

## **Candidate Questionnaire for Atlanta's 2025 Citywide Elections**

### **Section I: Personal Background and Motivation**

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Brief Biography (max 250 words):

Rohit Malhotra is running for City Council President to champion a bold economic agenda for Atlanta's families, small businesses, and neighborhoods.

A lifelong public servant, Rohit has dedicated his career to strengthening public policy and community engagement. He served as an Ash Innovations Fellow in the Obama Administration, holds a policy degree from the Harvard Kennedy School, and is the founder and executive director of the nationally-recognized Center for Civic Innovation in Atlanta.

Over the past decade, Rohit has led research on economic mobility and spearheaded initiatives to improve neighborhood planning and civic engagement. His work has helped raise millions of dollars to support more than 250 local community organizations and social entrepreneurs—efforts that have meaningfully shaped public policy in Atlanta.

Rohit's commitment to public service is deeply personal. The son of Indian immigrants and lifelong small business owners, he's driven by the challenges his family faced and inspired by their resilience

### **Section II: Priorities**

1. What are your top three priorities if elected?

#### **Addressing the affordability crisis and our city's historically low economic mobility:**

Atlanta's economic boom has also widened our income inequality gap and low upward mobility to historic crisis levels that are among the worst in the country. Atlanta's greatest strength has been to be a city that can be a home for people of multiple backgrounds, income levels, and industries— but we are already seeing mass displacement and an increase in homelessness, and if we do not address affordability for families, we risk losing a large part of our population and changing the very culture and soul of our city.

### **Supporting and protecting small businesses:**

Atlanta risks losing its identity as a hub for small business development and growth. This decline is driven not only by affordability challenges but also by inadequate coordination, technical assistance, and investment in small businesses as essential components of economic development. In the early 1990s, strategic investment in small businesses enabled them to thrive during major events in Atlanta. Today, many small businesses are unprepared for upcoming opportunities. Without these enterprises, we stand to lose a vital cultural element that makes Atlanta a desirable place to live.

### **Ending gun violence:**

Gun violence remains a profound crisis in Atlanta, with a devastating impact on families and communities. While crime rates have seen some reduction, the emotional and financial toll on victims and their families continues to escalate. The Interrupting Violence in Youth and Young Adults (IVYY) Project at Grady Memorial Hospital stands at the forefront of addressing this issue. As a hospital-based violence intervention program, IVYY provides comprehensive support to survivors aged 14 to 34, aiming to reduce re-injury, retaliation, and trauma symptoms. Through a holistic approach that includes bedside engagement, outpatient care, and community collaboration, IVYY addresses the root causes of violence and supports individuals in their recovery journey. Investing in gun violence reduction strategies, such as community-based violence interruption programs, is essential to prevent further harm. Without sustained efforts and resources, our interventions risk being mere temporary solutions to a deeper, systemic issue. Gun violence is the leading cause of death among children and can destroy a family with costs that are not protected by our city or state. This is an emergency that must be a priority.

### **Section III: Public Safety**

2. The Atlanta Public Safety Training Center has sparked both support and opposition throughout our city. How do you view the Public Safety Training Center's role in shaping the future of public safety, and how would you ensure it serves the needs of both first responders and the broader community?

To build a safer Atlanta, we must start by defining public safety in a way that includes all our neighborhoods. For some residents, safety means low crime; for others, it's about safe streets, reliable transit, and strong community institutions. If we use a one-size-fits-all definition, we risk leaving many people behind.

The training facility's stated value proposition was to create cost savings, shared facilities, and better coordination among our police, fire, and EMS. Those efficiencies, if handled appropriately, can free up dollars for what I believe really moves the needle: higher first responder pay, reduced burnout, investment in mental health crisis response, and strengthened community engagement.

However, efficiencies aren't enough if the center is built without trust. I recognize many Atlantans feel left out of decisions about the Training Center — questions about environmental impact, transparency, and whether local communities were involved early and fairly. To earn that trust, I would commit to:

- Clear, ongoing disclosure of budget, scope, and decision-making;
- Early, meaningful community input on how the facility is used and how it interacts with surrounding neighborhoods;
- Strong oversight to ensure training emphasizes de-escalation, civil liberties, free speech, and that community safety includes more than policing;
- Ensuring that some of the savings from consolidation go directly into underfunded support roles, like mental health responders, community liaisons, and outreach professionals who prevent emergencies before they escalate.

Finally, we must hold ourselves to measurable outcomes. Success means not just training, but that neighborhoods feel safer, that community members feel respected, heard, and protected. Any plan for public safety should not just reduce harm and violence, and also build public trust and community.

#### **Section IV: Transportation and Infrastructure**

3. Traffic congestion, caused by delivery trucks and rideshare vehicles, physically blocks travel lanes on major roads like Peachtree and Piedmont. How can we ensure that this dangerous practice stops?

Georgia code and a few Atlanta ordinances already create prohibitions and regulations around blocking of roads by trucks or vehicles— so while there may be some legislative work to be done, a lot of these challenges are rooted in infrastructure. Atlanta, particularly on Peachtree and Piedmont, lacks options for legal parking and loading. This gives these drivers limited options. So the first solution must be to create designated and clearly marked loading/unloading zones and rideshare pick-up/drop-off zones off of main travel lanes. In Midtown, for example, Midtown Alliance and Downtown Atlanta have partnered on

a curbside management plan for how curbs are used—balancing deliveries, rideshare, parking, transit, pedestrians, bikes, etc.

While there needs to be enforcement for any egregious violations, we need to be sure we are not penalizing workers for the lack of infrastructure that needs to be dictated by the City. So in the event where these delivery and drop-off zones are clear and accessible, then it is fair for the City to regulate against violations. We are also seeing deliveries compete with already existing congestion from traffic because many delivery companies only deliver during “peak hours,” the City can incentivize off-peak deliveries with companies. For rideshare, many cities use geofencing in apps to limit picks/drops to certain zones on busy roads. We can monitor high-traffic times and areas to create these restrictions from the apps.

Part of creating this culture is to make sure signage is clear and that there is public education around the rules. This will make it clearer what is permissible and what is not, versus creating confusion or exceptions that end up just leading to temporary relief around the problem. All of this, in turn, will be measured by reduced congestion and improvement of traffic flow, greater safety for drivers, cyclists, pedestrians, decreased behaviors that block lanes, and a balance between the needs of businesses/deliveries with public safety and access.

4. What is your vision for revitalizing the Lindbergh area and addressing the visible blight along Piedmont Road, a key gateway into Buckhead? How would you work with city agencies and law enforcement to improve safety and aesthetics in this high-priority corridor?

I grew up going to the Lindbergh area and it remains one of the most underutilized transit-oriented development opportunities in the City. My vision for the Lindbergh area is to transform it into a welcoming, walkable, vibrant corridor that balances transportation efficiency, transit access, green space, retail/commercial vitality, and safety.

This means prioritizing:

- High-quality mixed-use development: Transit-oriented development (TOD) with affordable residential, retail, offices, small scale local businesses, green/open spaces (parks, pedestrian paths), and amenities that serve both residents and commuters.
- Strong public realm aesthetic: Streets that are clean, well-lit, landscaped, with consistent sidewalks, benches, street trees, public art, visible maintenance.

Facades of buildings facing the corridor improved; removal/replacement of truly blighted/abandoned structures; thoughtful signage.

- Multimodal mobility & connectivity: Better sidewalks, bike lanes, transit access, safe crossings. Reduced car-dependency; encouraging people to walk, bike, take transit. Improved pedestrian safety and comfort.
- Safety & perception of safety: More lighting, patrols, design that discourages crime (eyes on the street, activation of ground-floor commercial uses, public spaces that attract foot traffic).
- Identity & branding: Giving Lindbergh a coherent identity as more than a transit node — maybe renewed public art, signage, gateways, landscaping entrances.

As City Council President, I would see the City of Atlanta, regional agencies (MARTA, GDOT), the CIDs, and community partners working together to implement a lot of the vision behind the existing Lindbergh Master Plan. This directly involves zoning changes that include incentivizing (or require) building owners to build affordable housing and rehab or redevelop derelict/blighted properties, while offering tax incentives, façade grants to support those who that is challenging for. I also think we can use small-scale activation: pop-up parks, markets, public art, lighting installations to shift perception and usage. Additionally, we should help small businesses buy some of the property to invest in the character of the area. We can also launch a streetscape improvement program along the Piedmont corridor near Lindbergh: better sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, adding trees, public art, and consistent infrastructure aesthetics. The same lighting will help improve safety, while also working with enforcement on code enforcement for intentionally derelict properties.

5. Buckhead lacks sufficient sidewalk infrastructure, particularly in some residential neighborhoods and near schools, making walking uncomfortable and unsafe for many residents. While progress has been made in the commercial core, large portions of the community remain disconnected. What specific policies or funding strategies would you support to accelerate and incentivize sidewalk construction throughout Buckhead?

This is a citywide issue and we must incentivize a citywide plan around this type of infrastructure. As City Council President, I would want to commission a sidewalk audit across the City, including in Buckhead, to map all gaps, especially around schools, transit, and underserved neighborhoods. There are existing grants that we will become

immediately eligible for through this type of audit. I also think people need immediate results. This audit can allow us to pick a select number of missing sidewalks and complete them within a fixed time frame to show progress and popularize support. We also need to set up a system for sidewalk maintenance (e.g. reporting, scheduled inspections, funding for repairs) so once sidewalks are built, they stay in good shape. These types of changes should be a priority from the Moving Atlanta Forward Infrastructure package, but if we don't identify the right places to make the fixes, the money runs the risk of being spent in the wrong places (or not spent at all).

### **Section V: Education - Atlanta Public Schools (APS)**

6. Many schools throughout Atlanta are currently facing significant under-enrollment. As part of the ongoing Facilities Master Plan, the APS Board is considering recommendations for school consolidations and redistricting by late 2025. Specifically, APS has circulated a recent plan under community review that outlines various scenarios that could repurpose and consolidate existing facilities. What is your position on potential school closures or consolidations within APS? How do you believe these changes could impact schools in Buckhead, which currently experience some of the highest enrollment levels in the district?

Atlanta Public Schools (APS) is considering school closures and consolidations to address a projected \$100 million budget deficit, primarily attributed to salary expenditures. However, most research and national examples indicate and conclude that such closures may not yield significant financial savings. Facilities-related expenses constitute less than 10% of a school's total budget, and the costs associated with closing and repurposing buildings often offset any anticipated savings. Moreover, the plan does not address the district's historic challenges, including the frequent struggle to sell closed facilities. The true cost drivers—such as salaries and benefits—remain unaddressed.

And while there are some facilities that are in need of repair, the solution to addressing underenrollment is not directly school closure and consolidation. This treats the symptom, not the problem. We must address the actual underlying data that suggests why there is underenrollment in schools.

The impact to Buckhead schools is not clear. While North Atlanta High School has high enrollment (95-100% utilization), the majority of elementary and middle schools in North and South Atlanta are at "low utilization (< 65%)". APS must provide clear information about which schools are at risk of closure and involve community stakeholders in the decision-

making process. From there, they need to utilize enrollment data and community input to guide consolidation efforts, ensuring that decisions are based on comprehensive analysis rather than assumptions. Only then should we allocate resources in a manner that supports all schools to ensure that all students have access to quality education.

While addressing budget deficits is necessary, APS must consider the broader implications of school closures and consolidations and not use correlation as causation. By prioritizing transparency, equity, and community involvement, APS can navigate these challenges in a manner that serves the best interests of all students.

### **Section VI: Watershed**

7. Considering the recurring and increasingly severe flooding events along Peachtree Creek, what specific policies or infrastructure investments would you advocate for to mitigate future flood risks and protect vulnerable neighborhoods? How will we pay for these?

The policies and infrastructure investments I would advocate for the City to invest more in the development of rain gardens, permeable pavers, and bioswales. We also need to strengthen floodplain regulations and zoning laws (which will come up during the zoning review) to prevent harmful development in high-risk areas. Flooding and heavier rains damage homes, infrastructure, and livelihoods — again disproportionately affecting historically under-resourced communities. These aren't just environmental issues, they are justice issues. The way you pay for this, especially in light of less money allocations from the federal and state governments, is to dedicate a portion of the MOST tax toward these projects or even utilize some of our existing infrastructure dollars to include these types of improvements. Additionally, my thesis work is on social impact bonds, and we could do a social impact bond that captures future savings from flood damage and respond to make upfront investments in these type of projects. Last, this is a major role that philanthropy can play, and can help put upfront dollars to prevent long-term, irreversible damages.

8. The city has experienced multiple water main breaks and wastewater spills in recent years. What specific policies or oversight mechanisms would you support to prevent future infrastructure failures?

There are still families today impacted by the water main breaks from last year. Water must be treated like a human right and our long-term solutions need to keep sustainability and detection in mind. We know issues will happen, but how we respond to them matters. First

of all, we need to conduct a thorough evaluation of the existing water infrastructure to identify critical areas in need of repair or replacement. This assessment should prioritize high-risk zones and consider factors such as pipe age, material, and historical performance. Additionally, we must adopt advanced technologies, including AI-driven leak detection systems and predictive analytics, to monitor water usage and identify potential issues proactively. This approach can lead to quicker response times and more efficient resource management.

### **Section VII: Tree Protection Ordinance (TPO)**

9. Buckhead contains the majority of Atlanta's tree canopy and has seen significant community concern regarding the finalized Tree Protection Ordinance (TPO). How would you balance the need for development with the goal of protecting Atlanta's urban forest, especially in rapidly growing neighborhoods? What new policies or solutions, if any, would you support to strengthen the Tree Protection Ordinance (TPO) code enforcement process, currently managed by the Arborist Division within the Department of City Planning?

Across the City we need to restore the city canopy to at least 50% in all neighborhoods, measured with frequent and transparent canopy assessments. The restoration of the tree canopy needs to highly consider high-risk neighborhoods (older housing, less canopy, high heat burden) for canopy restoration: funding, street trees, shade infrastructure. I would push for policies that ensure quality of native species, resilient trees, proper maintenance.

Housing growth and development must be balanced and considered in high conservation areas where development could harm tree canopy, watersheds, or floodplains. For example, in Briarcliff Woods and other parts of the South Fork Peachtree Creek watershed, protecting natural resources must come first. Directing new housing toward transit corridors and major commercial streets allows us to grow sustainably while preserving Atlanta's critical green space.

As a way to improve enforcement, I believe we should use GIS and remote sensing to help track tree canopy changes and identify potential violations. The Arborist Division is not necessarily best resourced to manage this process—there is value in partnering with the CID or a third party to ensure that the City can focus on enforcement and a third party can focus on detection and prioritization.

### **Section VIII: Final Thoughts – How Buckhead can Help the City of Atlanta**



10. In what ways can the Buckhead community actively support the priorities you've set for your district or post within the City of Atlanta? Where do you believe Buckhead can have the most meaningful impact in advancing Atlanta's overall growth, prosperity, and quality of life?

Buckhead is an important neighborhood to Atlanta's identity—and it is integral to the city's growth. But engagement with Buckhead should not be reserved for moments of crisis. While Buckhead has historically been mobilized during pivotal votes or contentious issues, true civic participation thrives through regular, proactive involvement. This means moving beyond city-led meetings and ensuring that City Hall is present in all neighborhoods, including Buckhead, listening to its residents, businesses, and community leaders. Such consistent engagement builds trust and ensures that decisions reflect the community's needs and aspirations.

The truth is, the aspirations of Buckhead residents align with other neighborhoods across Atlanta: quality education, safe neighborhoods, economic opportunity, and cultural vibrancy. Buckhead's investments in institutions, green spaces, and small businesses—and also the CID model itself—can serve as models for the entire city. There are also efforts and initiatives that can help Buckhead feel more integrated as a part of the city. All communities want that. By integrating Buckhead into broader citywide initiatives, we not only enrich Buckhead but also strengthen Atlanta's collective identity.

As City Council President, I will collaborate with entities such as Livable Buckhead and the Buckhead Community Improvement District, which are already working to improve the area's infrastructure and community engagement. I will encourage partnerships between Buckhead and other neighborhoods to share resources, knowledge, and best practices.

By embracing a neighborhood-by-neighborhood approach, we ensure that every part of Atlanta, including Buckhead, contributes to and benefits from the city's growth and prosperity