

Rebecca King

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? Hiring of additional police officers, maintaining fully functioning cameras and partnering with neighborhood associations would address concerns and give citizens the peace of mind to visit any park in Atlanta.

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? As more development occurs the comprehensive development plan should address and give recommendations for land use to better support our local ecology, our economy, and our quality of life. Once areas are identified the City of Atlanta can build a partnership with landowners to determine different tools to move land use toward sustainability.

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? A portion of taxes should be put aside in neighborhoods that need additional park space. A City led funding stream shouldn't be the only option. Working with developers and private entities to match funding will enhance a neighborhood's viability to access parkland.

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? My administration will hire a liaison to be the hub of resources to help people with their rent. The tax structure should be address by changing the existing formula for taxes. Taxes should not be set on appraisals.

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? Once an audit of all parks at their current state and future state of needed long-term maintenance is presented my administration will present a working plan that brings together neighborhoods, private and public funding sources to keep parks and trails at their best for the viability of the neighborhood and Atlanta. Educational institutions that offer vocational training and summer programs for our youth should be utilized to address short staffing that can enhance maintenance.

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? Utilizing the audit that presents current and future maintenance I will bridge the city services department with educational institutions that offer vocational training and with youth programs to address maintenance concerns.

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? As Mayor I will work with educational institutions to offer Atlanta's parks and golf courses as incubators for training. Any youth program will be partnered with the educational institutions that offer training in Greenspace jobs.

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? Utilizing an audit to show the needed resources and addressing those through

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 tree recompense fund, as well as, other organizations dedicated to

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?

Waiting on the ordinance to be completed with stronger language and penalties doesn't need to be the only tool utilize to maintain our tree canopy.

Continuously penalizing property owners and developers has not brought a stop to clear cutting prior to building so I think it most important to work with landowners to receive buy in as to the benefits of maintaining the tree canopy.

Cost savings and offsetting the impervious surfaces to stop flooding are two great reasons to maintain the 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?

An assessment of all infrastructure in Atlanta will show the path needed and the funds necessary to maintain and upgrade existing infrastructure. The tree canopy would provide an additional resource to offset the amount of impervious surfaces and help decrease damage from flooding. The tree recompense fund, as well as other organizations dedicated to greenspace can be brought in to work towards reducing flooding.

Q12

Tell us why you see yourself as a greenspace champion.

Sitting in the Mayor's office would be an extension of my life's work in committees to maintain and enhance the City of Atlanta's greenspace.