

# Ceasar Mitchell

## 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?**

The single most pressing issue impacting Atlanta's urban forest and greenspace is development. Interestingly enough, canopies are always included in the renderings for new development, yet they are rarely included in final development. As our city continues to grow and attract new development, our urban forest and greenspace become more and more diminished. However, with increased development comes a real opportunity to change the narrative.

To prevent new development from completely diminishing our canopy, we must consciously decide to require all new developers to commit to preserving our urban forest and new greenspace. As Mayor, I will make it a requirement for developers to plant or preserve trees in an effort to offset loss due to development. We must make the be purposeful in requiring developers to provide more benefits to the communities in which the development is occurring.

### **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?**

I would absolutely support strengthening the city's Tree Ordinance. Our tree canopy is one of the things that makes Atlanta such a special place to live and it is our duty to preserve it. The purpose of the Tree Ordinance is to guard against any net loss of trees within the city's borders. However, a primary issue with the current Tree Ordinance is enforcement, or the lack thereof. As Mayor, not only will I uphold our current Tree Ordinance to ensure that we preserve more of our existing trees, I will strengthen the ordinance by ensuring that our best quality trees are included as an integral part of the building process. I will empower the City of Atlanta Arborist Division to protect more tree canopy on private property throughout the city. I will create clearing processes based solely on need and necessity. Lastly, I will attach monetary deterrents to new development projects, which can incentivize developers to consider our urban forest in their plans.

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

To get the development community on board with growing and building our city -while also protecting our greenspace - I will offer building permit incentives. As Mayor, my plan includes planting 5,000 new trees throughout the city. To ensure that the development community is on board with this plan, developers will be asked to commit their support upfront through the permitting process.

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As Mayor, I will also add an additional safeguard to building permits process to encourage new developers to plant or preserve trees surrounding the development. Additionally, the initial building permits will come with a tree inventory that creates an incentive to preserve those trees. However, if the developer does not preserve the trees in the building process, the builder will have to pay the city to offset the costs to plant additional trees or be used for park maintenance. It is important for the city to ensure developers consider our urban forestry, and the only way to make that happen is to assign a monetary value in the form of a tree removal fee.

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

As Mayor, to evaluate the current state of maintenance of our park system, I will enlist the expertise of nonprofits such as Trees Atlanta to help develop a comprehensive evaluation and maintenance plan and process for all city parks and greenspaces. The Trust for Public Land conducted a 2017 Park Score survey ranking the largest 100 U.S. cities. The survey was based on 3 criteria – acreage, facilities and maintenance, and access. According to the survey, Atlanta is tied with Dallas for 50th place. The easiest way to improve our Park Score is via maintenance.

As a Councilmember, I established the Atlanta Park Technical Advisory Group to provide recommendations on how to achieve and sustain a world-class Parks & Recreation system. Additionally, I created the Atlanta Clean Green Team to provide sustainable best practices and resources to over 22 community groups with the goal of improving parks and greenspaces in their neighborhoods. As Mayor, I will take my work a step further and create a Park and Greenspace Task Force for the purpose of expanding and preserving our parks, locate designated funding sources for park maintenance, and ensure that our parks are in great working condition.

### **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?**

Yes, I would absolutely make a case for increased funding for park maintenance. Ten years ago, when I created the Atlanta Parks Technical Advisory Group, one of the key recommendations was to find a designated funding source for our parks. Back then, the city knew that funding solely from the General Fund was not sustainable, which was evident during the recession. As a result of the advisory group's efforts, the city allocated an additional \$2M into the budget for parks. As Mayor, not only will I allocate sufficient funds for parks through the city's Parks & Recreation Budget, I will create a designated funding source specifically for park maintenance. Similar to the city's Renew Atlanta Infrastructure Bond Maintenance Fund, I will set aside a portion of the annual budget and deposit it into a park maintenance fund. This fund will allow for quick and routine repairs of our city parks and equipment to keep them in great working condition.

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I believe we have an incredible opportunity to go above and beyond what was done with the Parks Improvement Bond, along with funding from the General Fund, by authorizing a fraction of a penny tax to fund parks and create a viable source of funding for maintenance.

Lastly, I will take a collaborative approach to creating a funding source. As Mayor, not only will the philanthropic community be encouraged to support these effort, but I will also lead the charge to have Fulton County and the Atlanta Public School System on board as partners in increasing and protecting our parks and greenspace.

### **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 am absolutely in favor of more parks and protected greenspace. I am also in favor of convening a new Parks and Greenspace Task Force. As I mentioned, I created a Park Advisory Group along with a “Clean Green Team” to push the city forward and create and sustain world-class parks and recreation systems within large neighborhoods and smaller communities.

When it comes to parks and greenspace, Atlanta has an equity problem. I will work to create a strong assessment of the greenspace we already have and make sure that we are maintaining and preserving them as well as exploring ways to expand into areas where there are deficiencies.

I believe the city is missing a huge opportunity by not considering school parks as greenspaces. As Mayor, I will refashion how the city classifies and defines parks and greenspaces and push to view them through innovative lenses. A great example is the new GA400 Park located in Buckhead. The city capitalized on the area surrounding GA400 Highway and transformed the area into a park. As Mayor, I will look for more opportunities such as highways and urban agriculture as strengthen our park and greenspace footprint and to create multi-use spaces.

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

In 2013, Trees Atlanta made a commitment to plant 4,000 trees within two years. However, the project has not been completed due to insufficient funding. As Mayor, I will help find the funding to honor that initial promise and increase the city’s commitment to plant more trees across town. A possible way to accomplish this goal is including the business community.

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I will develop a program that replenishes and preserves trees. Under the program, the city will require developers to plant or preserve a certain amount of trees for every new project. The formula for tree planting or preservation will be based on the type of development. I want to ensure that Atlanta is the tree and canopy model for our region. As Mayor, I will prove how a major metropolitan city can build with trees for a truly sustainable future!

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

While the city will play a pivotal role in helping to maintain the Beltline, I believe that the issues regarding equity, connectivity, and affordability are more prominent for the community than maintenance. Managed appropriately, the Beltline has incredible potential, but it is important that we recognize and address its pros and cons.

As the former Chair of the Community Development/Human Resource Committee, and as one of the authors of the original Beltline legislation, I fought for policies and principles around accessibility and affordability, greenspace investment and community benefits. As Mayor, the city will fulfill the promise we made to the community years ago by ensuring that the Beltline will be affordable, accessible and enjoyable for all residents.

### **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?**

As one of the authors of the legislation that created the Beltline I am committed to securing philanthropic support to keep the the Beltline in good condition. With all major investments, maintenance must be contemplated. I am will be willing to explore options to create a designated funding source for maintenance that is a hybrid of private-partnerships and city funding. In 2015, Council created a maintenance account for the Renew Atlanta Infrastructure Bond, where 3.5% of bond proceeds are set aside in increments to address maintenance of bond projects. I am interested in exploring whether a similar funding account could be set up for maintenance for the Beltline.

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

To preserve and maintain the city's parks and greenspaces, in my first 100 days as Mayor, I will convene a new Parks and Greenspace Task Force to develop recommendations on creating a world class, state-of-the-art parks and greenspace system. Additionally, I will evaluate all of our city parks and greenspaces to determine if maximum acreage is being

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achieved and to assess whether parks are being properly maintained properly/in great condition. Lastly, I will convene a survey of city land to determine if additional parks can be created within the city. Every neighborhood should be located within a 20-minute walk of a city park.

### **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?**

To cultivate a culture of conservation of the city’s water supply, it is important that the city develop a strong education/outreach program to educate residents on the importance of conserving water and the effects of water waste. To create a successful program, the city will need to include nonprofits and community organizations to bring awareness and increase engagement. Lastly, the city will need to implement an incentive program that provides monetary benefits or credits for residents who abide by the conservation program.

### **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?**

Yes, my administration will invest in the health of the city’s river and upgrade its wastewater treatment capabilities to current technological standards. It is extremely important that we accurately treat our wastewater and its effluent, while also ensuring proper disposal that guards against contamination.