to 71%. We have reduced the size of central office and transitioned to a charter system in order to give more autonomy to school leaders. Moreover, we have enacted an aggressive turnaround strategy and early results show that 2/3rds of our schools have shown improvement from last year. Additionally, I led the negotiation, on behalf of APS, to settle the longstanding dispute with the city regarding the Beltline. The deal we brokered keeps the project on track and ensures almost \$100 million in new revenue for Atlanta's students. More recently, I appointed an affordable housing taskforce to develop a plan for APS to repurpose abandoned school buildings into affordable housing units. The strategy they developed will help reduce the districts mobility rate (number of students who move at least once during the school year), help keep Atlanta affordable and reduce blight throughout our neighborhoods. Lastly, I have helped to lead the district out of one of the darkest periods in Atlanta's history—the CRCT cheating scandal. To free the district from corruption, we have implemented a series of aggressive ethics reforms including; mandatory ethics training for all employees, additional protections for whistleblowers, and an anonymous ethics hotline to report wrong doing and eliminated pay for performance compensation.

In short, I have a track record of effectively leading big change efforts in service of the city I love; and for that reason, my campaign has been endorsed by Former Mayor Shirley Franklin, the unions for both the city's police and firefighters, the American Federation of State County Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and hundreds of Atlantans from all walks of life. Each of the aforementioned, have all served our city and are vested in its success and I am honored to have their support.

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

Atlanta will be the destination of choice for all those seeking to build big dreams. Whether you were born here, like me, or chose to move, Atlanta will be an educated, accessible, safe and equitable city for those seeking to build a brighter future for themselves and their families.

To implement this vision we must work to strengthen our neighborhoods and our people by;

- Investing in Universal Early Education
- Making our workforce development agency a world-class agency
- Implementing a city-wide comprehensive affordable housing strategy
- Ensuring government functions efficiently and ethically

- Expanding MARTA and increasing transportation options
  - Embracing community policing and a holistic approach to crime reduction
  - Developing a neighborhood needs assessment to prioritize and tackle longstanding issues throughout communities.
  - Working to eliminate food deserts by investing in urban agriculture, mobile food options and partnerships with NGOs
  - Building on the city's partnership with United Way to reduce homelessness
  - Investing in the arts, entertainment and tech. industries
  - Incentivizing smart development that doesn't displace residents and have binding community benefit agreements.
3. Please identify the three greatest issues or problems facing the City of Atlanta and specifically how you would work to solve them.

Equity. Many of the problems we face today are rooted in inequity. Crime, persistent poverty, homelessness, educational challenges, wage gaps etc. are all issues that cannot be addressed without a focus on building a more equitable Atlanta. When we raise wages crime goes down. When we close achievement gaps and improve education, crime goes down and we attract jobs to our communities.

Equity. No, this is not a "typo." I believe this issue is critical to the future of our city. Atlanta has always worked best when it has worked for everyone. Our ability to set aside all that would seek to divide us and work together is how we built the world busiest airport, hosted the 100<sup>th</sup> Olympiad and landed the 3rd highest concentration of Fortune 500 companies. Collaboration and inclusion is woven into our DNA and we must rededicate ourselves to making sure that all have the ability to prosper from what our city has to offer; it's not only good for our economy, it's not only the right thing to do-- it's who we are. Please see the previous question for how I would address these issues.

Accessibility. Atlanta is plagued with congestion and too many neighborhoods lack viable transit options; if these conditions persist, they will stifle our economy and exacerbate the isolation of communities. The city of Atlanta should create a department of transportation to coordinate, align and implement transportation plans to ease congestion, increase transit options and ensure walkability throughout the city.

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

First, elected officials must work in a collaborative fashion to serve all constituents. As a citywide elected official I have worked diligently to build trusting relationships with my colleagues who are district representatives. As Chairman, I make it a point to create opportunities for board members to visit districts other than their own to listen and learn about issues facing communities across the city. Exposing my colleagues to communities they may not represent has created an atmosphere of collaborative problem solving no matter who the representative is. Next, on council, my office will keep a running list of calls from constituents seeking assistance solving a problem. If we are receiving multiple calls on the same issue from citizens across the city, then, that suggest that we have a citywide issue that may require a broader solution. Finally, the city has to be responsive and effective at addressing constituent concerns. The “everyday” issues like broken sidewalks, potholes, functioning street lights, crime etc., are normally the types of neighborhood issues that require immediate attention; by efficiently tackling these concerns, we earn the trust needed to address larger scale citywide issues.

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?

Having significant reserves and a strong bond rating, the city of Atlanta has a strong financial position. In order to protect and strengthen this position, the council should pass legislation that sets a floor for the amount the city can draw down its reserves. Likewise, the council should also pass legislation that sets a cap on the amount of money that can be held in reserves. This cap should be high enough to maintain the city’s strong bond rating and protect against emergencies but not so high that we are over taxing. Any overages should be dedicated for a specific purpose or returned to taxpayers in the form of a millage roll back. Moreover, the city needs to do more to reduce attrition among the city’s police and firefighter corps. The money currently being spent to train and replace public safety employees can be redirected for better use or returned to taxpayers.

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

Generally, I believe that tax assessments need to be accurate, timely and that any growth in the tax digest resulting in higher revenue for the city should be analyzed annually to determine if said increase should be returned to taxpayers, directed to reserves or deployed for city services. Moreover, the county needs greater alignment with its taxing entities to prevent imposing an undue burden on taxpayers in the form of significant increases due to assessments not keeping pace with growth. The county should ensure that tax bills go out in a timely fashion to align with the fiscal year of the various taxing entities. For the past two years, APS has had to issue tax anticipation notes (TANs) solely because the county was late issuing tax bills. These TANs cost taxpayers almost half a million dollars over that period.

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 was an excellent tool to rebuild the city's once crumbling infrastructure. Once all necessary repairs and upgrades have been completed, the city should look to either sunset the tax and/or seek taxpayer and legislative approval to repurpose the sales taxes for other uses like funding for the arts, workforce development or universal early education. Given the aforementioned affordability/equity issues in the city, we must phase in any plan to sunset the MOST in order to avoid dramatic and immediate rate hikes.

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

The council should implement a quiet period that makes it illegal for council members to communicate with respondents to RFP's until the contract is executed. Ethics training should be mandated for all city employees and elected officials. The city should also establish an anonymous ethics hotline to make it easier to report wrong doing. The city should also take steps to ensure that the members of review committees for RFP respondents is independent and above reproach. Finally, the council should establish an independent audit function that is empowered to investigate impropriety. The auditor should exist outside of the traditional chain of command and can only be removed for cause.

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

First and foremost, I must lead by example by ensuring that I follow all policies, laws and codes of conduct for elected officials. I will commit to transparency by posting all of my council office's expenses online for public review and working to hold the administration accountable for doing the same. Please see the previous answer for additional detail.

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

I would propose legislation to accomplish the following;

- Identifying a funding source for universal early childhood education
- Developing a seamless partnership with APS
- Eliminating duplicative processes, particularly in zoning and in permitting, that unnecessarily slow the business cycle
- Expand Investment in the arts, entertainment, technology sectors
- Leverage TADs and other taxing incentivizes for smart growth, and attract corporate relocations provided that a well-defined, binding community benefits agreement exist
- Invest in diverse transportation portfolio that includes MARTA and bike lane expansion, increasing walkability, incentivizing telecommuting, and a department of transportation to coordinate planning, implementation and regional alignment
- Continue and strengthen the partnership with the state government to sustain Ga.'s ranking as the #1 state to do business.
- Promote Atlanta as a global entity for trade and commerce
- Building Atlanta's workforce development agency into a world-class agency
- Defend against any federal intrusion that would negatively impact Atlanta's workforce, businesses or harm Atlanta's reputation as "A City too Busy to Hate."

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

In order to expand affordable housing, the city should;

- Develop a city-wide affordable housing strategy
- Hold the Beltline accountable for reaching its affordable housing requirements
- Expand the anti-displacement program recently launched in English Ave. and Vine City
- Eliminate zoning policies that require a certain number of parking spots accompany new development with the caveat that those savings be passed along to potential residents
- Look to repurpose vacant property into affordable housing units. A recent strategy was recently adopted by APS
- Urgently deploy the funds from the second housing bond to help seniors offset the cost of renovations and rising property values
- Reform zoning requirements to expand non-traditional forms of housing i.e. tiny housing
- Expand “inclusionary zoning” policies throughout the city, prioritizing those areas ripe for development
- Invest in the expansion of transit oriented development (TOD)
- Partner with the Land Bank, AHA, other agencies to purchase land dedicated to the development of long-term affordability through community land trusts.
- Consider defining area median income by those who live within the city limits as opposed the higher regional definition used now

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?

In addition to the aforementioned economic development strategies, the city should;

- Create a seamless partnership with APS to expand career placement programming that aligns the needs of employers with the content and opportunities being offered to students
- Make the work force development agency the best of its kind in the entire country
- Create smaller satellite offices of the city's workforce development program
- Provide additional points on RFP's for potential vendors who pay their employees a living wage
- Invest in universal early child-hood education
- Expand public-private partnerships that help entrepreneurs grow their businesses.
- Ensure that major development projects have binding "hire local" requirements while completing city projects

Taken together, these strategies will decrease the wage gap by training the workforce with the skills needed to participate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy and ensuring that good, well-paying jobs are available.

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. Completion of the infrastructure projects funded through the RENEW Atlanta Bond. The citizens trusted the city with a penny sales tax to address the growing backlog of infrastructure needs, their trust should be rewarded the city's urgent execution of projects that impact people and neighborhoods the most i.e. street re-pavement, sidewalk upgrades/installation, elimination of potholes etc.
2. Projects that will ease congestion like the expansion of MARTA along with road, sidewalk, and bike lane expansion.
3. Completion of the Atlanta Beltline. This will increase walkability, improve our economy and bring amenities to communities in need.



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?

- Pay our police officers a decent living wage
- Invest in building a department that believes in community policing
- Expand the Police Athletic League and create a real partnership with APS
- Work with the county to identify, prosecute and keep repeat offenders behind bars
- Invest in universal early-childhood education
- Bring more jobs into communities in need
- Create a seamless partnership with APS to continue their positive trajectory
- Partner with the Atlanta Police Foundation to build additional community centers like the “At Promise” neighborhood center
- Deploy steps to reduce attrition in our police department
- Utilize housing incentives to make it easier for police, firefighters and educators to live within the city.

I believe in a holistic approach to crime prevention. In the end, the best crime reduction strategy is a good school in every neighborhood and a job that pays a living wage.

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?

Recent studies show that the arts industry has contributed almost \$500 million to our local economy, 20,000 thousand jobs and over \$50 million in tax revenue. To grow the sector, the city should first look to dedicate a percentage of the general fund or a percentage from major property sales to a dedicated fund earmarked for the arts. Ideally, these funds will be matched by a philanthropic or private partner. In the long run, the city should also examine repurposing one of the penny sales taxes, or a portion thereof, for arts funding.