

Richard Wright

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?

As Mayor my administration will move away from Policing Zones to District Policing. Each district will have a Major who is responsible for that district's public safety. Each Major will have the support of my administration to create a public safety paradigm for that district. My administration will support each district police unit to create a Parks & Rec team that solely focuses on safety of public and private park and rec centers. My administration's office of infrastructure will use technology to improve features at parks like cameras at strategic points in each park using data collected by district police. My administration will install lights at every critical station along with phones that dial straight into district police at each park. The district Major will create public safety citizen training course, held bi-monthly on the weekends. Teaching citizens techniques No one should have to worry about their safety when visiting a park. My administration will treat public safety as a community value.

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 Mayor my administration is committed to creating a GreenAtlanta. We shouldn't have to sacrifice greenspace to accommodate grow in population. My administration will work with NPU's and all stakeholders in creating new zoning codes that cultivate growth and maintains Atlanta tree canopy and greenspace. Building housing closer to public transportation is critical as is working with Atlanta Beltline. My administration understands that each district is different. One size fits all strategies are illogical.

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?

My administration will issue 4 bonds for \$18.75 million dollars each over the next 4 years. The funds will be used will for land acquisitions, security technology and to creating natural gardens in parks in each district.

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's Office of Sustainability will work with the city CFO and finance department to create subsidies as part of adopt a park plan. Another source of revenues to help subsidize venerable homeowners is funds from the summer league baseball sales. The increase sales tax dollars collected form products sold at the summer league events will be placed in an interest baring escrow account to be allocated to residents in that district.

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?

Atlanta currently spends about \$151 per resident on parks with the national average at \$89 per citizen. The city budget for parks and recreation for FY2022 is \$43.7 million dollars. What is the return on investment in our parks and recreation centers? In 2020 Atlanta ranked 50th according to Parksourc. As Mayor my administration will always spend taxpayer dollars efficiently and effectively with maximum return on investment in mind. My Administration will offer robust support to Department of Parks and Recreation, so the ActivateATL 10 year plan will be a success.

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?

Communication is key to maintaining a health relationship. My administration believes in full transparency to all stakeholders. My administration will direct the department of parks and recreations to issue a quarterly analysis as part of the City new Quarterly reporting paradigm. Stakeholders, not for profit and the philanthropic community need

to be able to analyze the departments operating success and management's view on current operations and future spending.

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?

Yes. My administration in partnership with the different scientific stakeholders will create training programs for a GreenAtlanta. Summer programs will be offered to kids 14-18 and year-round training for young adults 19-25. Funds from the bond release will be used to fund the programs along with P3 (Public Private Partnerships) dollars raised.

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 administration as park of our adopt a park platform will analyze parks in low income zip codes to see how they are currently operating. After a review by the department of GreenAtlanta in partnership with the department of Parks and Recreation, each park will be assigned a Corporate, Private and/or Not For Profit sponsor. Equity in greenspace will be achieved under my administration.

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?

My administration will review The Atlanta City Design paradigm that was adopted. A lot has changed since 2017. My administration will work with stakeholders (NPU's, not for profit organizations) to assess the adjustments needed to bring Atlanta City Design up to date.

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?

Yes I do. My administration with city council will codify stricter tree ordinances. Atlanta tree canopy is essential for a multitude of environmental reasons. Trees help fight increasing hotter temperatures and decarbonize the air we breathe via their natural cycle of carbon absorption.

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?

Wouldn't add any addition fees or taxes to Atlanta citizens to fund stormwater infrastructure. I will review our current reserve balance to look for opportunities to fund stormwater infrastructure. Taxes and fees are regressive in nature due to the fact that we all regardless of income pay them equally. Our reserves are a much better avenue to take since most of our reserves are from taxes already collected.

Q12

Tell us why you see yourself as a greenspace champion.

My administration will create the 1st Office of Sustainability with a Chief reporting directly to the Mayor. My platform of GreenAtlanta will use greenspace infrastructure planning techniques to improve the city's land use and leverage technology to build in a cost efficient manner. My administration will join the 24/7 Carbon Free Energy Compact and commit to setting a goal of lowering Atlanta greenhouse gas emission 25% over the next 4 years.