



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

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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.**

I spent 30 years in education working first as a Counselor and then as a Principal. In this time, I worked to turn around four Atlanta Public Schools. I was successful because I quickly realized that what goes on outside the schools and in the neighborhoods is just as – if not more important – than what happens inside them. So I engaged parents and surrounding neighborhoods and invested in key wraparound services that ultimately resulted in greater achievement.

But through this experience, I realized that securing the future is about more than just education. It's about the whole system and how it all fits together. It's about transportation, housing, safety, and all of these other things that are tackled at City Hall. So that's where I want to go roll up my sleeves and do the work.

Our campaign has the support of many of Atlanta's past and present civic leaders. This includes Rutherford and Laura Turner Seydel, Dr. Lakeysha Hallmon, Lovette Russell, Marilyn Arrington, Ernest Lamont Greer, and many others who I am proud to call friends.

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

First, equity in transportation is a major concern. Too many Atlantans live on islands because our transportation network fails to connect them to the rest of the city. We need to invest in sidewalks so that folks can walk to transit stations, parks, grocery stores, and jobs. We need to grow our transit network so that not owning a car is a practical option. And then before getting into a debate around Beltline rail, let's just finish the trail itself first. Let's make sure that gets done by 2030 so that all Atlantans can enjoy its promise.

Second, safer communities are front of mind. Our Police Department remains understaffed. I think and hope that the new training center coupled with recent pay raises will make an impact on recruitment and retention. I also believe we should continue to grow funding for the Community Safety Housing Program, as the early returns on that program, which provides rental supports for police, corrections, and fire are promising. On Council, I would emphasize the use of de-escalation training and other 21st century policing best practices. I would also look to invest greater amounts in pre-arrest diversion, 311, and other initiatives that free up bandwidth for those working in public safety.

Finally, housing is the issue brought up by everyone citywide. I give a more complete answer on that subject later in this document, but the short answer is we throw the kitchen sink at the problem. Everything from zoning for greater density to shrewd investment of incentives and grants must be on the table so long as is effective and aligns with the goals of the various neighborhoods.

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

I am an innovator and bridge builder at heart. That's how I ran the schools that came under my purview in APS. I want everyone at the table. I believe we go farther with glass half full thinking. We must embrace the politics of lifting people up, of all boats rising. And I think I have the skillset, exemplified over a long career, to make that happen.

I can cite a few examples. At one school, we had an issue where student discipline was having the negative externality of causing parents to lose their jobs as they stayed home with suspended children. To push back, I worked with the city, elected officials, local businesses and nonprofits to create a community job fair both for parents and students looking for summer work. That was a large success.

At another school, the constant looming threat was school closure. We were under-enrolled and everyone in the district wanted their child to go to a nearby charter school instead. But I could see that the charter school only had so much space and that it would be a mistake more generally because we had so many young families moving into the area. So we did a range of things. This included printing and distributing "future student" t-shirts for kids in the neighborhood. The shirts created a compelling visual that the school had a future. We also expanded our Pre-K programming, as a way to create a larger on ramp into the elementary school. That was a collaborative effort that was enormously successful. At one point we were the only public Pre-K program in the city with a waiting list.

**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?**

Right now our Department of Transportation is under scrutiny on its time-to-delivery. On things like Complete Streets and other projects, we need to make sure we are hitting our deadlines. I hope to be on Transportation Committee to work to improve that.

For businesses, there are age old problems surrounding procurement that I would work to assist with. We also need to be much better as a city with timely permitting and licensure. These are both highly administrative functions, but where there are opportunities to legislate, I will certainly step up.

And then I talk about this later, but a big service delivery that I will focus squarely on is sidewalk infrastructure improvement. We need to put more money behind that and continue to ensure that we are prioritizing new construction as much as maintenance and infusing equity into that process.

**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 is the section of the city that is perennially just on the cusp of a turnaround but we never quite see the visible progress. Centennial Yards should be a first step toward major growth in that area. It should mean more housing and more commercial activity that will have spill on effects to the rest of the district. The Stitch, which I fervently support, will also be hugely additive to the Downtown footprint.

I am behind these and other projects in a big way because I think we lose our claim as a great American city if the heart of our town is largely in a state of disrepair and blight. It will take time, energy, and effort – much of which has already begun – but we must restore Downtown.

**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?**

Atlanta has a fundamentally flawed business model that we must improve. The city pays for services and infrastructure that serve non-city residents who commute in and then pay their property taxes elsewhere. This problem could be solved by taxing usage in some way for these non-residents. But that is not allowed under state law. The only solution then is raising millage rates. But that is not practical as they are already quite high in the city.

To fix this cycle of shortage, we must work with state legislature to gain allowances for alternative forms of taxation. Anything that is intentional about targeting non-city residents for usage would be my priority. A parking tax comes to mind as the most obvious and perhaps achievable one. There are things like congestion pricing models that make sense. If we are able to achieve enough of these things then ideally we could actually lower millage rates and have a more balanced and sustainable stream of revenue.

**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?**

This is a big challenge. We want visitors to have a great time, businesses to profit, and those who are uninterested to simply be able to live their lives un-interrupted by the event. To accomplish this, we need a transparent, unified strategy, most likely starting in the Mayor's office with folks like APD and ADOT at the table. It is then Council's job to effectively communicate logistics to constituents. If residents are caught unawares, like an individual driving down I-85 when a Presidential motorcade comes through, then it's going to be a poor experience. We must ensure that residents know what's coming and have a holistic plan for managing the flow of that many visitors to our town.

In terms of more granular things, the 5 Points MARTA Station must be accessible to all at that time. And we must be sure the Streetcar is not closed as we've seen in the past for other major sporting events or things like the Peach Drop. It's important that our entire transit network is up and running at that time.

**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?**

Public safety is one of the most essential core functions of local government. I support the recent pay raises that we've given to our police officers and firefighters; as well as our investment in the Public Safety Training Center and in equipment and resources.

Going further, we have seen excellent early returns on the Community Safety Housing Program, which grants rental subsidies to police, fire, and corrections officials in exchange for an agreement to live within city limits and perform off duty service hours. We saw a 15% increase in year over year APD recruitment and retention as a result of that program. I think we should scale that initiative.

I would also invest more in pre-arrest diversion and in ensuring we get 311 right. Also, in coming up with creative ways to push police functions on to code enforcement or private contractors – such as in the case of parking enforcement. These things create more bandwidth for officers to focus on violent crime. They would also lead to greater overall enforcement and to more humane treatment of those with mental health or substance abuse concerns that are not best served by going to prison.

**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?**

I think that we should install a liaison between MARTA and the City in the Mayor's office. The relationship is frayed and antagonistic at present. The ongoing dispute surrounding the More MARTA audit has only made matters worse. For our city to prosper, this relationship has to be a healthy one typified by mutual respect.

The most urgent thing within More MARTA -- assuming MARTA is unsuccessful in its appeal for another audit -- is to return the \$70 million to the city and restore faith in the institution.

In terms of capital projects, the major corridor projects on Campbellton and Clifton roads come to mind, as does Summerhill BRT. And then there is a great deal of rancor surrounding the Five Points Station. Many take issue with the design. Others have a rational issue with the length of the closure to pedestrian access. Going full steam ahead on that project would be a major mistake by the transit agency given the current state of city and resident approval of the project.

**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?**

Bill Hartsfield had his Airport. Ambassador Andrew Young had the Olympics. Some of our greatest achievements came when elected officials used their office to direct attention and will toward singular goals. It is imperative that City Council use its position to promote all the great things we have going on in Atlanta and attract new businesses. We have an excellent economic development authority in Invest Atlanta. Worksource Atlanta has great promise. And then other factors like proximity to a major Airport, a rich pool of talent, our position as a cultural leader, and so on make us highly attractive to economic interests. There's no excuse to sit on our hands.

As it relates to urban redevelopment tools, I assume you are referring to things like financial assistance for major projects such as Centennial Yards (formerly the Gulch) or perhaps the Stitch or Midtown Connector. I think that all of these projects are laudable and essential the viable growth of our community. That said, we should always look for federal financing (such as RAISE Grants in the case of the Stitch) to lower the city's financial burden. And in cases where the city is bearing the brunt of the tax incentive – such as Centennial Yards – I believe we should endeavor to do more in the way of transparency. Centennial Yards is a great project. But the way it was presented to residents was flawed from the start. The appearance was that there was an attempt to rush it through. And as a result, no one ever fully trusted the motives of the city or the developer. We need greater transparency in cases like this and Community Benefits Agreements are something that should always be on the table.

**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?**

I want so much more, and believe we can achieve so much more as it relates to building ladders to opportunity. We are at or near bottom in metrics surrounding the gap between rich and poor and in offering individuals the ability to better their circumstance.

I'm reminded of a time earlier in my career when I chose to get a degree in education rather than law. This was because, as someone told me, law is a reactive response to a problem whereas education is a proactive one. Similarly, while there are a number of ways you can approach this challenge, I would seek out those that are the most proactive in nature.

Securing childcare and early learning for 3- and 4-year-olds is a great proactive solution. We can partner with APS and non-profit partners and get that done. If we do, you're giving every kid a fair shot to start school on par with their peers and go on to graduate and have viable careers. Going one step further, I want to build out a formal apprenticeship program in Atlanta that does a more pointed job of connecting talent with usable skills and jobs. Take all of these things together and we are raising incomes and thus having to pay less to provide supports on the back end.

We should also invest in mobility. Practical pedestrian and transit options are essential for connecting residents to jobs that they cannot currently physically reach. I would also endeavor to take on food insecurity with more ardor. This is a difficult challenge as it involves private sector collaboration. But if we offer lower cost food solutions, then we are helping folks' money go further and in effect making them wealthier. But the list goes on. And the work should never stop.

**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?**

We have to begin by ensuring we invest MOST dollars wisely. Taxpayers have entrusted us and we need to re-pay that faith by wisely investing those dollars.

But MOST on its own will not tackle a challenge of this scale. There has to be a major infusion of federal dollars if we want our water infrastructure to catch up on a realistic timeline. I am committed to seeking out those opportunities and working with the administration to help identify and apply for grants that could get us there.

**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?**

This is a national crisis, and no one city across the country has figured this out conclusively. That's because there is no cure all. As we go neighborhood by neighborhood, there are different tools and instruments that make more sense for one community than another.

For me, the most lasting solution, and the most cost effective one, is to get the zoning re-write correct; to allow for greater density and flexibility, particularly surrounding transit. As a general notion, we want to see more multifamily housing. I would like to see allowances for more accessory dwelling units and small square footage homes. But these things have to happen with community feedback, because these solutions won't make sense everywhere. For example, some advance the idea of automatic zoning shifts within a mile of MARTA stations. But if you do that, you would fundamentally alter a historic single family neighborhood like Ansley Park, and that's not entirely feasible or advisable. But where we can advance these solutions, we should. Because they are cost-effective and at the end of the day growing our supply relative to demand is the surest way to lower prices.

By contrast, grants and abatements are popular with just about everyone, but are juxtaposed with zoning in that they cost a great deal. I am in support of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund and Housing Opportunity Bond but also realize that we cannot bond out solutions to all of our challenges. These tools are great for fighting displacement, protecting legacy residents, and hopefully prioritizing workforce housing. But we must remember that we can only do so much on credit, even if it's the most politically expedient option.



**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?**

The backlog is one of the greatest challenges facing Atlanta. Investments made elsewhere are less valuable if a large portion of residents cannot reach the resources we've provided.

We need a dedicated revenue stream for sidewalks, and may even want to consider a sidewalk specific TSPLOST. Along the way, we must do a better job of keeping an inventory of our repair and new construction needs.

I would hope for an appointment to the Transportation Committee so that I could work to improve outcomes as it relates to ADOT and MARTA specifically. Our relationship with MARTA is in need of a restart and rethink. We may want to consider a liaison in the Mayor's office to the transit agency. With ADOT, we must demand greater efficiency. There are things like Complete Streets projects that should have been completed yesterday. That's a huge detriment to our bicycle infrastructure, livability, and just general resident safety.

Finally, I would use my seat to work with the Atlanta delegation – particularly as state politics continue to shift – to gain greater autonomy around our taxation mechanisms. We tax property too highly in Atlanta. But that's only because we have to as we are preempted from finding revenue elsewhere. If we could tax something like parking, then we could lower millage rates. And in the process, shift things so that visitors who degrade our infrastructure but pay property taxes to surrounding counties are paying their fair share to the city government.

**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 vitally important. In some ways, many policies that would tackle climate change are state, federal, or even international matters. But that does not mean we should sit on our hands.

One thing I think we could focus on (and are to some extent) is incentives for developers to build more sustainable homes or for repairs that make housing more energy efficient. The city passed a ban on non-reusable plastics at city facilities a few years ago. We could work with private businesses to try and get pledges to expand that ban citywide with non-governmental companies.

And then expanding the scope of my response, I would just say that access to parks needs to be a major focus. This dovetails into the earlier conversations around sidewalks and access. But I truly believe that we should strive to have all Atlantans within one mile of a reachable park or greenspace. It's an important aspiration that means so much to the long term quality of life for all.