

The New Face of Atlanta

An Interview with the Honorable Shirley Franklin, Mayor, Atlanta

EDITORS' NOTE After earning a B.A. in sociology at Howard University and an M.A. in sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, Shirley Franklin entered public service in 1978, serving as Atlanta's commissioner of cultural affairs and, later, as the nation's first female chief administrative officer/city manager under Mayors Andrew Young and Maynard Jackson. She left city government to serve as senior vice president of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games. In 1997 she formed the management and consulting firm Shirley Clarke Franklin & Associates, and in November 2001, she was elected Atlanta's first female mayor. Franklin actively serves on more than 40 boards and committees, and is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the 1996 and 2002 Woman of the Year Awards from the YWCA and honorary doctor of laws degrees from her alma mater, Howard University, and from Dillard University in New Orleans.



Hon. Shirley Franklin

How has your administration restored financial stability to Atlanta?

When my administration started, the first order of business was to fully assess the city's previous annual budgets. We worked very closely with Atlanta's CFO and an outside consulting firm, Bain & Company, to conduct a full-scale assessment of the budget over the 10-year period prior to my term in office. Then we compared the cost of our services against costs in eight other U.S. cities' governments, and we concluded that we could reformat our departments in a number of areas to lower costs and raise efficiency. So I've sought out best practices from our sister cities around the country and from businesses, and incorporated those practices into our operations.

We have reorganized or restructured every single city department, downsized personnel where we were clearly overstaffed, and consolidated services and operations across the city. We will do that each

and every year. We have also frozen any nonessential services, like cell-phone privileges for departments that didn't need them. We're sticklers about the allocation of equipment and other resources.

How have you brought more transparency to Atlanta's government?

Today, Atlanta has the most stringent ethics and disclosure requirements of any government in Georgia. I ap-

pointed an outside ethics panel to conduct a line-by-line review of the city's ethics ordinances. They recommended some significant changes in the city's disclosure policies, and we adopted them within the first six months of my term.

Also within that time, the city council formed an independent board, whose members are appointed by independent legal, business, civic, and educational organizations. That panel is empowered to review disclosure forms and investigate any charges of wrongdoing. These measures established the Franklin administration and the city council as entities that would not cut corners in terms of ethics and conflicts of interest.

How have you brought crime down so significantly?

We hired Chief of Police Richard Pennington, who has more than 30 years of law-enforcement experience, and asked him to develop a 100-day plan for preventing and fighting crime. That plan called for the formation of the Atlanta Police Foundation, which conducted major research on Atlanta's crime statistics. This assessment led to very specific recommendations regarding the staffing of the police department and the need for increased compensation and additional training.

We also implemented COBRA [Command Operations Briefings to Revitalize Atlanta], an accountability system that has resulted in some astounding decreases in crime. This year, overall crime is down 11 percent. Finally, we established a fugitive squad, and have vigorously enforced petty and quality-of-life crimes, which, research

shows, lead people to commit more serious crimes. We are on our way to having a major impact on crime, but we have to remain vigilant and aggressive.

What other quality-of-life improvements have been made?

Our Commission on Homelessness has developed a blueprint for the reduction of homelessness over the next 10 years. We're looking at the best programs for the homeless around the country and retrofitting those programs to work for Atlanta.

I've also proposed to the city council that we double the amount of park space in Atlanta. We lose 50 acres of land every day to development in metro Atlanta. I'm in favor of new development, but we want to preserve our green space, which contributes to the overall quality of life in the city.

How have you addressed issues of economic development in Atlanta?

My administration has implemented two initiatives that will dramatically impact long-term economic development in Atlanta. First is the \$3-billion upgrade of our water and sewer system, which will be completed in 2014. We need to serve the additional two million people who will move to Atlanta in the next 20 years, continuing our transition from a quiet southern city to a major metropolitan area.

We've also gotten the expansion of the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport back on track. There is now a fifth runway under construction that will alleviate some of the delays associated with air travel into and out of Atlanta.

Have you had a productive relationship with the private sector?

I have reached out to business leaders in innumerable ways. They have donated more than \$15 million in cash and in-kind services. As such, we have a very extensive program related to public-private partnerships and improving government. In addition to that, we have open lines of communication with the private sector. Opening and maintaining those lines of communication provides the stimulus to make Atlanta a best-in-class city. ●