



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

Devin Barrington-Ward
Atlanta City Council Post 3



2024 Candidate Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Please type your response to questions in the field provided. **Please limit answers to 300 words or less.**

1. Briefly describe your qualifications for this office and why you have chosen to run. In addition, please identify up to 5 organizations or individuals who are actively supporting your candidacy and why you believe their support is important.

With over 18 years of experience in civil rights, progressive public policy, and grassroots advocacy, I am fully prepared to address the complex issues facing Atlanta through innovative legislation and decisive leadership. My role as the Director of Power Building & Organizing at Community Catalyst has deepened my expertise in health justice, complementing my prior experiences, including serving as Chief of Staff in the Georgia General Assembly and Senior Health Equity Fellow with the National Coalition of STD Directors. These roles have honed my abilities to develop impactful policies in areas such as affordable housing, public safety reform, public health, and economic justice, reflecting my dedication to enhancing the well-being of all Atlantans.

Atlanta is currently the leading U.S. city in terms of racial income inequality. To confront this and other challenges hindering our city's potential, I am compelled to pursue a position on the Atlanta City Council. My legislative track record, which includes securing increased funding for HIV prevention, expanding the PAD 311 services citywide, and obtaining \$7.5 million to support small businesses affected by the water crisis last summer, demonstrates my capability to effect substantial improvements in our community.

Endorsements:

- **SEIU Southern Workers United & Georgia Conservation Voters:** These endorsements underscore my commitment to workers' rights and environmental sustainability, vital areas for our city's growth and health.
- **Abundant Housing Atlanta & Atlanta Chapter of Democratic Socialists of America:** Support from these groups highlights my commitment to pushing for innovative housing solutions and robust economic policies that aim to reshape Atlanta into a more equitable city.
- **Asian Americans Advancing Justice Fund:** Their support is crucial as it emphasizes my focus on developing inclusive policies that respect and reflect the diversity of all Atlanta's communities.

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

Addressing economic inequality, public safety, and health disparities requires innovative solutions rooted in proven success and a deep understanding of community needs:

1. **Economic Inequality: Atlanta Baby Bonds** To combat economic inequality, I propose the introduction of Atlanta Baby Bonds, a transformative initiative designed to provide financial assets to children born into poverty. This program, modeled after successful implementations in other states, aims to secure a financial foundation for every child by setting up trust accounts that mature over time. The funds, which can be used for education, purchasing a home, or starting a business, empower young Atlantans to break the cycle of poverty and contribute to economic diversity and stability in our community.
2. **Public Safety Reform: Expanding Policing Alternatives** In the realm of public safety, I advocate for a significant expansion of Atlanta's Policing Alternatives and Diversion Initiative (PAD). By ensuring that PAD operates 24/7, we can more effectively address incidents that require intervention without

criminalization. This initiative will integrate violence interrupters and community conflict resolution strategies to proactively reduce crime rates. These measures focus on mediation and support rather than punishment, fostering a safer community environment through prevention and constructive engagement.

- 3. Health and Well-being: Mental Health Crisis Intervention** Recognizing the critical gap in health services due to the state's non-expansion of Medicaid, my plan includes establishing a mental health crisis unit within the Atlanta Fire Department. This unit will provide immediate, expert response to mental health emergencies, offering a crucial alternative to traditional law enforcement responses. Additionally, I propose creating a city-funded emergency crisis fund to ensure that uninsured and underinsured residents can access necessary mental health services. This initiative not only addresses immediate health needs but also contributes to the overall well-being and safety of the community by reducing the incidences and impacts of mental health crises.

3. Describe your leadership style and an example of a strategy you have used to influence others and deliver results.

My leadership approach is deeply rooted in proactive and community-focused strategies, particularly evident during Atlanta's challenging water crisis. Recognizing the urgent need for support, I spearheaded the initiative to secure financial relief for local small businesses that suffered immense losses due to prolonged water main breaks. Initially proposing a \$5 million relief fund, I collaborated closely with affected businesses to understand their financial burdens and advocated fiercely for them, which led to the city council enhancing the fund to \$7.5 million. This decisive action not only provided critical financial assistance to stabilize these businesses but also highlighted the broader issue of our aging infrastructure.

This incident underscored the pressing need for systemic changes to prevent such disruptions in the future. My leadership during this crisis involved not just addressing the immediate financial fallout but also pushing for a strategic dialogue on long-term infrastructure resilience. By engaging with both governmental bodies and the community, I facilitated discussions that aimed to reshape our approach to infrastructure management, ensuring that robustness and sustainability are at the forefront of urban planning and development.

This experience has reinforced my commitment to leading with a vision that anticipates challenges and swiftly mobilizes resources and support to address them. It exemplifies my dedication to not only react to crises but to use them as a catalyst for systemic change, advocating for policies that strengthen community resilience and ensure the stability of our city's economic foundation.

4. What improvements are necessary to improve the delivery of the City's core service functions to improve quality of life for citizens and businesses in Atlanta?

Enhancing Atlanta's core services through strategic improvements is essential for ensuring a high quality of life for both citizens and businesses. Upgrading our city's digital infrastructure is crucial in this digital age. Streamlining online services through an integrated digital platform will improve accessibility, allowing residents to easily interact with city services from obtaining permits to paying bills, thereby increasing efficiency and reducing administrative burdens. Additionally, deploying smart technologies can help manage city assets and resources more effectively, from traffic lights to water systems, enhancing overall urban management.

Expanding public transportation is another vital improvement. By increasing the availability and reliability of public transit options such as buses, trams, and subways, we can significantly reduce urban congestion. This not only makes commuting more bearable but also contributes to lowering the city's carbon footprint. Enhancing connectivity through transit-oriented development can spur economic growth, revitalize neighborhoods, and make the city more accessible. The extension of services like the BeltLine should be

prioritized to connect more areas of the city, making transportation seamless and more inclusive.

Moreover, public health services require substantial enhancement to ensure comprehensive community care. This means not only increasing funding for existing health facilities but also expanding outreach programs that can address public health issues at the community level. Integrating mental health services with other community care initiatives, and increasing the availability of preventative care programs can lead to a healthier city populace. The establishment of a mental health crisis response unit within the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department is an example of an innovative approach to addressing health emergencies more effectively, ensuring that those in crisis receive the right care at the right time.

5. What are your views on Downtown Atlanta and its role in the healthy and vibrancy of Atlanta? What actions will you take related to improving the downtown experience for visitors, employees, and residents?

Downtown Atlanta, while central to our city's identity and growth, currently grapples with significant challenges such as homelessness, which detracts from its overall vibrancy and safety. To address this, I have proposed a comprehensive and humane approach that includes both immediate and systemic solutions.

- **Decentralized Shelter Model:** Recognizing the diverse needs across Atlanta, my plan involves the establishment of smaller, community-integrated shelters distributed across all 12 council districts. This decentralized approach not only helps mitigate the common 'not in my backyard' sentiments but also ensures that support services are more accessible to those in need, wherever they are located. By integrating these shelters within communities, we can foster a more inclusive environment and facilitate easier access to job centers, healthcare, and other essential services.
- **Mental Health Crisis Fund:** A cornerstone of my strategy to support unsheltered individuals, especially in downtown areas, is the establishment of a mental health crisis fund. This fund will provide crucial support to unsheltered individuals who often lack access to necessary mental health services. It will assist those who are uninsured or underinsured, bridging the gap created by the state's non-expansion of Medicaid. This initiative not only addresses immediate health needs but also contributes to the safety and well-being of the broader community by reducing the incidence of mental health crises on the streets.
- **Enhancing Public Safety and Well-being:** The integration of the mental health crisis unit within the Atlanta Fire Department will complement this approach by providing prompt and effective responses to mental health emergencies, which are common among the homeless population. This proactive measure aims to treat emergencies with compassion and medical expertise rather than with law enforcement, reducing the strain on police resources and improving outcomes for those experiencing crises.

6. What is your philosophy on taxation in the City of Atlanta? What future funding streams do you believe are needed to pay for the things we need to grow? How should these opportunities be evaluated?

My taxation philosophy emphasizes equity and sustainability, aiming to ensure that everyone, especially the wealthiest and large corporations, contributes their fair share to the city's development. To achieve this, we need to reevaluate commercial property taxes to reflect true market values, a move that could unlock significant revenues to fund essential public services.

Additionally, we must actively leverage funds from federal infrastructure initiatives to enhance our city's infrastructure without disproportionately burdening our local taxpayers. These federal funds can help bridge the gap between local needs and available resources, ensuring that we can undertake vital projects without additional local taxes.

An integral part of my approach includes advocating for more equitable tax incentives, particularly aimed at supporting small and midsize companies and Black-owned businesses. Historically, these entities have not

benefited from tax incentives at the same rate as larger corporations. By restructuring our tax incentive programs to be more inclusive, we can encourage growth and innovation across all business sectors, supporting local entrepreneurs and creating jobs in communities that need them most.

This comprehensive taxation strategy supports a more balanced economic environment where growth does not come at the expense of community equity. It fosters a thriving, dynamic local economy where small businesses and major enterprises can flourish side by side, contributing to a robust public revenue system that finances critical city services and infrastructure improvements.

7. As Atlanta prepares to host the World Cup in June 2026, what specific strategies do you believe the city should implement to ensure a successful and impactful event? How do you plan to leverage your role to make the most of this opportunity for both visitors and residents?

Hosting the World Cup in Atlanta presents a unique opportunity to not only showcase our city on a global stage but also to ensure that the event has a lasting positive impact on our local economy and community. To achieve a successful World Cup, it is essential that we establish robust community benefits agreements (CBAs) that include provisions to support small businesses and ensure that labor-backed contractors, especially those local and minority-owned, benefit from the vast influx of visitors.

- **Enhancing Transportation Infrastructure:** A key strategy is the improvement of transportation infrastructure. This involves not only upgrading our roads and public transit systems to handle increased traffic but also ensuring that these improvements are sustainable and serve the city well beyond the World Cup. Enhancements like expanding bus routes, improving subway lines, and possibly integrating new transportation technologies will provide lasting benefits to Atlantans.
- **Improving Public Spaces:** Another focus should be on beautifying and making functional improvements to public spaces. This includes parks, plazas, and other communal areas where visitors and residents alike gather. By revitalizing these spaces, we not only enhance the visitor experience during the World Cup but also enrich the daily lives of Atlanta's residents.
- **Sustainable City Enhancements:** It is crucial that all enhancements made in preparation for the World Cup are designed with sustainability in mind. This means that infrastructure upgrades and public space improvements should not only meet the immediate needs of the World Cup but also align with long-term environmental and economic goals for Atlanta. This could involve implementing green building standards, enhancing energy efficiency across new and renovated structures, and promoting sustainable practices among local businesses and vendors during the event.

8. Describe your philosophy as to the City of Atlanta's role in continuing to improve public safety outcomes in the city? Which strategies should be prioritized, and if elected, how will you work to advance them? What partnerships are necessary to achieving success?

To enhance public safety in Atlanta, we need to build upon and expand initiatives that have shown success in reducing crime through community engagement and support rather than solely through punitive measures. The expansion of the Policing Alternatives and Diversion Initiative (PAD), to operate 24/7, is central to this approach. This program provides immediate, non-punitive crisis intervention services to individuals, addressing issues at the moment of crisis and offering alternatives to arrest that can lead to long-term solutions rather than temporary detentions.

Additionally, I propose the establishment of a community public safety training center, which will focus on equipping community members with skills to suppress violence through proactive and preventive strategies. This center will serve as a hub for training residents in violence interruption and conflict resolution,

empowering community members to take an active role in maintaining safety in their neighborhoods.

Integral to both these initiatives is a comprehensive mental health strategy. My plan includes enhancing mental health services through the establishment of a mental health crisis unit within the Atlanta Fire Department. This unit will provide rapid-response services to mental health emergencies, offering interventions that are more appropriate and effective than traditional law enforcement responses. Moreover, I propose the creation of a city-funded emergency crisis fund to assist uninsured and underinsured residents in accessing necessary mental health services. This fund will help bridge the gap in mental health care exacerbated by the state's non-expansion of Medicaid and ensure that all Atlantans have access to the mental health support they need.

These integrated approaches — expanding PAD, establishing a community public safety training center, and strengthening mental health services — collectively enhance our community's resilience, reduce reliance on traditional policing, and improve overall public safety through prevention and support.

9. What specific measures would you propose to strengthen the relationship between the City of Atlanta and MARTA? Which capital projects on the More MARTA program do you consider most urgent to address in the next 1-3 years?

Improving our relationship with MARTA is critical for enhancing Atlanta's transportation infrastructure and overall city planning. My approach includes a thorough re-assessment of the \$70 million identified in the More MARTA audit as owed funds, ensuring these are strategically redirected to enhance transit services. Additionally, tapping into federal infrastructure funds will further empower us to expand and modernize MARTA's capabilities, making public transit more accessible and reliable for all Atlantans.

A key part of my strategy also involves ensuring that MARTA and city leadership are aligned on a clear vision for transit development, particularly along the BeltLine. It is imperative that we halt the approval of future development along this corridor until there is a definitive plan from the mayor and his administration for implementing mass transit solutions. Continuing to add residential and commercial development without a corresponding transit strategy only exacerbates congestion and undermines the overall effectiveness and sustainability of our urban growth. I believe movement of transit construction along the Beltline is imperative. I also see the commencement of construction of the BRT line on Campbellton Road is also urgent as well.

This stance not only addresses current transit inadequacies but also pressures city leadership to prioritize comprehensive transit solutions that can handle increased density. Ensuring that MARTA has a clear, actionable plan from the city will improve coordination, enhance service delivery, and ensure that transit developments are coherent with broader urban planning goals. This holistic approach to transit planning and development is crucial for reducing congestion, improving air quality, and enhancing the quality of life for all Atlantans.

10. What role should the City of Atlanta play in economic development? What is your perspective on urban redevelopment tools as the City competes for jobs, talent, and its share of economic growth?

My taxation philosophy is grounded in equity and sustainability, with a firm stance that the wealthiest and large corporations must pay their fair share to support the development of our city. To build a more equitable Atlanta, we must reevaluate and adjust commercial property taxes to accurately reflect true market values. This adjustment could significantly increase revenue for essential public services, ensuring that all Atlantans benefit from our city's prosperity.

Moreover, our approach to tax incentives needs a fundamental shift. Historically, large corporations have benefited disproportionately from tax abatements. To rectify this imbalance and foster a more inclusive economic environment, I propose extending tax incentives to small, mid-sized, and minority-owned businesses. These businesses are the backbone of our economy, employing the majority of Americans and playing a critical role in our communities. Providing them with targeted tax relief will not only promote job creation but also

advance our racial justice goals. It is essential that economic advancements are tied to tangible gains for historically marginalized groups, including Black communities, ensuring that our progress is both broad-based and inclusive.

Furthermore, our economic development efforts must incorporate progressive zoning laws that increase the variety of housing options available. This approach is crucial as Atlanta faces a housing crisis that not only affects our residents but also stymies our ability to attract and retain businesses. Companies are more likely to invest in cities that can house their workforce effectively and affordably. Adopting zoning reforms that allow for a greater mix of housing types, from high-density units to mixed-use developments, will help alleviate the housing shortage and support economic growth.

11. What role should the City of Atlanta play in addressing economic mobility and the racial wealth gap? Which tools and strategies would your office advance, if elected?

The Atlanta Baby Bonds Initiative (ABBI) is a groundbreaking program managed by Invest Atlanta to tackle wealth inequality and interrupt cycles of generational poverty. Every newborn from a low-income family is granted a trust fund, aimed to grow to at least \$35,000 by their 18th birthday, thanks to initial city contributions and strategic investments targeting a 7-8% annual return. This fund, accessible for education, homeownership, or starting a business, embodies a critical step towards economic empowerment.

ABBI's design includes opportunities for families to enhance these funds through additional contributions, benefiting from the same robust investment strategies managed by Invest Atlanta. Moreover, families can opt to extend their investment period until the child's 26th birthday, maximizing potential growth and financial impact to \$64,000.

Addressing the need for equitable economic development, outside of the ABBI, I also propose a reformed approach to tax incentives. Recognizing that large corporations often disproportionately benefit from current policies, the initiative advocates for expanding tax abatements to small, mid-sized, and particularly minority-owned businesses. This shift aims not only to spur job creation but also to advance racial justice by linking economic gains directly to historically marginalized groups. This approach is critical in a city where small businesses constitute the backbone of the economy and where economic tools can serve as levers for social equity.

Such progressive policies are essential for Atlanta's growth, ensuring that economic development is not just inclusive but also supportive of the city's broader social and racial justice goals. The ABBI and change in tax abatement strategy will take significant steps forward in creating a more equitable Atlanta.

12. Atlanta's water infrastructure is aging and requires long term solutions to meet the demands of citizens and businesses. What solutions would you propose to address this critical need?

To address Atlanta's pressing water management issues and ensure a sustainable future, I propose a comprehensive plan that includes infrastructure upgrades, adopting advanced water management practices, and implementing innovative financing mechanisms.

- **Infrastructure Upgrades:** Upgrading our aging water infrastructure is critical. This involves replacing old pipes, enhancing treatment facilities, and integrating smart water management technologies. Cities like New York and Kansas City have successfully implemented systems that use smart sensors and IoT technologies to monitor and manage water usage, detect leaks, and optimize system performance, significantly reducing water waste and improving efficiency
- **Sustainable Water Management Practices:** Adopting best practices from leading cities can enhance our water resilience. For example, cities like Stockholm and Berlin have excelled by implementing advanced wastewater treatment technologies and conservation measures, such as rainwater harvesting and

optimizing water use in cooling towers. These practices not only improve water quality but also reduce overall consumption.

- **Innovative Financing Mechanisms:** To fund these necessary improvements, Atlanta can explore multiple avenues. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have been successful in cities like Los Angeles and Chicago, where private sector investment is leveraged to support public infrastructure projects without overburdening taxpayers. Additionally, Atlanta should pursue federal and state infrastructure grants, such as those available through the Biden-Harris administration's infrastructure package, which specifically allocate funds for water system upgrades. By tapping into these external funding sources, Atlanta can ease the financial burden on residents while still achieving essential water system improvements

13. What strategies would you implement to improve the City's supply and preservation of affordable housing? What are the barriers to succeeding on this front and how will you work to overcome them?

To effectively increase Atlanta's affordable housing stock, my strategy encompasses a multifaceted approach:

1. **Leveraging Public Land for Housing Development:** Utilizing public land can significantly reduce the costs associated with new housing developments, enabling us to focus resources on building affordable units. At present the city owns 362 acres of land and by partnering with private developers and nonprofit organizations, we can develop underused or vacant city-owned properties into affordable housing projects. This method not only speeds up the construction process but also ensures that developments are strategically placed to benefit low-income families without the burden of high land acquisition costs.
2. **Enforcing and Expanding Inclusionary Zoning Policies:** Inclusionary zoning requires that a portion of new development be reserved for affordable housing. Strengthening these policies will ensure that as Atlanta grows, it does so inclusively. Expanding these policies to cover more areas and types of new developments can create a diverse mix of housing options that are accessible to residents at different income levels. This approach not only helps in maintaining the socio-economic diversity of our neighborhoods but also in preventing the displacement of long-term residents.
3. **Supporting Cooperative Housing Models:** Cooperative housing is a community-led solution where residents have collective ownership of the property. Supporting these models can empower communities, provide stability, and make housing more affordable in the long term. By providing grants, loans, and technical assistance to cooperative housing projects, we can foster a more communal approach to living and managing property, which has proven successful in cities with high housing costs.

These strategies are designed to make housing more accessible and affordable, while also ensuring that developments are sustainable and community-oriented. Together, they provide a comprehensive framework for tackling Atlanta's housing crisis by increasing supply, ensuring affordability, and enhancing community control over housing decisions.

14. Describe your philosophy on the City's current infrastructure backlog. If elected, what strategies will you pursue to ensure forward progress is made? How would you expedite project delivery in the City?

My approach to infrastructure development in Atlanta is rooted in prioritized, strategic investment, ensuring that our projects not only meet current needs but are also aligned with our long-term urban planning goals. This means focusing on projects that offer the highest return on investment in terms of social, economic, and environmental benefits. A transparent and accountable selection process is critical to maintain public trust and ensure that decisions are made based on objective criteria and community needs.

- **Strategic Investment:** We will identify and prioritize infrastructure projects based on their potential to enhance quality of life, promote economic development, and improve environmental sustainability. This prioritization ensures that resources are allocated to projects that provide the greatest benefits to the

most people.

- **Transparency and Accountability:** Implementing a transparent process for project selection and funding is essential. This will involve clear communication about how decisions are made, who is making them, and on what basis. Public input will be sought at all stages of the process to ensure that the community's needs and preferences are considered. Regular updates will be provided to the public on the progress of projects and the use of funds.
- **Efficiency and Cost-effectiveness:** My tenure on council will focus on assisting the administration with completing projects on time and within budget. By pushing the administration to leverage modern project management techniques and technologies to track progress and manage costs effectively. By doing so, we can avoid the common pitfalls of infrastructure projects, such as delays and cost overruns, which can erode public trust and waste valuable resources.

15. How important is sustainability to Atlanta's continued growth and vitality? What sustainability initiatives have been most successful in Atlanta to-date and how build you upon them?

Sustainability is vital for Atlanta's continued growth and vitality. Our city has already made significant strides with successful initiatives such as the large-scale implementation of green building requirements and the expansion of public transit. To build on these successes, we must further promote renewable energy projects, enhance urban green spaces, and develop comprehensive recycling programs.

- **Renewable Energy Projects:** Atlanta has committed to transitioning to 100% clean energy by 2035. Expanding solar installations and supporting municipal solar programs can accelerate this transition. Investments in renewable energy not only contribute to reducing our carbon footprint but also create jobs and stimulate local economies.
- **Urban Green Spaces:** Initiatives like the Greening America's Cities project, funded by the Bezos Earth Fund, have started to increase equitable access to green spaces across Atlanta. Expanding this initiative will provide more parks, trees, and community gardens, which are essential for improving air quality and providing recreational spaces for our residents.
- **Comprehensive Recycling Programs:** Building on the city's efforts to improve waste management, we can introduce more robust recycling programs that not only reduce landfill use but also promote sustainability in everyday life. Programs that include composting and the reuse of materials can greatly reduce our overall environmental impact.
- **Addressing the Housing Crisis:** To further support economic development and address the housing crisis, adopting progressive zoning laws to increase the type of housing available is crucial. This approach ensures that Atlanta can effectively and affordably house its workforce, attracting more companies to the city.