

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

Crime is the first priority of mine and I have specific solutions to get the crime under control. The majority of the crime and the drivers of the crime in the City are violent, repeat felons. We will focus our resources on bringing accountability to these violent, repeat felons and ensuring that they are not free to endanger the public in any way.

Aside from the ups and downs of actual crime statistics, people need to actually feel safe and comfortable going to our parks. This includes both residents and visitors. I do plan to increase the APD staffing levels which will help with the visibility and presence of our officers.

How do we balance growth and preservation and protect greenspace?

Growth and preservation are not an either/or – we can do both successfully and sustainably. First, the city has hundreds of acres of land under its ownership. We need to evaluate the best and highest use for the land we have, and this includes preservation as an option.

Secondly, my vision and plans for parks in Atlanta is focused on more neighborhood parks. This is both the preservation and acquisition of new neighborhood parks. Not only does this preserve greenspace, but this will improve the quality of life in many neighborhoods. My goal is to increase the percentage of residents who live within walking distance of a park.

Regarding growth, my plan is to concentrate development in existing developed and high-density corridors and near Marta stations.

How will you fund acquisitions for new park spaces?

As stated above, my vision and plans for parks in Atlanta is focused on more neighborhood parks. As far as funding, neighborhood parks are much less cost and resource intensive than the large scale parks that we have developed previously. This allows us to have a much broader reach for much less money. I believe that we can fund new neighborhood parks within the existing overall budget, without the need for new funding sources.

How will you ensure that park investments do not displace existing residents?

Right now, displacement is occurring near parks because the previous and current strategy around park development has been large scale prestige projects and parks. Our park investments traditionally lead to displacement because they become destinations and attractive to residents. The new westside park is a good example. It has brought and will continue to bring development, and along with that, some displacement.

My focus and vision is on neighborhood parks. This will allow us to replicate the positive attributes of the larger parks and bring them locally to more neighborhoods and make these amenities more accessible. The goal is to make the neighborhood parks a place where families can go for a walk or bike without having to get in their car first. As we bring on more neighborhood parks, it takes pressure off the displacement.

In addition, the city has other policy tools and funding to directly address displacement, if it is something that is observed as a result of park investments.

What will you do about the poor maintenance and poor conditions in our parks?

Next to crime, basic city services is a top priority of mine. There is no excuse for the substandard condition of some of our parks. We have to establish and implement basic standards of care relating to our parks. This is for ALL parks, not just our prestige parks. At all times, each park needs to be clean, fully maintained, and have fully functioning amenities. This is THE top priority of the parks department and I will provide supplemental resources to accomplish this, if needed.

How will you work with private organizations to leverage donations for park improvements?

We need to rebuild trust with the private organizations that have long cared for our parks. Ideally, we want the private funding to go to capital improvements, but right now instead they are being used to backfill the city's lack of attention to the parks and the basics of park maintenance and cleaning. This certainly drives mistrust and may lead to a drop in private donations.

Ultimately, it's the City's obligation to maintain the parks and facilities. This is a top priority of mine to ensure that this gets done for ALL parks (not just the ones with private foundations). Once we can demonstrate that we can take care of the basics, this will help rebuild the trust with the private organizations. We can then work with each one of them to hopefully stimulate additional donations, but also direct these funds into capital improvements.

What policies will you use to ensure that historically disenfranchised communities receive investments in their parks?

This goal is central to my overall vision and plans for parks in Atlanta. I want to focus on more neighborhood parks and this includes ALL neighborhoods. My goal is to increase the percentage of residents who live within walking distance of a park. There are well know benefits and improvements in quality of life that come along with this. In addition, I want to ensure that ALL parks have desirable amenities that those in the community will actually use.

How will your administration use the Atlanta City Design (ACD) framework to protect and preserve greenspace?

The ACD framework is very ambitious and calls for the preservation of several corridors of greenspace. I would be open to exploring and further refining what this framework would look like in practice and what investments and policies would be needed to take it to the next stage.

Unfortunately, the grand vision of the ACD is not at a stage where the next Mayor will likely have shovel ready projects, but it can be advanced. As part of the next steps in advancement of the ACD, I would like to get citizen feedback on how the framework may impact their neighborhoods and communities.

Do you support a stronger tree ordinance?

I'd be open to a re-write of the ordinance. There are shortcomings of the current ordinance, but before we completely abandoned it, we have due diligence to perform to ensure that we are being as effective as possible within the current guidelines. Enforcement has been lacking in the past and without addressing this shortcoming, enforcement of a new tree ordinance would continue to be subpar.

If we do move in the direction of a re-write, we have to include ALL parties, this includes our citizens, conservationists, and the developers. Everyone needs to be at the table and everyone needs a voice. We reasonably can't exclude developers from providing input and then mandate what they can and can't do.

Do you support the establishment of a stormwater utility in the COA?

Whether I support this or not, this is effectively what Atlanta has or will soon be doing, no matter what. We are under a consent decree related to violations of the clean water act as a result of combined sewer overflows (CSOs). We have to remediate this issue anyway by upgrading and managing our stormwater to comply with the clean water act.

Much of this work has been delayed and deferred due to lack of funds and lack of political will. In addition, an awareness of the burden that additional utility charges will put on low income households has prevented the city from prioritizing this work.

It doesn't matter if we have a new stormwater utility handling this work or if it's handled under the existing public works department – the work has to get done. In addition, we need to evaluate the funding needs for the upgrade work. Again, this work costs the same whether we have a dedicated stormwater utility fee or simply increase existing water usage rates.