

Atlanta Committee *for* Progress

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Atlanta Committee for Progress Releases “Go-Forward Priorities” for City of Atlanta

Five key focus areas; “economic opportunity for all” major theme

ATLANTA — The Atlanta Committee for Progress (ACP), a partnership between the city’s top business, civic and academic leaders, and the Mayor of Atlanta, today released a public policy platform with priorities for the city’s future and recommendations for the next mayoral administration. The overarching goal of the ACP’s recommendations is to accelerate Atlanta’s competitiveness for residents, businesses and investment while expanding economic opportunity for all.

The five “Go Forward” focus areas are: (1) Maintain a financially strong city; (2) Expand economic opportunity for all; (3) Invest in transit connectivity; (4) Strengthen student achievement and (5) Keep Atlanta safe.

The recommendations set specific goals for each focus area, including keeping the city’s general fund reserve balance above 20 percent of the city’s operating budget. Since 2010, the city’s reserves have grown from \$7.4 million to more than \$175 million under Mayor Kasim Reed’s leadership. The priorities also include an increased focus on public-private partnerships to support workforce development initiatives and career readiness of Atlanta public school students.

“We’re at a critical moment in time in Atlanta’s growth and development,” said Duriya Farooqui, ACP executive director and former chief operating officer of the city of Atlanta. “The city has made tremendous progress under Mayor Shirley Franklin and Mayor Kasim Reed. We must build on that momentum so Atlanta can continue to thrive over the next decade and beyond.”

Created in 2003 by Mayor Franklin, the ACP is an example of what makes Atlanta great: Leaders from across all sectors working together for the common good of the city. The ACP has played a leading role in supporting major initiatives and policies, such as the purchase of the papers of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; the creation of the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership; the enactment of the city of Atlanta’s pension reform; and the passage of the T-SPLOST.

More recent ACP initiatives include this year’s launch of [Engage Ventures](#), which was first envisioned by Mayor Reed. Engage was founded by 10 leading Atlanta companies, in partnership with Georgia Tech, to support entrepreneurs and generate more high-tech jobs in the city. The go-to-market focused accelerator and venture fund invests in startups selected into the program, connects entrepreneurs with advisors and gives entrepreneurs what they need most — market access and distribution.

“As business leaders, we are deeply committed to helping Atlanta remain a city that attracts new business investment and a talented workforce,” said John Dyer, ACP chairman for 2017 and chief

executive officer of Cox Enterprises. “These five focus areas ensure we proactively address issues such as income inequality and lack of access to job training.”

To read more about the Go Forward priorities and learn more about the ACP, click here: www.atlprogress.org.

About the ACP

The Atlanta Committee for Progress (ACP) is a unique public-private partnership founded in 2003 by Mayor Shirley Franklin. Today, the ACP includes more than 40 highly-engaged chief executive officers, university presidents and civic leaders who offer expertise in service to Atlanta and its future development under the leadership of Mayor Kasim Reed and 2017 Chairman John Dyer, president and CEO of Cox Enterprises. The organization’s key focus areas have been public sector fiscal accountability; economic development; infrastructure and transportation; K-12 public education; technology and innovation; and enhanced quality of life.

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Go Forward Priorities

For more than 15 years, the ACP has forged a partnership between our Mayor and business leaders to support positive change in Atlanta. Together, we’ve taken big strides to strengthen the city’s financial position, spur economic development, invest in infrastructure and public safety, support our public schools, and enhance the quality of life in our city. And much more is possible.

We are ready to accelerate Atlanta’s competitiveness for residents, businesses and investment. With bold priorities and measurable goals, Atlanta can achieve its unequalled potential over the next five to 10 years. It will remain critical to ensure the future success of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, Atlanta Beltline, and Westside development. In addition, focus is needed on key priorities to help **Atlanta Go Higher**.

1. Maintain a Financially Strong City

Fiscal health is fundamental to a successful city. A strong balance sheet, ample cash reserves and efficient delivery of services enable Atlanta to invest, grow and expand opportunity for all its citizens. In the wake of the Great Recession, the city has improved its credit rating eight positions to AA+ with the three major ratings agencies, Moody’s, Standard & Poors and Fitch, allowing for bond financing at favorable rates. In addition, under the Reed Administration, the city’s cash reserves (rainy day fund) grew from \$7.4 million in January 2010 to more than \$175 million.

Goal: Maintain the city’s general fund reserves above 20 percent of its operating budget.

Why It Matters: Atlanta must continue to strengthen its balance sheet, improve its expenditure-to-reserve ratio and maintain a well-funded pension plan. It must be prepared to respond to the next economic downturn and unforeseen circumstances, without draining its cash reserves. A robust rainy day fund also allows Atlanta to maintain and improve its AA+ credit status to remain competitive with peer cities such as Austin, Charlotte, Denver and Seattle. A top-tier rating

expands Atlanta's capacity to access credit markets for bond financing and municipal improvement projects that expand growth and opportunity for all citizens.

What It Will Take: Maintaining the city's general fund reserves at above 20 percent of budget will require a Mayor and City Council who wisely manage the city's revenues and expenditures, prudently oversee the city's airport and watershed enterprise funds, and develop and approve balanced budgets without imposing undue tax increases on citizens. They must exercise discipline to outpace inflation with cost control and efficiencies in delivery services. In addition, pension costs and investments must be well-managed to sustain pension funding levels, with improved governance. It's a process that requires strong fiscal management and oversight.

2. Expand Opportunity for All

Although overall poverty rates in our region have declined in recent years, a quarter of the residents in Atlanta live below the poverty line or struggle to make ends meet. We need to expand access to jobs across all skill levels, while maintaining our low cost of living and increasing our availability of affordable housing with transit connectivity.

Goal: Increase access to jobs through workforce development and thriving affordable neighborhoods.

Why It Matters: Our city cannot fulfill its potential unless more of our citizens have access to the middle class. Rising income inequality is a major barrier to overall growth and development of the city. A quarter of Atlanta's residents live in poverty while unemployment rates for low-skill and mid-skill jobs outpace the region. No one wins if the city is divided between the haves and the have-nots.

What It Will Take: Atlanta can leverage its concentration of Fortune 500 and high growth companies to create a stronger pipeline from high school to technical training to jobs matched with skill level. Working with public and private organizations to support job development and career preparedness, beginning with public school students, is also essential. A balanced approach to growth, such as the Atlanta City Design project, that includes a strong focus on affordable mixed-income neighborhoods, with access to public transit, is critical.

3. Strengthen Student Achievement

Over the past several years, Atlanta has made great strides to improve its public education system through dynamic new leadership, an action-oriented turnaround plan, and new public-private partnerships. The School Board and Atlanta Public School system (APS) have come a long way since a cheating scandal and the potential loss of accreditation in 2010. Now we must commit to build upon the gains in student graduation rates and achievement, and better prepare students for career success.

Goal: Improve the college graduation rate and career readiness of APS students.

Why It Matters: Raising the number of students who graduate not only from high school but also from college and/or technical schools is critical for the success of the city. The school district's leaders have worked to improve high school graduation rates and those efforts must

continue. Atlanta must also push to see those who graduate from high school go on to complete either a two-year or four-year degree program or enroll in job training that leads to employment. While APS high school graduation rates have increased significantly to 77 percent, the college completion rate is about 15 percent.

What It Will Take: We need to continue to support partnerships, such as Achieve Atlanta, that support post-secondary education for APS students to improve college graduation rates. In addition, we should invest in partnerships to support career preparation in APS high schools, job training and placement services, including programs that target non-college educated youth and ex-offenders who are working to improve their life outcomes.

4. Improve Transit Connectivity

Good infrastructure powers businesses, connects workers to their jobs and creates opportunities for struggling communities. Atlanta’s voters recognized the needs for new investments through the passage of new general obligation bonds, the T-SPLOST and a tax increase for expanding MARTA. To improve commutes, reduce congestion and connect all city neighborhoods, Atlanta should continue to effectively invest in public transportation access while adopting policies that promote livable, walkable neighborhoods with mixed-income development.

Goal: Build infrastructure for sustainable growth, density and last-mile connectivity.

Why It Matters: More than two-thirds of Atlanta households are more than a mile from a transit stop. Access is especially important for low and middle-income citizens so they can get to jobs, schools and other vital services. Increasing density in historically underserved neighborhoods makes city services more efficient and builds stronger communities — leading to a safer, more livable and vibrant city.

What It Will Take: We must adopt a thoughtful and strategic plan for allocating new public dollars generated by sales taxes and bond proceeds to ensure the needs of all neighborhoods and citizens are being met. The \$3 billion in investments that have been authorized must be managed effectively and allocated transparently to maintain the public trust for supporting renewals in future capital investment.

5. Keep Atlanta Safe

Since 2009, major crime in Atlanta has dropped a remarkable 37 percent, including a 20 percent reduction in violent offenses, under the leadership of first Chief George N. Turner and now Chief Erika Shields. Mayor Kasim Reed deemed safety as his number one priority and expanded the city’s police force to 2,000 police officer positions — for the first time in the city’s history.

The city invested in new policing technology and worked with neighborhood stakeholders to ensure that their concerns were being heard and addressed through a new focus on community policing. While the city is on the right trajectory, there remains more work to do — and this should be a key focus area of the next administration.

Goal: Reduce crime by 15 percent with a focus on technology, youth and repeat offenders.

Why It Matters: No city can thrive when crime is high. Residents don't feel safe and live in fear, more vulnerable young people become susceptible to gangs and violence, neighborhoods falter, and economic development and investment tapers off — sometimes grinding to a halt. That's not the future we envision for Atlanta, and we look forward to working with a Mayor and City Council that continue to make public safety its number one priority.

What It Will Take: To keep Atlanta safe, city leaders must continue to invest in the police department with cutting-edge technology such as gunshot sensors and surveillance information technology, maintain our recruitment, training and retention efforts for police officers, and partner with the Atlanta Police Foundation. In addition, city data shows that repeat offenders account for more than 7,000 crimes in a year — and nearly three in four receive no jail time. A new approach to address repeat offenders could translate into a meaningful reduction in crime. Finally, efforts such as the @Promise Youth Center that offers youth a second chance and services for improving their lives, have the potential to seed a generational impact in Atlanta.