

# Mayoral Forum on Greenspace Questions (Kasim Reed)

## 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?**

Crime is the number one crisis facing our city. Right now, in every neighborhood across our city, Atlantans feel less safe. Crime impacts our personal and collective quality of life and the city's reputation, creating a vicious cycle that undermines everything that makes our city vibrant. The fundamental truth is that until Atlanta feels safe again, nothing else will feel right – including enjoying our beautiful greenspaces and parks.

Public safety reform starts at the top. During my eight years as Mayor, the city's crime rate was at 40-year lows and the city employed 2,000 sworn police officers, the largest force in the city's history. I have demonstrated that when we collectively focus on public safety across all neighborhoods and public spaces, our quality of life and economic security thrives. I am the only candidate who can talk about proven results because I have shown us that we can have a safer city, and how.

Here are the core elements of my plan to make every neighborhood, public park, and corner of Atlanta safe:

- Hire and properly train 750 new APD officers so that we have a fully functional force, and coverage throughout the city.
- Triple the city's network of traffic cameras and license plate readers, including adding safety surveillance to public parks.
- Provide all – new and existing – officers with implicit bias and de-escalation training.
- Keep the Atlanta City jail open to eliminate the overcrowding in the Fulton County jail, and shut down the revolving door for repeat violent criminals.
- Work with state and county leaders to hire new judges to eliminate the huge prosecution backlog caused by COVID-shutdowns.
- Establish weekly cabinet meetings to review crime data and implement solutions across departments.
- Upgrade precinct locations and facilities and replace outdated equipment.
- Expand Atlanta's Policing Alternatives and Diversion Initiative (PAD), a program created during Mayor Reed's first term, and reopen the Centers of Hope recreation centers to get kids off the streets safely.
- Revamp APD Code Enforcement processes to target the city's most egregious offenders and aggressively prosecute nuisance establishments.
- Establish LGBTQ+ hate crime protections in APD's Special Victims Unit.

## 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?**

Sustainability is critical to Atlanta's future. I understood that in 2016 when Atlanta became a member of the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities (100RC) and made Stephanie Stuckey the city's first Chief Resilience Officer. Stephanie spent months leading the most open and transparent public engagement process developing the Resilient Atlanta strategy. The strategy presents a vision, targets and 55 short-term and long-term actions to address social equity and climate change adaptation. The strategy was developed to support the prevention of, and resilience to, extreme climate events such as major floods or heat waves, and long-term chronic stresses such as income inequality, lack of affordable housing, and the effects of climate change. Although some progress has been made, there is much to do. I will re-energize the Office of Resilience and move with urgency on the recommendations in our report.

My administration will demonstrate that we can balance multiple priorities at the same time if we have a well-coordinated and intentional effort. Increasing density is key to improving affordability, encouraging more transit ridership and allowing residents to bike and walk more often. We made progress on bike and pedestrian infrastructure and greenspace expansion in my first two terms, but we can do more. I have a plan to leverage every parcel of land that the City of Atlanta owns for smart, beautiful and affordable development. And my proven track record on crime will ensure that as we focus on the many priorities of our growing city, Atlanta will be safe and resilient again.

## 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?**

While I was Mayor, the Department of Parks and Recreation acquired an additional 171 acres of land in the City of Atlanta, including 15 new parks, serving as the largest greenspace accessibility percentage jump in more than 40 years. I also championed support for the Atlanta BeltLine implementation and created additional funding for new trails such as Proctor Creek Greenway, a seven-mile bike and pedestrian trail spanning from Maddox Park to the Chattahoochee River. The completed Proctor Creek Greenway will feature 50 acres of linear park and 400 acres of greenspace, and will offer connectivity to the Bankhead MARTA Station and the Atlanta BeltLine Westside Trail.

Expanding access to parks and greenspaces so that every resident live within a 10-minute walk of a park will continue to be a top priority under my administration. To ensure every Atlantan has a neighborhood park, I plan to:

- Launch a \$100M fundraising initiative to aggressively acquire land for parks, greenspaces and protected land with old growth tree canopy before it becomes too expensive to do so.
- Create a naming rights initiative to provide opportunities to fund capital and maintenance for future park projects such as the Westside Park, which is now the largest in the city's inventory.
- Continue to expand the parks budget and dedicate funding specific to parks maintenance.
- Support the renewal of the municipal option sales tax, a funding source for on-going park and greenspace acquisition and green infrastructure development.

## 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?**

There are many reasons we love to call Atlanta home, as do the thousands of people moving here every year. As that growth and development occurs including with major new park investments, we need to fight to ensure that Atlanta remains affordable for the people who have long called it home, as well as the people who work hard every day to keep our doors open. I plan to ensure affordability and workforce housing throughout the City:

- Take the Westside Future Fund model and expand it; we will raise private sector dollars to offset increases in the property digest and have a robust grant initiative.
- Create a fund that is powered by the growth of development to ensure existing members of the community can remain in their homes.
- Create Atlanta's first-ever Office of Anti-Displacement to help folks experiencing these challenges and respond with expert support.
- Conduct a city-wide audit of the area's current affordable housing digest, ensuring that current affordability commitments are being met.
- Make better use of currently owned public land.
- Layer units to help both low and middle-income households.
- Build housing for middle income city employees, including public safety officers and teachers, so they can live in the town they serve.
- Double the number of affordable units near MARTA stations and new park investments without jeopardizing or destabilizing historic single-family neighborhoods.

In addition, we need to better leverage current public real estate assets, particularly the properties owned by the Atlanta Housing Authority and MARTA, and leverage the federal dollars available to expand affordable, transit-oriented housing options. We need to layer the affordable units so that we have options to serve low-income households earning up to 60% of area median income, while also supporting middle-income households that earn up to 100% of median income.

A good example during my previous two terms as Mayor is the partnership with the Atlanta Police Foundation called Secure Neighborhoods. That program offers sworn Atlanta Police Department officers affordable options and incentives to purchase a home that has been renovated or built from the ground up in English Avenue, Vine City, and Pittsburgh. That program aids in officer retention, helps reknit the fabric of those communities, and ensures that the people who serve our city can afford to live in it as well.

We have to create more workforce housing that serves this middle-income market, allowing teachers, police officers, firefighters, and other city employees to live where they work. With a focus on public-private partnerships, we can help double the number of affordable units at or near MARTA stations and new park investments from 1,500 completed, under construction or in planning, to over 3,000.

## 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?**

Our park maintenance is inadequate. Under my previous two terms as Mayor, I raised the parks department budget by 47% and aggressively funded park capital projects. We can do more. As our next Mayor, I will:

- Continue to increase the budget support needed to meet the increasing demands of our park system and dedicate funding specific to park maintenance.
- Leverage sources of funding from impact fees, local option sales taxes and partnering departments, such as Watershed Management, to support our parks, greenspaces, tree canopy, green infrastructure and storm water mitigation efforts.
- Hire more staff for park maintenance and ensure that the city is competitive for talent with its wages.
- Change the parks maintenance schedule from a seasonal operation (of April to October) to a year-round schedule with appropriate resources.
- Continue to partner with residents, neighborhood groups, Friends of groups, conservancies, and the philanthropic community to ensure our parks has its necessary resources.

## 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?**

Our city is special because we have every day Atlantans who volunteer their time and commit their resources to support our parks and greenspaces through our Friends of groups, conservancies, and various nonprofits. I have demonstrated what can be achieved when we work together. Some examples include:

- Lindsay Street Park, in partnership with the Conservation Fund's Parks with Purpose program and Park Pride, was developed into a new park that includes green infrastructure which will help absorb stormwater, alleviate flooding of nearby homes, and improve water quality.
- Rodney Cook Sr. Park, in partnership with the Trust for Public Land, leveraged more than \$30 million dollars from the city and \$14 million dollars from the philanthropic community to build a world-class park in the English Avenue neighborhood with amenities that serve as retention ponds and a new community playground.
- Westside Park, in partnership with the Atlanta BeltLine, leveraged more than \$321 million dollars from the city to transform the Bellwood Quarry Reservoir into a 30-day emergency water supply along with an additional \$24 million dollars of investment (along with philanthropy's match) to build and open the city's largest park.
- Grant Park Gateway, in partnership with Zoo Atlanta, leveraged more than \$48 million dollars to transform outdated, impervious surface lot into an innovative, at-grade parking garage with newly expanded greenspace that serves as green infrastructure and stormwater mitigation efforts for the Grant Park community.

My vision is to continue to listen and understand the unique needs of every neighborhood park in Atlanta and raise the level of funding to meet those needs. I will develop and implement a model that provides increased parks support from the city that maximizes the generous support from the philanthropic community, Friends of groups, conservancies, and nonprofits.

Together, we will ensure every Atlanta has a safe, resilient, and beautiful park within a 10-minute walk.

## 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 support and expand green job training programs. The City of Atlanta should be a leading employer in Georgia and the nation. Previously, I have demonstrated measurable efforts to attract and retain talent and prioritize providing workforce opportunities:

- Launched a re-entry program to train non-violent offenders pre-release status as Watershed Management trainees. Several of whom went on to have meaningful employment and careers with the city.
- Raised the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, which helped retain and recruit talent in various city departments including Parks, Public Works, and Watershed Management.
- Established an incentive for employees to get licensure in Watershed Management.
- Increased the base salaries for operators in the Office of Linear Infrastructure and Operations as well as Meter Operations to be the highest paid in Georgia at the time.

The city should continue to look for ways to increase employment opportunities while also addressing the needs of our parks department and system. To do so, my administration will:

- Continue to review the city's compensation, workforce development programs, and training to align with the city's responsibilities and service levels across multiple departments including within the Parks department and Watershed Management.
- Explore partnerships with community-based organizations to assist in providing green job training programs.
- Ensure that the city's employment application 'ban the box' so that those seeking employment have a fair shot and second chances.
- Leverage the city's Centers of Hope and community centers to offer programs that help develop young people and offer a training and pipeline of opportunities to meaningful employment in the city.

## 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?**

Every Atlantan deserves a well-maintained and safe neighborhood park that meets their community's unique needs. During my two terms as Mayor, I invested in small and large park and greenspaces projects across our city's diverse neighborhoods – new playground in Windsor Street Park nearby Mechanicsville, restored community pool at Maddox Park off Donald Lee Hollowell, green infrastructure improvements in Atlanta Memorial Park in Buckhead, and a world-class Martin Luther King, Jr. Recreation and Aquatic Center in Old Fourth Ward.

As stated above, my administration will take an all-hands-on-deck and bold approach to achieve equitable investments in parks and greenspaces that will include launching a \$100 million dollar fund to aggressively acquire land for new parks and greenspaces and increasing the city's operating budget for additional staff and resources dedicated to park maintenance. With my leadership, our park system will retain national accreditation again and increase our national ranking among leading cities.

At the same time, we do not need to sacrifice what makes Atlanta special – like our historic in-town neighborhoods – if we take intentional steps to create affordability and density in areas where additional park investments are made. We'll use warning metrics, like water and utility disruption, to identify legacy residents that need additional support to maintain their homes. We have been told we either need to choose affordability or historic and community preservation, but that's a false choice that I reject.

Atlanta has taken solid steps to create and preserve long-term affordability, but we know we must do more. Displacement does not have to be the inevitable result of economic growth and neighborhood change. With intentional policies to protect lower income residents, they can stay and access the benefits of improved housing, job opportunities, and access to transit and world-class parks and greenspaces.

## 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?**

The city must be intentional as Atlanta continues to grow with development, economic opportunities, and people choosing Atlanta as their home. I understood this when my administration led these neighborhood conversations through the Atlanta City Studio and created the framework laid out in the Atlanta City Design that prioritized protecting existing trees and preserving nature while growing and building our city. My administration also prioritized these efforts through the engagement and publication of the Resilient Atlanta strategy which balances that growth with multiple priorities.

As Mayor, I will re-energize a well-coordinated and intentional effort and get back on track in implementing the strategies laid out in these frameworks to protect existing trees and preserve nature while growing and building our city.

## 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?**

Atlanta's trees serve as our riverfront. During my two terms as Mayor, I authorized legislation to leverage tree impact fees for the specific goal and responsibility to protect our natural preserves, vast lands with old growth forests, and beautiful tree canopy.

My administration will enforce our existing tree ordinance to avoid unnecessary elimination of trees and at the same time, ensure developers do not cut corners on development projects without consequences. Any changes to the city's tree ordinance should make the rules clear for developers so that they are enforceable and continue to prioritize our tree canopy. My administration will listen to the community feedback as discussions continue regarding the tree ordinance to ensure Atlanta's growth is balanced and we safeguard our tree canopy.

## 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?**

We invested more in stormwater management and flood mitigation projects throughout the city – Atlanta Memorial Park in Buckhead, permeable pavers throughout Peoplestown, stormwater detention and parks projects in the Old Fourth Ward, English Avenue at Cook Park, and Proctor Creek among others – than had been invested in the last 20 years. Stormwater management requires an approach that addresses operations, maintenance of the system, capital improvements and regulatory compliance. This approach should be comprehensive and cooperate with regional and federal partners.

Under my leadership, the city will work with local organizations, businesses, and private property owners to install water and energy-efficient systems to manage drought, stormwater flooding, and rising energy costs to ensure a sustainable future for the city. We will continue to develop and renovate neighborhood parks that achieve multiple purposes and adopt green infrastructure design as a standard (with models being the Westside Park and Rodney Cook Sr. Park). As stated in the Resilient Atlanta Strategy, my administration will consider creating a stormwater utility to develop and fund a comprehensive management program that will reduce city water runoff by 225 million gallons annually. An integrated approach for clean water programs and controls to urban flooding can be achieved cost effectively, and we will maximize existing funding tools, such as the municipal option sales tax, to support green infrastructure across Atlanta.

## Q12

### **Tell us why you see yourself as a greenspace champion.**

Great cities have great parks, greenspaces, and tree canopy. My record has demonstrated that I am the greenspace champion. Under my leadership, the City of Atlanta emerged as a national and international leader in sustainability, including major expansions of public greenspace. Atlanta had the largest expansion of greenspace in the city's history, including 171 acres of land and 15 new parks. We moved the budget support for parks from \$25M to \$40M, a 47% increase for parks.

Perhaps most significantly for Atlanta's future resilience and greenspace efforts, I led the effort that invested \$321 million dollars into creating the Bellwood Quarry Reservoir and invested an additional \$24 million dollars that leveraged philanthropic support to develop the recently-opened Westside Park, Atlanta's largest park. This massive infrastructure project allows water from the Chattahoochee River to be channeled to the quarry site providing Atlanta a 30-day supply of drinking water.

We have great deal more to do. We can pick the mantle up and continue our forward progress. As Atlanta's next Mayor, I will double down on the city's effort to meet our goal of every Atlanta living within a 10-minute walk of safe, beautiful, and well-maintained parks.