

CREATIVE LOAFING

Meet Atlanta's new planning commissioner

Tim Keane leaves Charleston to help right Atlanta's public realm wrongs

THOMAS WHEATLEY — JULY 23, 2015



SUNDANCE KID: Planning Commissioner Tim Keane speaks to residents and activists on July 15. | ERIC CASH

Tim Keane, Atlanta's newly appointed planning commissioner, is saying all the right things.

Bikes? The Charlotte, N.C., native says Atlanta's streets need to make more room for 'em. Good urban design? It's possible and necessary, he says. Traffic? Every great city in the world has it, and Atlanta should focus on helping people avoid gridlock with alternatives, such as MARTA.

Now all Keane, who recently started the City Hall job after leading Charleston, S.C.'s planning division, has to do is deliver.

The dapper 50-year-old told members of the Northwest Community Alliance on July 15 that he wants the city, one that for decades has been the epitome of erratic car-centric planning, to be more than just a collection of buildings.

"We are responsible for the public realm of the city — the spaces we share," Keane said. "This is a big challenge ... There are many good things happening here. [But] if the city continues to be a series of projects, I will have failed."

Keane will be tested on that promise. Between now and when Mayor Kasim Reed leaves, prospective developers plan to start work on the overhauls of the Boisfeuillet Jones Atlanta Civic Center and Turner Field. Atlanta film mogul Tyler Perry will soon start turning 330 acres of Fort McPherson into a movie production hub. A South Carolina-based real estate developer will give Underground Atlanta an estimated \$400 million makeover. There's also the issue of reforming the department's permits office, which the city auditor recently scolded for building a hefty reserve and not using best practices to prevent potential conflicts of interest.

Keane, who will have to convince Reed's successor to stick around after 2017, acknowledges he has a steep learning curve ahead in Atlanta. Yet he's already started touring the city, chatting with developers and business leaders, and brainstorming how the city's urban core could evolve during this most recent building bonanza.

He declined to issue a grand vision for Atlanta, but noted that it's up to him, city planners, and the community to make sure developers stick to the basics. For example, the first floor of a mixed-use building should work well with the street. And he echoed an earlier point: that the city can't be just a series of disconnected projects.

But why would a planner in one of America's most beautiful coastal cities, where officials seem to care about preservation, public spaces, and urban design, want to come to a city that bulldozes much of its past and rushes toward its future, planning be damned?

Keane says he loves the South, and that working in the region's biggest city — one that came of age when cars were king — is an exciting challenge. Plus, he sensed from talks with Reed that the mayor cares about planning, urbanism, and more options for bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders. He thinks that Atlantans feel the same.

"There's ground to cover," he says. "But maybe we make a lot of progress relatively quickly. It seems like there's a lot of consensus that these need to be done."

JOIN THE CONVERSATION!

This site requires you to [login](#) or [register](#) to post a comment.



Posted by Sophisticated Urbanite

Jul 23 2015 10:05

Yes,
please; someone save us!



Posted by 13th-Streeter

Jul 23 2015 13:06

He seems to be taking broadly about the Atlanta region. Should we send him a map of the city limits?



Posted by cartographer

Jul 23 2015 16:08 Or

just send him a map of his asshole since he apparently can't find it with both hands.



Posted by Y'all are too predictable

Jul 23 2015 19:33

don't see anything at all in this article that suggests Keane is anything less than familiar with Atlanta's boundaries, or is focused on anything outside of them. I do see a couple of examples of the one-note sour tone of CL's comments section, sadly.



Posted by wesleywhatwhat

Jul 23 2015 23:24 For

real. What are the second and third commenters babbling on about?



Posted by Tom G

Jul 24 2015 11:01 Alth

many in the Balkan States surrounding Atlanta that think of nothing outside their territorial boundaries, it is good that someone will consider not just on the local effects of planning, but the regional outcomes. I sincerely hope he works with the folks that actually live in the city to reduce the effects of overzealous developers, and poorly planned projects.



Posted by Burroughston Broch

Jul 24 2015 11:14 @

Tom G "I sincerely hope he works with the folks that actually live in the city to reduce the effects of overzealous developers, and poorly planned projects.."

Do you think he has the stripes on his sleeves and the political courage to protect you from the Mayor, City Council, and all the City career bureaucrats?



Posted by Burroughston Broch

Jul 24 2015 13:10 @

Tom G "Although many in the Balkan States surrounding Atlanta that think of nothing outside their territorial boundaries, it is good that someone will consider not just on the local effects of planning, but the regional outcomes." This is precisely what the Atlanta Regional Commission and its predecessors have been empowered to do for the last 68 years, with little positive effect to show for their existence. Mr. Keane had best focus his efforts on serving the citizens of the City who pay him.



Posted by Tom G

Jul 25 2015 13:59 @Bu

If we all think that way, then things will never improve. Change has to start somewhere. It's not all about 'me'. Sad.



Posted by Burroughston Broch

Jul 25 2015 17:55 @

Tom G "It's not all about 'me'." My impression of Mr. Keane is that he is all about him. I suggest he get the City of Atlanta fixed first before he widens his view. And I wish him success.

Posted by CHANCEY ANDRELL PORTER FOR MAYOR OF

Jul 26 2015 13:59



CHANCEY ANDRELL PORTER FOR
MAYOR OF ATLANTA GA U.S.A 2017 CHANCEY ANDRELL PORTER MY
CHANCEY ANDRELL PORTER
PLATFORM IS THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF GOD OF THE Holy Bible(SEE
HAMMURABI CODE OF
LAW) CHANCEY ANDRELL PORTER



Posted by 13th-Streeter

Jul 28 2015 14:27 Let

me
clarify my earlier comment. Keane stated, "that he wants the city, one that for
decades has been the epitome of erratic car-centric planning, to be more
than
just a collection of buildings." This is factually incorrect. The City of
Atlanta has been advancing innovative transit-oriented planning and zoning
for
decades. How do you think Midtown and Lindbergh Center were built? Not to
mention all of the great stuff going up in the Historic 4th Ward and West
Midtown. Many of the city's special public interest (SPI) zoning districts have
no minimum parking requirements (try to find one in Charleston). Almost all
of
the city's federal and local transportation funds have been spent on bicycle,
pedestrian and transit projects since the 1990s. A roadway has not been
widened
within the city limits in years. His comments are more applicable to Cobb and
Gwinnett Counties. He's not going to win any allies at City Hall by disparaging
all of the great work that has already been completed. Granted, there is
definitely more that can be done, particularly around public space and using
public investment to support private redevelopment.



Posted by The Othet Donald

Jul 30 2015 08:33

May

I offer a list to start with? Pick one and focus on completing it before the next one. Simple Mayor Kaseem Reed failures: 1. The Atlanta Street Car - a project now \$40M over the \$60M budget, for a route to nowhere outside the downtown area and late on schedule for longer than 9 mos. Dec. 23rd announced:

Hello, The Atlanta Streetcar will open on the morning of Tuesday, December 30th. Stay tuned for event details to follow. A.J. Robinson Dave

Stockert President Chairman Central Atlanta Progress,

Inc. The Atlanta Streetcar project opened Dec 30th without much fanfare. It truly is a tourist ride to nowhere. Let's take the next step to connecting it to somewhere - Midtown and Ga Tech. 2. The Atlanta Braves negotiations fiasco

that resulted in the Braves leaving Atlanta's Stadium for a new stadium in Cobb

County. There were numerous plans for redeveloping the surrounding land at Turner Field, all to no avail in negotiations with the city and the Braves. 3.

There still is no signed contract with Ga State or other entity for developing the soon to be abandoned Turner Field properties. Feb 26, 2015 The neighborhoods around Turner Field have been awarded a \$212,000 grant to study

development possibilities for the surrounding area after the Atlanta Braves leave for their new Cobb County stadium. Still no signed deal with GA State or

Developer in the purchase of the Turner field properties. July 2015 - Stadium neighborhoods want input. July 23, 2015 - Mayor is talking to Three Gaming companies to turn Turner Field into a Casino. MGM is not interested in building

a 1.1B\$ casino in Downtown Atlanta. 4. There is finally a new redevelopment deal in the works for the low occupancy Underground Atlanta property. City announced mid 2014 that Big Plans were in the works. Still nothing has surface

until Dec 2014 when all land apparently sold to a developer for \$25M - quite the

bargain. Stay tuned for more details of final dev. WRS will pay the city \$25.75 million for 12 acres of downtown real estate, which the city will use to pay off the remaining debt on the property. Why would there be 25\$m debt after 30 years?

February 23, 2015: The redevelopment of Underground Atlanta appears to be underway. WRS, the South Carolina-based firm, is in the process of purchasing

the property from the City of Atlanta, and it has begun planning for its redevelopment. - See more at:

<http://saportareport.com/involve-greater-community-in-design-of-underground-atlantas-redevelopment/#sthash.x3LKB8ax.dpuf>

July 7, 2015: The developer of the re-envisioned Underground Atlanta says the

total investment in the project likely will be between \$350 million and \$400 million. That's about double previous estimates that have been announced for the

Underground Atlanta redevelopment project. 5. The negotiations for the Atlanta

Falcons to stay in the city had been suspect. \$200 M was offered from the Hotel

Tax revenue, for the 1.4B\$ stadium (now 400M\$ over budget). Still no other plan

for surrounding neighborhood or Vine City Station to be improved with Fan Experience development. 6. Civic Center Site is another city owned property that is slated for redevelopment but no future Developer has won negotiations

with the City. July 24,2015 City claims the Atlanta Hawks are interested in the Civic Center Site as one of three options. For more than a year now the City

has tried to sell the 20ac site which has been a drain on Atlanta's Budget.

Mayor Reed said he would support any reasonable plan to ensure the Hawks remain

in Atlanta. 7. Dec. 5 2014 - After more than eight months seeking to buy most of Fort McPherson to redevelop into a major movie production studio,

filmmaker Tyler Perry is having second thoughts, and has pulled out of his negotiations with MILRA and the City of Atlanta. Dec. 8th. Reed originally brokered the deal with Perry in June before taking the project to the McPherson

Implementing Local Redevelopment Authority, or MILRA, for approval. Reed now

appoints another City Council member to the development board AND asks that the

Governor get involved. A clear sign of political weakness and lack of redevelopment knowhow. 8. Dec 1, 2014 Mayor Reed says city has a \$900M backlog

of infrastructure improvements, 4 bridges rated near collapse. Put this on the Mayor Reeds "To Do" to accomplish list:

[http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/morning_call/2014/11/mayor-reed-city-has-900m-backlog-of-infrastructure.html?](http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/morning_call/2014/11/mayor-reed-city-has-900m-backlog-of-infrastructure.html?ana=e_atl_rdup&s=newsletter&ed=2014-11-28&u=qgGEne/6DISGo6ZCVGFaw97WIVo&t=1417199356)

[ana=e_atl_rdup&s=newsletter&ed=2014-11-](http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/morning_call/2014/11/mayor-reed-city-has-900m-backlog-of-infrastructure.html?ana=e_atl_rdup&s=newsletter&ed=2014-11-28&u=qgGEne/6DISGo6ZCVGFaw97WIVo&t=1417199356)

[28&u=qgGEne/6DISGo6ZCVGFaw97WIVo&t=1417199356](http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/morning_call/2014/11/mayor-reed-city-has-900m-backlog-of-infrastructure.html?ana=e_atl_rdup&s=newsletter&ed=2014-11-28&u=qgGEne/6DISGo6ZCVGFaw97WIVo&t=1417199356)

Jan. 2015: Mayor Kasim Reed has made the infrastructure bonds a key goal of his

second term, a down payment on a \$900 million backlog of needed improvements.

The Reed administration is still working on a final project list to present to the city council in the coming weeks. 9. Dec 18, 2014 - The Georgia Baptist Convention is asking Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed to reinstate, and apologize to,

Atlanta Fire Chief Kelvin Cochran. In late November, Reed suspended Cochran for

one month without pay after the fire chief published a book that says homosexuality and having multiple sexual partners is "vile," "vulgar", and "inappropriate". 10. January 22,2015; Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed has said that he

doesn't intend to pursue funding for the Multi Modal Transit Station project during his remaining time in office; he senses a lack of political will to get the project started during his second term. He lacks a true transit vision for

Atlanta. 11. Atlanta lost the highly sought-after federal Choice grant awards in 2014, to say city leaders were disappointed would put it mildly. Atlanta had been one of six finalists for the \$30 million neighborhood revitalization grants

that ended up being awarded to four cities – Columbus, Ohio; Norwalk, Conn.; Philadelphia, Pa.; and Pittsburgh, Pa. But the city of Atlanta has bounced back.

It is busy improving its application for a \$30 million Choice grant to improve the Vine City neighborhood as well as the communities around the Atlanta University Campus and Ashview Heights. The deadline is Feb. 9, 2015

Jan 4,

2015 - City proposing 30-acre "ATL Energy Park" at Hartsfield-Jackson

June

24, 2015 On Tuesday, the city held its last public hearing on the overall \$3.6 billion, 25-year transportation plan. A part of that is to expand the Atlanta Streetcar to the city's BeltLine. To do it, the hopes to win nearly \$30 million in federal grant money. So far the newly opened Trolley Car project had failed miserably due to its route to nowhere status. 14. July 30, 2015 The City announces the arrival of Atlanta's new City Planning Commissioner - Tom Keane

Tim Keane leaves Charleston to help right Atlanta's "public realm wrongs"!

15. July 29, 2015 The City continues to work towards a plan for an Airport hotel. Negotiations have been ongoing since January 2015. City officials want

to break ground early next year on a new mixed-use project that would include a

four-star hotel at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. Three development teams are vying for the project: Atlanta-based Regent Partners; a

second team including Atlanta-based Carter, Majestic Realty Co. and GPM Investments LLC; and a third firm, Airmall USA Inc.



Hey

@Donald: half of the stuff you list has nothing to do with the Department of Planning & Community Development. Keane is a new department head, not a new

mayor. This position has historically been pretty ineffectual. I see no reason for it to change any time soon. There are just too many cooks in the kitchen in

the Atlanta planning realm (i.e. Atlanta BeltLine, Inc., Invest Atlanta, three CIDs, City Council, NPUs, MARTA, ARC, GRTA, GDOT, GA Tech, GA State), all doing

their own thing.

RELATED

