

# Cathy Woolard

## Mayoral Forum on Greenspace Responses

### **1. What do you believe is the single most pressing issue impacting Atlanta's urban forest and greenspace, and how would you solve that issue?**

There are a number of different issues that impact the urban tree canopy and greenspace and they are not necessarily the same. For the tree canopy, I think the most pressing issue is a weak and poorly enforced tree ordinance. For greenspace, I think it is insufficient funding for existing park maintenance and improvement as well as for growing our acreage to meet the needs of our city. The issues are inter-related but also require some specific policy and financial decisions.

Because a tree canopy commission is now underway, I'm hopeful that the set of policy and enforcement recommendations will resolve the weak ordinance and as Mayor, I'll commit to funding and standing behind the enforcement mechanism. We can't be serious about mitigating climate change, managing storm-water and preserving this unique and precious asset without committing to changes that provide real protection against loss of canopy and investing in planting trees for the future.

As to funding of existing park maintenance and improvement as well as for growing our acreage:

I'll increase the parks and recreation budget by \$3.3 million year over year in the first four years. That will guarantee a minimum budget of nearly \$50 million – a number that was promised many years ago but never fulfilled.

In the first six months of my new Administration, I'll convene a Task Force comprised of parks advocates, neighborhood representatives, philanthropic and corporate leaders to assess, price and rank all of the great public realm projects struggling to find a way while adding priorities that we might not have considered like how to make our public realm more accessible to seniors, children and people with disabilities and how to increase and improve the recreation and fitness offerings that we offer across the city. By the end of the first year, we'll have a priority list, budget and a map for getting it done.

We'll spend year two and three working with the Georgia General Assembly to pass and implement an appropriate funding solution to grow and maintain our system well into our grandchildren's adult years. And I'll get to work with the Task Force and city staff to do the blocking and tackling required to fund and build a world class parks and recreation system.

### **2. The community is frustrated with widespread tree destruction and removal on teardown/infill sites. Would you support tree ordinance changes that limit impervious surface and total clear-cutting?**

Absolutely. I'm assuming that the tree canopy commission will be making solid recommendations on these issues and, if not, I'll ask for more work on the policy. There are legal considerations governing the use of private property that will

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need to be considered so that the ordinance will be enforceable and fair, but I'll be aggressive in getting policies that have real teeth passed through the City Council.

It's important to understand the relationship between trees, climate change and storm-water management. A medium-sized oak tree can absorb 2,800 gallons of rainfall per year. Removal of just one of these trees has a dollar value to the city that is tangible. And when you multiply in the impact of loss of tree canopy and escalating heat in our city and world, we can calculate a fairly precise value on each tree that is removed and/or planted. We should reflect that value when determining how much impervious surface and tree removal to allow in new or infill construction and the impact fees required to mitigate loss of tree canopy.

### **3. How would you get the development community on board with growing and building our city while protecting our greenspace?**

I'd work with the Development Community the same way I'd work with other communities in our city. I'd include a representative group of individuals and organizations in conversations to help them understand and develop our goals for preserving and growing our public areas while listening to understand the challenges they face when making investments in developments in Atlanta. My best expectation is that we will be able to get broad consensus on the objectives which will help us craft the policies to achieve those goals. While I don't expect everyone will agree with every aspect of our plans, I believe we can work toward a win-win in most instances and will always seek to do so. That doesn't mean we compromise on our objectives; it just means we seek input on how best to get there. I believe it's in everyone's best interest to build a world-class city and I look forward to working with developers to help us do it.

### **4. As Mayor, what would you do to evaluate the current state of maintenance of our park system?**

I'd create a deferred maintenance log and then do on-site inspections of our facilities with local residents, park advocates, conservancies and other interested groups to make sure we've captured a comprehensive list. I want to ensure that our processes for receiving information on minor and major repairs are clear and easy for everyone to access. Putting that log on-line so that people can submit requests and see repair schedules will make it easier for everyone to be accountable and for us to address problems in an organized fashion.

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### **5. How would you make the case for increased funding for park maintenance? Are there specific funding sources you would consider for park funding aside from general funds?**

The case for increased maintenance funding is already made. We've increased our park land by over 1,000 acres in the past 20 years and our funding level is about \$15m in today's dollars below where it was 20 years ago. The need is clear. I have ideas about ways we can increase funding beyond the \$3.3 million year over year increase I'm committing to over the first four years. But I'd rather do a comprehensive review of options before saying definitively what a long-term solution is. I'll put together a Task Force immediately to inventory our needs and aspirations and then seek the right combination of funding to fulfill those priorities. It will likely be a combination of general and reserve fund (like watershed and storm-water mitigation), a permanent funding source and philanthropic and federal/state resources.

### **6. Do you believe we need more parks and protected greenspace? Are you in favor of convening a new Parks and Greenspace Task Force?**

See Question #1 for my commitment on this question. Yes, I am in favor of a new Parks and Greenspace Task Force and will use that group to help create the plan for expansion of our parks and protected greenspaces.

### **7. Providing specific details, how would you develop a plan for our city that includes both future growth and our urban forest?**

A new Tree Commission is in place and working toward recommendations. I'd support the work of that Commission and will provide input as Mayor on the scope of the project if I feel it is not ambitious or comprehensive enough to achieve our goals for preserving tree canopy, mitigating climate change, reducing storm-water run-off. I'd charge the new Parks and Greenspace Task Force to follow that formula while looking specifically at the issues outlined in #1.

### **8. How do you see the City's role changing as maintenance of the Atlanta BeltLine becomes a more prominent issue?**

The Atlanta BeltLine is a massively complex project in terms of execution, maintenance and impact. To be a world-class city, we need world-class projects like the Atlanta BeltLine but it is only as good as we make it and maintain it. The City will always be responsible for the overall health of this project because it is a public asset. I think the role of the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership or a successor organization will grow in importance as we determine the best way to ensure the asset is maintained at the highest possible level. That likely means a combination of general fund revenues for things

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that make sense like public safety and basic maintenance and perhaps a conservancy type arrangement to ensure a healthy and timely flow of investments and new improvements as time goes on.

### **9. What is the likelihood that the City will increase its commitment to maintenance of the BeltLine as this is critical to securing philanthropic support to make the Atlanta BeltLine a reality?**

Since I initiated the Atlanta BeltLine project more than 15 years ago, you can be assured that I will ensure that we are aggressive in securing the philanthropic as well as federal and state grant funding needed to complete the project with transit and a radical emphasis on housing affordability on the parts that we own. The future costs of maintenance will be part of the discussion of the Task Force and will spark a deep look at how we sustain the project will into the future.

### **10. What would you do in your first 100 days as Mayor to preserve and maintain the City's parks and greenspaces?**

I will audit the City's current and projected revenue and budget to ensure that our expenditures and budget reflect our priorities for a world-class, sustainable city that is committed to moving the dial productively on income inequality and equity in every quadrant of the city. Parks, recreation and greenspace have a prominent role in that vision. My first budget will clearly reflect the shift in priorities.

I'll convene the Task Force on Parks and Greenspace as well as receive and review the results of the Tree Commission and look for quick wins to show movement and commitment to these issues. I'll ensure in my selection of staff for all related departments including Watershed, Parks and Rec, Resiliency and Sustainability and the new Chief Equity officer clearly reflect these goals and bring world-class experience and diversity to the table.

### **11. The city of Atlanta relies on Lake Lanier and the Chattahoochee River for high quality drinking water. And, when completed, the Bellwood Quarry will provide 30-days of emergency water supply for the city. What can the city do to cultivate a "culture of conservation" to ensure the city's water supply, wastewater, and storm water management are resilient?**

First and foremost is awareness. We cannot expect our City to have a culture of conservation without being educated on the realities of water demand and supply in Atlanta. We will work with the appropriate Departments to create that

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on-going awareness campaign to help our citizens understand the magnitude of the situation. A solid partnership with APS would be beneficial as well. Educating our young people about conservation of natural resources is in our best interest.

We can also continue efforts to assist low income and elderly residents update toilets, showers and tubs to water conserving products. We can work with the businesses and multi-family housing owners to help us hit aggressive conservation metrics. And in every case, City Hall must set the example by implementing the culture of conservation into every department, every facility and every project. With at least 7 colleges, universities and technical schools in Atlanta, we can be a living laboratory for studying new technologies and even methodologies which change human behavior in an urban environment and create new jobs and save money while we are doing it.

We've made progress on our water resource management system but it's time to put a greater emphasis on being prepared for the future. Bellwood Quarry will help improve our emergency water provisions. But further investments in updating our facilities and practices will help us have the world-class system we need and deserve.

### **12. The city of Atlanta holds the permit to the largest wastewater treatment facilities in the southeast, but does not treat its effluent to the highest quality for return into the Chattahoochee River. Will your administration invest in the health of our river and upgrade its wastewater treatment capabilities to current technological standards?**

We have so much work to do to ensure that we are preserving and protecting our water reserves. And we want to uphold the highest standards we can achieve. Most people think infrastructure is not sexy, but I think it is. We must invest in both high tech and low-tech solutions to ensure that our commitment to sustainability is a key pillar in everything we do. We want our sports teams to be number 1, but often settle for less on things that are much more important. Some ideas that we must implement as soon as possible include:

- Pharma Collection programs to keep pharmaceuticals out of our water.
- Invest in green areas and technologies that will help us manage storm-water; including new policies requiring development projects to slow run-off, promote green infrastructure and reduce run-off.
- Invest in nutrient (methane and phosphorus) recovery from our wastewater system and generate revenue at the same time.
- Pilot water hubs in the city that will turn waste water into water that can be used for non-potable purposes

We must also provide true accountability for the progress being made separating our sewer system and upgrading our pipes and plants. We've had a penny sales tax for over 10 years and have spent over a billion by now. It's not clear to the public how far we've gotten and where we are going. We need money to address our increasing storm-water run-off and we are leveraged to the hilt so solving that issue is very important to our sustainability in the truest sense of the word.