

Candidate Pre-Interview Questionnaire

The Committee for a Better Atlanta (CBA) is a coalition of business organizations concerned about Atlanta. In 2009, CBA is interviewing candidates for mayor, City Council president and City Council with the intent of publishing a voter's guide of candidate evaluations. The evaluations will be based on the answers to the questions in this document, plus in-person interviews to be held this summer.

Your answers to these questions are very important to the CBA interview and evaluation process. ***Candidates who do not complete this questionnaire will not be scheduled for an interview with CBA.***

Please complete this questionnaire and deliver it to the Committee for a Better Atlanta so it arrives **no later than 5 p.m., July 31, 2009**. Questionnaires can be filled out electronically and emailed to cwatkins@macoc.com, or mailed to:

**Committee for a Better Atlanta
235 International Blvd., NW
Atlanta, GA 30303
Attn: Che Watkins**

If you have any questions about completing the questionnaire – or about the CBA process – please contact Che Watkins at (404) 586-8468.

Candidate information:

Name: Alex Wan

Position Sought: Atlanta City Council District 6

Address: 640 Sherwood Road NE

City, State, ZIP: Atlanta, GA, 30324

Telephone: 404-875-1016 Cell phone: 404-863-4659

E-mail address: alex@alexwanforatlanta.com

Campaign Web site address: www.AlexWanforAtlanta.com

Secondary contact information: (If you prefer that CBA direct scheduling inquiries to someone other than the candidate, check here. **yes)**

Name: Eric Gray

Relationship to candidate: Campaign Coordinator

(e.g. Administrative assistant, campaign manager, etc.)

Address: PO Box 8374

City, State, ZIP: Atlanta, GA, 31106

Telephone: 404-992-8699 Cell phone: 404-992-8699

E-mail address: egray9@gmail.com

Please answer the questions in the space provided on this questionnaire.

1. In your opinion, what are the three greatest issues (problems or opportunities) facing Atlanta?

The three greatest issues facing Atlanta are (1) public safety; (2) transportation; and (3) the City's finances. Providing public safety is the most fundamental service a government is charged to provide to its constituents. Worsened by the economic downturn, crimes are perceived by the general public to be on the rise. Response times to emergency calls have increased, and our public safety force, coming off a furlough imposed for financial reasons, suffers from low morale. Left unaddressed, this perception – whether completely accurate or not – by both residents, visitors, and those considering moving to or visiting the area will most certainly impact Atlanta's growth. Having grown up in Atlanta, I have watched the city's population increase tremendously, yet the transportation infrastructure has not expanded smartly with that growth. Much emphasis has been placed on using roads to address the need, but ultimately we can only pave so much. Less investment has been made on local and regional transit systems, and the funding models for our public transportation system are clearly not working. At some point, this capacity will limit the number of people the city can comfortably support. The city cannot sustain its growth and expansion without addressing this issue. Solutions to both public safety and transportation issues, however, are undermined by whether or not the City has the financial resources to implement them. The City of Atlanta FY2008 budget ran a \$41 million deficit, and the recently adopted FY2009 budget showed a \$50+ million deficit that was ultimately plugged by an increase in property taxes. Although the deficits are partly a result of the weak economy, they are also partly due to irresponsible decisions made without adequate concern given to the future economic impacts. The public's growing distrust of the City's ability to manage its money must be addressed by making City government more efficient and effective, while delivering first class city services.

2. Describe briefly your qualifications for holding this office. *(Please answer in the space below, but you may also attach a resume or other description to provide us with additional detail.)*

To become a world class city, Atlanta needs new, strong leadership with the education and business acumen to successfully deal with the many complex challenges we face. I bring a unique blend of skills and experience to the Atlanta City Council: demonstrated business experience and leadership and an ongoing track record of strong community service, coupled with a studied, collaborative approach to problem solving and leadership. The combination of my Industrial Engineering degree from Georgia Tech and an MBA in Finance from Wharton Business School (University of Pennsylvania) foster a sound, rational approach to problem solving and a thorough understanding of finances and budgets. As a successful business owner, I bring the knowledge needed to run local government in a businesslike way – including delivering a quality product, managing a budget, meeting payroll and making difficult decisions during tough times in a deliberate way. My active involvement in the Atlanta community provides me with familiarity about a broad range of issues, from the neighborhood level (Morningside-Lenox Park Association) to broader city-wide matters (Atlanta Development Authority Board of Directors), as well as addressing issues associated with diversity (Asian American Heritage Foundation), civil rights (Human Rights Campaign), the socio-economically disadvantaged (For the Kid in All of Us), and health/homelessness (Jerusalem House). I've built a track record of identifying issues, building consensus and getting things done. Just one example is the charitable organization I founded in 2003 to meet the needs of Atlanta's disadvantaged children, For the Kid in All of Us. I brought together partners from the business, private, and public sectors and the community to create an organization that still thrives today. For the Kid in All of Us has donated over \$380,000 in funds to benefiting organizations and provided an additional 17,000+ toys and 3,500+ backpacks with schools supplies to those children whose families could not provide for them.

3. What events or experiences caused you to decide to run for this office?

My decision to seek the District 6 City Council position is a natural extension of my history of community service. I have established a track record of continually seeking to make a difference in those areas for which I have a passion, including civil rights, community building, neighborhood support, diversity, children's causes, health issues, and economic development. I even recently took a full-time position with a non-profit organization so I could apply my education, training and experience to day-to-day work in community service. But there also comes a time when one's passions grow beyond what a private citizen can affect, and that vision can only be accomplished in a public role. What specifically made me decide to seek the City Council position is the growing frustration I feel with how the City is delivering the most fundamental services. Increasing concern with our City's ability to keep its residents and visitors feeling safe and protected; continuing disappointment with the City's financial decline (specifically fiscal management and budget); and mounting challenges like transportation and infrastructure problems that will ultimately limit our City's ability to continue to grow and prosper all compelled me to run for City Council. I have always believed that in difficult and challenging times, those with the capability and the capacity to lead and to devise constructive, productive, and meaningful solutions have the responsibility to step up and do so. The residents of District 6 deserve strong, active leadership from their councilperson, and I believe I am the most qualified candidate to represent them.

4. Please identify up to five organizations or individuals who are actively supporting your candidacy.

- 1) Kenneth Britt
- 2) Peter Chang
- 3) Anna Foote
- 4) Beth Schapiro
- 5) David Yu

5. The city government faces a \$50 million budget shortfall this fiscal year. How would you close the budget gap?

In business, closing a budget gap is accomplished either by cutting expenses or increasing revenues. City government has the option to generate revenue by raising taxes, which it recently voted to do in order to balance the next budget. That said, there is still opportunity to continue seeking ways to tighten the budget – in preparation for future shortfalls, to free up funds to strengthen certain core services, or to provide relief for taxpayers. On the expense side, in the short term, we need to take a very close look at how the City operates, and focus on delivering the core services that the public expects the city to deliver in the most efficient way possible. This examination must include (1) looking at possible elimination of services or other expenditures that do not fall within the “core services;” (2) finding more efficient ways to provide those services, including, where feasible, outsourcing to private enterprises that can deliver same or higher quality at equal or less cost; and (3) reducing bureaucracy – both in terms of processes and manpower. We also need to examine the City’s pension program for its employees and evaluate possible adjustments to keep our wages competitive while not unduly burdening our taxpayers. We must also examine the revenue side of the equation and implement measures that will expand the tax base. For example, the Atlanta Development Authority has identified four commercial corridors where smart, strategic investments in catalytic projects would jumpstart redevelopment. We should also utilize all economic incentives available to continue to attract businesses to move to or expand existing operations in the City. Only when all expense/revenue options have been exhausted should increases in property taxes be considered. By systematically – and openly and transparently – engaging in these very basic analyses, the City will earn the trust of the taxpayers as an efficient and effective steward of their money.

6. Since 2004, the city's official goal has been to have 2,000 police officers. The Police Department is now at 1,615 officers. Do you support the goal? If so, how would you pay for the additional officers given the city's budget problems?

Although 2,000 police officers is an ambitious goal, I do support it. Public safety is one of, if not the most fundamental service that the public expects its government to provide. Further, simply the perception of an unsafe environment – whether justified or not – would be a major obstacle in the City’s plan to continue growing and thriving, as that perception would certainly be a deterrent to residents considering moving to the City, businesses relocating here, and business and pleasure travelers visiting here. As your organization’s “A Platform for City Government” points out, the one avenue that the City has the most direct control over in this area is its police department, so any candidate committed to addressing public safety must support strengthening the City’s “front line.” Of course, we must have the financial wherewithal to add those staff. The recent passage of the increase in property taxes effectively closes the \$50 million operating gap in the new budget. I would propose applying savings generated by any combination of the strategies I outlined in the previous question – reducing inefficiencies (including possibly outsourcing certain operations); exploring options to make our pension burden more reasonable; and increasing tax base through economic incentives – to fund the increase in the number of police officers. I would also make it a priority to ensure that the recently awarded \$11 million of federal stimulus dollars to hire 50 new police officers are deployed quickly and as intended.

7. Mayor Franklin has used tax-allocation districts and tax abatements to support redevelopment projects. What would you have the city government do to support desirable redevelopment projects in the years ahead?

My service on the Atlanta Development Authority Board of Directors has given me a thorough understanding of the many economic tools that the city has in its arsenal to spur catalytic projects in historically underdeveloped areas. Such investments, when used strategically and deliberately, can revitalize neighborhoods and commercial corridors, stemming blight or decline in those areas and creating long-term, sustainable economic growth. The implementation of tax-allocation districts (TADs) have had a directly measurable, positive impact on the economic vitality of those areas (the growth in the tax base in TADs has historically been many times the city's overall rate of increase). And tax abatements have been used effectively to attract businesses to return and invest in areas of town where natural market forces have failed to maintain economic growth. I would certainly continue the thoughtful use of such tools to attract investment in areas that would otherwise continue to be ignored by the market. Of course, stringent evaluation criteria and processes must be followed to ensure specific projects warrant investment by the City. In addition, I would also continue utilizing the City's various loan funds (Opportunity Loan Fund, Business Improvement Loan Fund, Phoenix Fund, etc.) to layer additional assistance and incentives for small businesses to participate in the desired redevelopment. Because small businesses have long been recognized as the engine of the economy and source of much-needed new jobs, they too must play a role in devising a sustainable revitalization plan.

8. Traffic congestion is a major problem in Atlanta. If you could implement only one initiative, enhancement or management change to reduce congestion in Atlanta in the next four years, what would it be? Note: This should be something within the city government's ability to implement.

Atlanta's traffic is indeed a major issue, created by a history of spot problem solving without a long-term, forward-thinking perspective. And without a strategy to address the issue, it will only worsen as the city's population continues to grow and existing roads and interstate infrastructure reaches and/or exceeds capacity. The reality is that there is only so much we can ultimately pave, so any viable solution must include a transit component. But transportation must be addressed – and then funded -- at a state and regional (and federal) level, and the current state government leadership continues to miss out on opportunities to do so. Within that context, the City government is limited in what solutions it has the ability to implement, particularly because of the funding issue. But the Atlanta Beltline project, through its proposed network of transit, bike paths and walking trails to provide connectivity between neighborhoods, is perhaps the most promising initiative within the city's capacity to implement. The project is currently in the midst of its five-year work plan, and shepherding it through to the completion of this phase is critical to its long-term success. Therefore, I would focus on this initiative, placing particular emphasis on the transit piece of the project, while preserving the integrity of one of Atlanta's biggest strengths, its neighborhoods.

9. In your opinion, what are the three greatest infrastructure problems facing Atlanta over the next four years? Please rank them in terms of importance and urgency.

- 1) Traffic/Transportation
- 2) Transit/MARTA
- 3) A clean, affordable water supply (water source)