

Kwanza Hall

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?

Protecting and enhancing Atlanta's urban forest and greenspace will be one of the key environmental priorities of my administration. Today, the booming commercial and residential development in our city presents a continuing challenge to our urban forest and green spaces. This is not a new problem but it requires new solutions. My Administration will start by reviewing all the current regulations to identify ways to enhance the protection of our tree canopy and greenspaces. This, by the way, will go beyond tree-cutting regulations and will include a comprehensive analysis of all threats to forested green space, including heavy rain, drought and pests. The 100% clean energy commitment that I led and our efforts to address climate change will play a key role in our urban forest and greenspace protection and enhancement programs.

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?

My administration will review all existing City rules and regulations in order to identify additional controls on tree removals and re-plantings. I don't think there is a one-size-fits-all answer but, for starters, we need to find a better and stricter way to deal with developers who may clear-cut a property without permits and then dismiss the payment of fines as just another cost of doing business. Impervious surfaces put additional pressure on our waste water collecting and treatment systems and I will work with the Council to define and establish reasonable regulations to increase pervious surfaces in our city.

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

I believe that rules that are created without input from those most affected often are ignored, circumvented or challenged in court so we will not do that. In my administration, we will invite developers to partner with community, neighborhood, environment and greenspace advocates, among others, as we seek to define and establish better rules for development that will include environmental and greenspace protection. I am convinced that we can make that collective effort work. Yes, there is a natural and understandable tension between development and preservation but, fortunately, smart developers are recognizing that preservation and environmental protection can be a great asset, even a selling asset, to the developed property, be it commercial or residential.

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

At the outset, my administration will start with a comprehensive review of all departments and offices of the City. Review of the Parks & Recreation Department will be a priority. In that review, we will take advantage of the expertise regarding greenspace, parks and recreation issues that is available in our city outside City government.

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?

I would ask the Department of City Planning to evaluate bringing developer impact fee in line with surrounding jurisdictions and propose legislation to make changes if needed. Also I would be open to calling for a referendum on our parks millage (currently 5 mills) and see whether voters would like to increase it and open it up to cover maintenance as well.

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

I do believe that we need more parks and protected greenspaces and early in my administration I would convene a new Parks and Greenspace Task Force.

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

The City Design Project is off to a great start. I support continuing and perhaps enhancing that effort to bring it to a timely conclusion. Then, and this is the key thing, I would work hard to implement that plan. In the Hall administration that plan will not gather dust in a bookshelf.

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

I think continuing existing partnerships and encouraging new partnerships with interested communities and organizations is particularly important in everything involving the Beltline, including maintenance. Over time we have learned that "Friends of" parks groups tend to do the best job of capturing the time and talent of those who care the most about parks near and dear to them. As such, I think we need to let those groups take the lead, but at the same time ensure that the Department of Parks is collaborative, responsive and supportive, not just in partnership with existing "Friends of" groups but by filling any gaps where "Friends of" groups might not exist.

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?

I agree that maintenance of the Beltline is critical to its continued development. Clearly, with all capital improvements comes maintenance responsibility and the City is and will probably increase its maintenance efforts as more parks are opened. We will conduct a Beltline maintenance and projected cost review as we develop a City budget for 2018 and also seek to leverage private funds from as many places as possible to ensure adequate protection and enhancement of this great City asset.

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

My commitment "to preserve and maintain the City's parks and greenspaces" will not start once I am Mayor. That commitment has been part of my City Council work from the start and it will last years beyond my first 100 days in office. I will bring City resources to this task in the most cost-effective way. Effectiveness and efficiency will be the hallmarks of every initiative we undertake. And in everything, we will look not just to the physical improvements we can bring to the city but also to human capital improvements. And whenever possible marry the two. In that regard, one of my key aspirations is to develop a program like Detroit's, that offers free tuition to a 2-year college in collaboration with an Americorp-type community service program for students through departments in our city like Parks & Rec, Cultural Affairs, Watershed, Planning & Public Works.

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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?

In recent years, our water and sewer rates have prompted a “culture of water conservation” and our next step must be to develop a communications strategy to expand that “culture of conservation” to overall energy related consumption. In that effort, we will seek to make water and energy conservation “cool.” I think that the participation of celebrities like Killer Mike would be a great asset for this communications effort, and one that we will seek to involve in our education campaign.

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?

As I understand it, Atlanta is currently meeting regulatory standards for discharge of treated effluent into the Chattahoochee. Nevertheless, ideally, we would be discharging effluent treated to the “highest quality” possible. To that end, I will ask the Watershed Management experts to work with stakeholders to evaluate the costs and benefits of developing that capacity and to recommend a course of action.