

Peter Aman

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?

Atlanta's population will continue to increase rapidly over the next few decades. While this presents an exciting opportunity to move our city forward economically and expand culturally, it will also challenge the foundation of our city. We will need to address how this population influx will affect infrastructure, mobility, and crucially, our urban forest and park system.

The city must dedicate itself to protecting our environment—especially our tree canopy and greenspace—during this growth. Determining where and how the city will develop is crucial to this effort, and the next mayor will oversee this through the city's ongoing rezoning process. I am committed to ensuring the updated zoning laws will preserve and grow our existing greenspace and tree canopy and ensures equitable development and access for all of Atlanta's residents. Zoning is one of our greatest tools to design dense urban and economic centers while also allowing us to preserve conservation areas throughout the city. A multi-year rezoning process is already underway and the next mayor will be instrumental in ensuring we are zoning for the future all while protecting the things that currently make Atlanta the city we love. In addition to zoning, other efforts will also be critical, including intentional acquisition of new greenspace, planting more trees, and finding opportunities for more park-making projects.

Through rezoning and other efforts, we will keep our canopy coverage at or above 48 percent and increase greenspace acreage throughout our entire city, solidifying our reputation as the city in a forest.

This will be a group effort. As a former Chief Operating Officer for the city of Atlanta, and as someone with extensive experience bringing people and organizations together, I am prepared to work collaboratively and ensure stakeholders from the environmental and greenspace community have a voice in how we collectively advance Atlanta.

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?

The current regulatory structure restricts low and middle income residents but does little to limit large-scale tree removal. I will review the current policies and work collaboratively to increase the degree of protection for large areas of tree canopy. These clear-cutting projects are the biggest threat to our tree canopy and we must review relevant ordinances to address this reality. One possible concept worth examining is to tether the cost of tree-removal to the expected change in property value. The city should not charge a low-income family removing one or two trees at the same rate we charge a developer cutting down dozens of trees. As your mayor, I will address these regulations to protect trees in teardown sites while easing the burden on everyday Atlantans.

Peter Aman

Mayoral Forum on Greenspace Responses

We must also make our guidelines explicit, so developers have clear rules to follow and are not faced with unexpected tree-removal moratoriums that hurt business and delay development projects. It benefits everyone to have a clear, robust tree removal ordinance. The city needs to establish effective and coherent regulations, rather than burden residents and businesses with ever-changing ordinances and unexpected costs.

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

It is essential that as our city continues to grow, we reach out to the development community and the public to help protect our greenspace. Developers have influence in our city's future and we must exhibit to them the value and importance of our parks and preserving what makes our neighborhoods special. There is plenty of room for win-win opportunities here. Parks continue to be an economic boon to neighborhoods and the city at-large and drive the increase of value in land owned by both private citizens and developers.

When parks are properly maintained, they attract residents and businesses, leading to economic growth. As the local economy grows and the value of neighborhood real estate rises, the area becomes attractive to developers. It is imperative that we prepare and plan

The development community should be involved in the park planning process, creating innovative ways of integrating greenspace into a vibrant and growing city. I will work with the development community to preserve our existing greenspace and expand parks in a manner that strengthens our neighborhoods and their economies. This will be done by choosing strategic locations for parks that will have the greatest social and economic benefit, and including these designated areas in the new zoning ordinance.

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

We must understand the current status of park maintenance before extensive change can take place so we make sure we spend our dollars wisely. But make no mistake, I intend to increase the investment in park maintenance. To this end, I will pursue three independent but related projects. First, I will request a formal audit of the park maintenance system to fully account for our spending. I will also develop a special task force to assess and make recommendations based off of the current state of park maintenance, where we succeed, and where there is opportunity for improvement. This will include internal City Hall departments, community leaders from the greenspace community, and subject matter experts. Lastly, I believe local neighborhoods and the residents and business that comprise them, understand their needs most clearly yet remain underutilized as information sources. I will reach out to community members, businesses, nonprofits, and schools for input on the status of their neighborhood parks. Armed with a greater understanding of existing conditions, we will have the tools to develop informed and targeted initiatives for our parks.

Peter Aman

Mayoral Forum on Greenspace Responses

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?

Atlanta does not dedicate sufficient financial resources to our parks and greenspace. In fact, adjusting for inflation, funding for parks and greenspace is on the decline. As your mayor, parks and greenspace will no longer take a backseat. My case for increased funding for greenspace maintenance is simple: when properly maintained, parks improve life for everyone in our city. They are crucial to our city's culture, economy, livability, equity, and overall quality of life. Parks make people happy.

I am dedicated increasing the park budget on an annual basis so our parks and greenspace. To ensure this money is spent responsibly, the increase will be based upon a plan with specific guidelines and goals for the park system. These guidelines must prioritize inclusivity, so that every Atlanta resident can experience nature in a safe and comfortable way.

In addition to traditional funding sources, I will partner with nonprofits and other government entities including Atlanta Public Schools to support parks throughout our city. I will also examine what new sources of revenue could be dedicated to parks, such as a potential parking tax. These organizations have property, money, expertise, and volunteers that the city should utilize as a cost-effective way to grow park resources and improve park maintenance. In particular, I will work with APS to include their greenspace in the city's park system. However, it is not enough to stop there; simply naming a field as public property is not satisfactory. Both existing and new greenspace will be properly maintained and special attention will be given to public safety. Parks should be a space for families to feel safe and comfortable, and general maintenance coupled with an emphasis on public safety will move us closer to this goal.

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, growing park acreage remains essential to our city. Atlanta currently ranks in the middle of the pack on the Trust for Public Land's ParkScore, and expanding our greenspace is key to climbing that list. New construction and development is crucial to growing our greenspace, but we need to do this in a way that is cost effective. If we are creative and reimagine what we consider greenspace, we can efficiently increase acreage and access. I will work with APS on turning their parks and fields into public parks after hours and during the summer recess. And, we can work with developers and property owners to activate private greenspace for special use by the public. This, along with purchasing more property for parks, will expand the portion of the city dedicated as greenspace and available for public use. We should also look at the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies standards to find areas for improvement.

I also support the creation of a Greenspace Task Force to address issues of funding, acreage, access, public safety, and how to otherwise improve our parks. There are great challenges to our city's greenspace, and a dedicated task force would help us think big, overcome challenges, and improve our public spaces in a fiscally responsible manner.

Peter Aman

Mayoral Forum on Greenspace Responses

I have already encouraged the greenspace and environmental community to put together a proposal of activities and initiatives my administration will begin to tackle in the first 100 days I am in office.

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

The next mayor will be responsible for planning where and how our city will develop. We need to pursue a strategy that welcomes newcomers and economic growth while preserving the environment and urban forest that defines our city. The next mayor will be responsible for overseeing a rezoning process that will encourage two interests seemingly at odds, growth and preservation. If we harness this growth productively, this is an opportunity to make our city a more prosperous, equitable, and vibrant place to live. We need to get this right.

In this pivotal moment, Atlanta deserves a mayor that has experience coordinating government agencies, understands the zoning process, and is willing to get deep into the weeds of policy. I plan to enact initiatives in line with the Atlanta City Design Project and its values of nature, access, ambition, progress and equity. The key to sculpting healthy growth in Atlanta will be to distinguish between conservation areas and growth areas. I will tailor zoning to promote density in business districts with even more capacity, such as Downtown, Midtown, and Buckhead—and other transportation corridors such as Metropolitan Parkway and Cascade Road—while preserving the tree canopy and neighborhood character throughout the rest of the city.

While zoning is our greatest tool to success over the next few decades, there is no panacea. I am committed to the expansion of MARTA—in tandem with a reduction of urban parking—to ease mobility and encourage public transit in our city. I will re-write our tree ordinance to curb large scale tree removal. I will work with every relevant government agency to create a comprehensive city strategy that preserves our urban forest, proactively harnesses the benefits of population growth, and creates a city we all are proud to live in.

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

As the Beltline continues to develop and establish itself within our city, we must evaluate our priorities, which I believe are equity, connectivity, and public safety (among others, eg education, city services, etc.). The Beltline's challenges run deeper than improving maintenance, as the symbolic resignations of Nathaniel Smith and Ryan Gravel demonstrated. We do not have to choose between development and preservation; we can do both. I will emphasize equity, connectivity, and public safety as the keys to building a Beltline that benefits our entire city.

For some Atlanta residents, the Beltline is synonymous with exclusion and gentrification. Property value surrounding the new infrastructure has risen, forcing some residents out of their homes and neighborhoods. I will work with developers

Peter Aman

Mayoral Forum on Greenspace Responses

to ensure that affordable housing is available along the path. It is critical that we allow longtime residents to continue to live in their communities. I will not permit development take place at the expense of inclusion. To this effect, I would work with civic organizations to provide tax relief so that increased assessments do not force these vulnerable communities out of their homes—just as we have done on the west side of Atlanta already.

Specific to the physical maintenance of the Beltline, by auditing and assessing the current parks inventory—including the Beltline—we will be able to see upcoming funding and maintenance challenges. This is another area where our Greenspace Task Force will have an active voice in shaping public policy and ensuring the public is heard.

Looking towards the future, I want to think even bigger. If we stress public safety and beautification along the entire Beltline—not just the wealthy neighborhoods—the Beltline can help in the greater fight to unravel existing inequality in Atlanta. We must ensure that stretches of the Beltline in the poorest areas in our city are as beautiful and safe as in the wealthiest areas. If we think big, the Beltline can be a shared space for our city to get outside, enjoy our parks, feel safe, and explore the city—and connects neighborhoods and communities throughout our city.

In addition to creating a place for Atlantans to get outside in a safe and community environment, the Beltline can connect our city in a transformative way. As a walking and biking path, the Beltline already is a force for connectivity throughout our city. But it can do more. We can connect light rail to the Beltline and extend this transit along the path. Residents will have access to schools, jobs, and opportunities that are currently out of reach. If we develop strategically, the Beltline will work to unite our city, improve mobility, and expand economic opportunity to those who need it most.

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 am committed to increasing maintenance on the Beltline and partnering with independent organizations to ensure the successful preservation and growth of the Beltline. Many groups in the city have a stake in the success of the Beltline including APS, businesses, neighborhoods, and philanthropic organizations. Again, our Greenspace Task Force will play a critical role in determining the level and scope of maintenance of the Beltline and ensuring there is a robust public-private partnership.

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

Having worked with two mayors – once as a pro bono consultant and the other as the city's COO– I know what it takes to hit the ground running to ensure there are no gaps in service all while putting forth a plan to advance Atlanta. In my first 100 days I will continue ongoing park maintenance, address urgent short term needs, investigate our current

Peter Aman

Mayoral Forum on Greenspace Responses

condition, and start to put together a strategic development plan including the formation of a new task force. While we move forward on new initiatives and expansions, we cannot abandon what we have now. I will continue current maintenance programs and address any urgent infrastructure needs that appear until a new, fully constructed parks plan is available.

The first step to creating this new plan for our city parks and greenspace is to assess our current financial state. I will request a formal audit of our parks and greenspace services so we know where our money is going. The next step is to develop a special task force to investigate our current park system's successes and failures and make recommendations based off their findings. I will also ask for input and recommendations from community members, non-profits organizations, APS, and other local governments. With an understanding of our current spending and informed recommendations about how we should move forward, I will oversee the development of a new strategic park maintenance and expansion plan.

I commit to requesting a formal audit, and convening a special research task force within my first 100 days. The creation of a new parks development strategy will take more than these three months. But, the sooner we begin this process, the sooner we can act on its recommendations and enter a new chapter for Atlanta's parks and greenspace.

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?

Atlanta is not in an ideal geographic location for water supply. The Chattahoochee River and Lake Lanier are not deep nor large enough for a region growing at Atlanta's rate. The Bellwood Quarry project is a step forward, but a 30-day emergency water supply is still not much for a city of our size.

Unfortunately, there is no silver-bullet to solving our water supply and wastewater management challenges. As mayor, I will launch initiatives in conservation, infrastructure, and public education to provide sustainable and safe water services. We must conserve water through a sustainable stormwater system. This will involve storm water conservation, as well as improving our wastewater and stormwater pipes, which are at 80 percent capacity on a normal day. This makes our city vulnerable to overflow, a dangerous health hazard. In fact, this recently led to a boil water advisory in parts of the city, including the Old Fourth Ward, where my campaign is headquartered.

Educating the public about best practices and individual responsibility will also be essential for our conservation efforts. For example, low flow toilets reduce water usage by 40 percent, and the city can play a role in encouraging the installation of these utilities. This is an area where we can work across departments and city agencies. Additionally, we should reexamine the building code to find areas where new technologies should be used to increase conservation.

Peter Aman

Mayoral Forum on Greenspace Responses

As your previous city Chief Operating Officer, I have the unique knowledge and experience to coordinate these intersecting proposals and the different government agencies that will be involved.

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?

I will absolutely invest in improving our wastewater treatment services. A city should be concerned with the health and safety of all its residents, and this goes to the very core of that issue. Research done in 2012 by GreenLaw found that Metro Atlanta “areas with a minority population 50 percent or higher have more than doubled the number of pollution sources than areas where minorities make up less than 10 percent of the population.” A study published in 2000 by a Clark University professor found that 82.8 percent of the city’s black population relative to 60.2 percent of our white population live in waste site areas. It is unacceptable that the location of our wastewater treatment facilities and its effluent disproportionately harms our minority and underprivileged population.

As mayor, I will use intentional zoning procedures and improve infrastructure to ensure that our minority and poor neighborhoods are treated with deference and respect. In addition to addressing the condition of our wastewater treatment facilities, city planning and a zoning ordinance should be designed to mitigate all environmental impacts—traffic, noise, odor, chemical, pollutants—on nearby communities. Health should not be dependent upon our skin color or economic class, and our zoning ordinance can be an effective tool to untangle past discrimination and ensure environmental justice.