

Mary Norwood

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?

Preserving and Protecting Atlanta's forest cover – "Lungs of Atlanta"

Atlanta is known as the "City in the Forest". This is our most distinguishing natural feature, and one that has been underappreciated, underutilized and undervalued by government, business and many citizens until fairly recently. Our forest is as much our natural identity as Miami's beach, Denver's mountains and Chicago's lakes. We must be as vigilant, as proud, as branded around our magnificent trees as those other cities are about their natural resources.

- Forest and tree cover clean the air, reduce storm water runoff, protect the city from climate change and more. Trees Atlanta has done a tremendous job of working with the city to change the Tree Ordinance to access Recompense Funds (approx. \$10 million) to purchase forested land to preserve. I will work to strengthen the city's protection mechanisms, increase the public's appreciation and improve the economic benefits to businesses for preserving our magnificent tree-filled environment.
- As Mayor, I will support the City's commitment to maintenance at all parks. Upon my return to Atlanta City Council, I hosted two years of "May with Mary: An Atlanta Parks Tour." Each year, during the month of May, I welcomed our citizens to a park in every council district. It was important to me to showcase our parks all over our city...some on or near the Beltline and others farther away.
- There has been a reluctance from the philanthropic community to contribute to the City of Atlanta because of the lack of commitment to Parks & Greenspace. In 2001, the City of Atlanta created a "Parks Foundation" (Legislation # 01-O-0593) I would pursue the implementation of a Parks Foundation to assist the City in acquiring additional greenspace AND maintaining our parks.
 - Our right of ways and forested greenspaces are touched by several city departments. Trees are often not thought of as infrastructure and therefore are not cared for in their everyday work and long-term projects.
 - How would you get City Departments to work together to better manage and protect our forested areas and public trees?
 - I have run many organizations in my career and I would bring together a representative from the following departments: Dept. of Parks and Rec, Sustainability/Resilience, Dept. of Planning, Dept. of Watershed Management and Dept. of Public Works to establish the coordination and procedures needed to better manage our forested areas and public trees.

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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?

First, the Tree Ordinance must be re-written and our tree canopy needs to be connected to land value. I advocated for this policy when the Tree Ordinance was first adopted. Secondly, the current revision of the Tree Ordinance is in Committee. It needs to be adopted. Third, we must rewrite our zoning ordinance and include the protection of our natural environment as we redevelop the City. Our Commissioner of Planning has designated neighborhoods as the “lungs of Atlanta” because that’s where our tree canopy exists. The City Design Project is focusing on adding the 800,000 new residents (projected) along our commercial corridors, which will reduce the pressure on our Single Family Residential neighborhoods. Fourth, the vast majority of our tree canopy is in private hands. We must launch a public awareness program explaining the benefits of Conservation Easements and assisting homeowners who wish to preserve the greenspace they own in doing so. Finally, I just supported a 180 day moratorium on the acceptance of any application to remove more than 10 trees on residentially-zoned land of five acres or larger. During the moratorium period, the City is will examine the impact that development is having on our tree canopy and develop strategies for increasing and preserving the City's tree canopy. This interim strategy will protect our tree canopy until the comprehensive Urban Ecology Framework can be created.

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

I believe the development community is looking for fairness and an equal opportunity for their development. With clear rules and equitable enforcement for ALL permits, their costs will be predictable and their timeline more manageable.

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

First, we need to use ATL Stats to identify and quantify our current level of maintenance and we need these statistics more readily available to our citizens. Secondly, we need to have our Parks personnel equipped with cameras to document their work and have those images transmitted back to City Hall for both the Department and our citizens to review.

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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 City's capacity to maintain its existing inventory of public parks, greenspaces and trails is underfunded. By under-investing in park maintenance, we sell our city short. This negatively impacts the economic development, community revitalization, public safety as well as quality of life in neighborhoods throughout our city. It also discourages innovation and additional private capital investment in our parks.
- Atlanta has failed to keep pace with the need to grow its park maintenance budget over time (see research on benchmarks from Parks and Greenspace Task Force Report (2002) and Parks Technical Advisory Committee (2006))*
- Additionally, the City of Houston has an Open Space Ordinance which mandates that new development create parkland or pay a fee to the City's Park Fund. Atlanta has our Park Impact Fees. I will make certain that our fees are assessed appropriately and used exclusively for our parks.
- As Mayor, I will work the City's Legal Department along with Parks and Recreation to review the relationships and the mechanisms that exist with our Conservancies and our Friends of the Parks, for example, rulings on fundraising activities or the recognition of donors or sponsors. We need to make sure that all operating agreements and MOU's enable these organizations to have the tools, resources, and support they need to be successful.

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

Yes.

I have been an Atlanta Greenspace and Parks advocate since my arrival in Atlanta in the 1970's. I was a participant in the Georgia Land Trust raising funds to acquire Greenspace in the City of Atlanta in the late 1990's – early 2000's.

I have been a longterm advocate of Parks, participating in Park Pride prior to my being elected to City Council in 2002. I understand that multiplicity of benefits that Parks provide including:

- Community Revitalization
- Community Engagement
- Economic Development
- Safer Neighborhoods
- Green Infrastructure

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- Helping Children Learn
- Improving Public Health
- Providing Settings for Arts & Cultural Programs
- Promoting Tourism
- Contributing to Smart Growth by enhancing our Quality of Life
- An integral part of Climate Change Management by mitigating the effects of our urban heat island

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

As previously stated, there has been a reluctance from the philanthropic community to contribute to the City of Atlanta because of the lack of commitment to Parks & Greenspace. In 2001, the City of Atlanta created a “Parks Foundation” (Legislation # 01-O-0593) **I would pursue the implementation of a Parks Foundation to assist the City in acquiring additional greenspace AND maintaining our parks.**

I am a strong proponent of working with DWM to create parks that assist with our City’s stormwater runoff. We have torrential rainfall which exceeds our ability to manage. Our City needs LOTS of parks created in conjunction with DWM to provide green infrastructure throughout our City.

Additionally, the City of Houston has an Open Space Ordinance which mandates that new development create parkland or pay a fee to the City’s Park Fund. Atlanta has our Park Impact Fees. I will make certain that our fees are assessed appropriately and used exclusively for our parks.

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

All of our Parks need our attention. I have been a strong proponent of the Atlanta Beltline since first acquiring Alexander Garvin’s The Emerald Necklace.

My involvement in neighborhoods across the City began in the 1980’s, which was also the decade when I was the first Volunteer Coordinator for Trees Atlanta and one of the Founding Members of the Atlanta Botanical Garden’s volunteer organization: Garden Associates. The Atlanta Beltline touches 45 neighborhoods in our City. Our City has over 300

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neighborhoods, all of which We need an assessment of our entire tree canopy: nature preserves, parks, and privately held greenspace so that we prioritize where our funds can be spent.

As Mayor, I want to ensure every child in Atlanta grows up within a 10-minute walk of a park, trail or natural area. We need to collaborate with the Atlanta Public School system to strategize how their facilities can be used after hours and on weekends. We could increase our percentage of parks and recreation facilities dramatically if we were successful. Most importantly, it would enhance the quality of our children's and families lives in our city. They deserve our care and concern.

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?

Very likely.

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

- Create a Parks Advisory Task Force.
- Implement and populate the Parks Foundation.
- Make sure that ATL Stats relating to Parks are easily accessible and widely distributed.
- Review Operating Agreements and MOU's with all Conservancies and Friends of the Parks groups in conjunction with Park Pride.

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?

A park with water features will be a welcome addition to the Quarry project. While the Park plan has been developed. It will promote storm water management and the value of clean water as a park amenity.

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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?

It will promote storm water management and the value of clean water as a park amenity.

Released Treated effluent should be of the highest quality. As upgrades to the facilities are made, my administration is committed to incorporating the latest technology, such as membranes, to provide clean water downstream.