

Kenneth Hill

Mayoral Forum on Greenspace Question Responses

Q1

The premise that parks should be safe, crime free areas has been challenged by recent senseless acts of violence that took the life of Jakari Dillard at Anderson Park pool and the horrific murder of Katie Janness at Piedmont Park.

How will you address the concerns around safety in our parks?

Public Safety is on all of our minds. The first and obvious answer to increase the size of our police force back to two thousand plus officers. This is a component of the solution but not the complete answer. As mayor I will install leadership that will recruit and retain our police officers. It costs over \$100K to recruit and train a police officer. When we lose that officer after two or three years, we have not received our return on investment and must start over. I would also be open to recruiting retired officers, former military police and private security companies to assist with parks security until our officer ranks have been refilled. There is also the important role that community members play in observing and communicating activity in our parks. We would benefit from a refocus on the Neighborhood Watch program for communities and parks. Additionally, I would support a media campaign to promote unity in keeping community park spaces clean and safe.

Q2

To advance a sustainable future for Atlanta, we must focus attention on both our urban spaces and our natural spaces and resources. Atlanta's projected population growth of approximately 106,000 people over the next ten years further stresses a current challenge of making intentional decisions regarding our use of land that support our local ecology, our economy, and our quality of life in equal measure.

As the city grows, how will you balance the need to protect trees and greenspace with other city priorities (namely public safety and affordable housing) which are often positioned in either / or terms?

Our growth as a city must be intentionally planned to include greenspace retention and ecological preservation. This intentional planning must be included with all housing, transportation, and infrastructure development. This would require partnerships between the Planning department and nonprofits like Trees Atlanta, Park Pride and the Urban Land Institute.

Q3

Data shows that only 6% of Atlanta's land is dedicated to parks, far below the national average of 15%. Meanwhile, 28% of Atlanta residents do not live within a 10-minute walk of a park. Recent acquisitions like Lake Charlotte, the opening of Westside Park, and the continued development of the Atlanta BeltLine Trail are a step in the right direction, but the city needs significantly more parkland.

How will you fund critical land acquisition needs for Atlanta over the next four years and ensure a funding stream is available for future acquisitions as the city grows?

Land acquisition begins with the land that is currently owned by the City, the Watershed Department and Atlanta Public Schools. Building consensus among these groups will help ensure that the priority of greenspace preservation is a common goal. Funding for the acquisitions and maintenance of greenspace would be done by third party partnerships and dedicated funding including SPLOT's.

Q4

How will you ensure that major new park investments do not displace existing members of the community who cannot afford higher rents and taxes that are likely to result from quality-of-life improvements?

I believe this is more likely to be an issue along the Belt Line rather than in community park spaces. With that in mind, I would support utilizing special assessment districts for these areas and to support transit concessions to decrease parking requirements. These actions will assist in making affordability possible.

Q5

Through the public engagement process for ActivateATL (the Department of Parks and Recreation's 10-year master plan), we learned that:

- *24% of City of Atlanta residents reported that park facilities are not well maintained. This is double the national average.*
- *Park maintenance and improvement-related issues are the #1 reason that prevents Atlantans from using parks and rec facilities.*

How will you address the lack of adequate resources and funding for park maintenance, especially as new parks and trails are developed?

There is tremendous upside available related to park maintenance through partnerships with nonprofits, community groups and schools. My non profit currently performs volunteer clean ups at West Manor Park and the C.T Martin Recreation Center. By developing partnerships with these community based organizations and local businesses, we can lower the expense related to park maintenance. Having a mayor who has been personally committed to parks and greenspaces for the past 5 years will provide a cascading effect on the engagement levels that communities and local businesses display. I will be the mayor who invites communities and business people to "Meet me at your local park".

Q6

While greater public investment is necessary to build and maintain a world-class park system, private dollars are being left on the table. The philanthropic community has expressed to its nonprofit partners an interest in additional investment in greenspace if the City committed additional dollars to maintenance. Further, a lack of adequate resources for park maintenance puts park conservancies and friends groups in the position of compensating for a lack of public resources instead of leveraging private dollars to make good parks even better.

How will you work with park conservancies, “Friends” groups and the philanthropic community to ensure all available dollars are leveraged for a better park system?

My current level of engagement around parks and my support of “Friends” groups provides a foundation to build a robust partnership between the philanthropic community and neighborhoods. With marginal increases in public funding we can move the needle significantly through grass roots support at the community level. Matching grant opportunities provide the opportunity for communities to have some skin in the game for the improvements needed. This will allow the City to focus on larger projects such as accessibility to the parks via side walks and walking trails.

Q7

Considering the multitude of new parks coming online, the infrastructure challenges of existing greenspaces, and the chronic understaffing of the Department of Parks and Recreation, green job training and workforce development presents an opportunity to increase employment (particularly amongst youth of color aged 16-25 who are not college bound) while also addressing the needs of Atlanta’s parks department and park system.

How would your administration support and expand green job training programs?

My administration will move quickly to initiate green job training for students as early as middle school through internships and certification courses. This addresses two problems and provides a win win situation. Keeping youth engaged in nurturing their communities also reduces crime. Young people who learn to care for the spaces in their communities are less likely to terrorize their communities. By providing initial exposure and pathways into green careers we equip the next generation to continue the work that we are engaged in.

Q8

Equity is about creating policies, structures, processes, and tools for All people to prosper including low-income and people of color.

What policies, structures, processes, and tools will you advance in your administration to ensure that historically disenfranchised communities receive equitable investments in their parks and greenspaces as well as the public resources necessary to maintain them?

My current nonprofit work centers around supporting some of the most vulnerable and disenfranchised members of our community. We provide transitional housing and wrap around services to homeless single mothers and their children. This work has enlightened me on how difficult it can be to navigate the path to sustainability. As mayor I would ensure that access to the resources that are needed is available to those who desire to change their situation. I will work with conviction to ensure that we are a city of compassion towards those people and communities who are fragile. I will have the needs assessments for each park and recreation center updated and ranked according to the number of people that can be served by the park. Getting the greatest number of people engaged with their parks as soon as possible would be my course of action.

Q9

The Atlanta City Design—adopted into the city charter in 2017—aims to protect and expand Atlanta’s watersheds, forest, and habitat in the face of rapid urbanization. It proposes additional large investments in new parks along with an approach to growth that focuses new development in appropriate areas, while protecting ecologically valuable areas as conservation corridors.

How will your administration use the framework laid out in Atlanta City Design to protect existing trees and preserve nature while growing and building our city?

Protecting our canopy is very important for many reasons. The first step that I would take would be to address the staffing levels of the arborist and support staff to engage with the planning and development process citywide.

Q10

We struggle to slow the loss of mature trees and increase the planting of new. For the last three years, there has been an effort to rewrite Atlanta's Tree Protection Ordinance so that we can better enforce the protection of trees from illegal and unnecessary removal.

Do you support a stronger tree ordinance and how will you address issues of enforcement?

I would like to see how well we can execute the current tree ordinance with proper staffing and the required technology upgrades. Until we are responding in a timely manner, issuing citations where appropriate and holding people accountable I would resist changing the ordinance.

Q11

Impervious surfaces like roads, parking lots, and roofs prevent rainwater from soaking into the ground. When it rains in an urban area like Atlanta, flooding can occur which may lead to property damage, a degraded natural environment, and even become a threat to public health and safety. Additionally, because Atlanta's stormwater infrastructure is aging, an increase in flooding is expected to cause damage to the City's water treatment facilities. A Stormwater Utility Fee would provide necessary funds for the operation of a stormwater management program to provide for necessary maintenance and new infrastructure to address the impacts from stormwater.

Do you support the establishment of a Stormwater Utility in the City of Atlanta?

Atlanta has a serious issue in the watershed department. High water rates, frequent boil advisories and a faulty system has eroded the trust of many citizens. While the stormwater issue must be addressed by federal government decree, it will be a hard sell for the people of Atlanta to embrace. The utility is needed and I would support it once a better level of trust has been developed between the citizens and the watershed department.

Q12

Tell us why you see yourself as a greenspace champion.

Since 2016 my nonprofit has sponsored community clean ups that have removed over 5 tons of garbage from our roads, parks, greenspaces, and water ways. I have been invited to participate as a community member in two School Yards programs. Both L.P. Miles and Harper Archer elementary schools are currently in progress. I also direct literacy programming in these two schools through my nonprofit. As a passionate gardener I take seriously the sharing of knowledge about nature and where our food comes from with the next generation. As mayor I will work to establish our city as a top ranked destination for companies, citizens and communities who desire to embrace greenspace.