

Leading Through Challenging Times

Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms

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On May 6, 2021, with seven months left in her mandate, Keisha Lance Bottoms, the mayor of Atlanta, Georgia, announced that she would not seek reelection—a first since the 1970s. She remarked, “It was one of the most difficult decisions of my life, and it was even more difficult to say aloud what I was feeling. I didn’t feel the passion in my heart that I needed to feel going into another mayoral race.”¹

The announcement came as a shock to many political observers in Georgia and around the United States. Bottoms was a popular figure in Atlanta with nearly 70% approval ratings.² She was also a rising star in the Democratic Party. During the 2020 presidential election, the Biden team had vetted her as a potential vice-presidential candidate. She later declined a position in President Biden’s cabinet.³

With just seven months left in her administration, Bottoms looked back on her first three years in office. She had worked hard to fulfill her campaign’s ambition to “keep Atlanta moving forward, leaving no one behind.” She saw some successes and lessons learned, even as she wondered what could have been if she had served her city in different times. Her time in office coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and a wave of racial justice protests in many U.S. cities, including Atlanta. She would be leaving office in 2022 to a world that had changed dramatically since her election. At this juncture, she considered some of the major issues she had faced, what she had learned from them, and how she wanted to direct her energy to make the most difference in the next few months.

Keisha Lance Bottoms

Bottoms was born and raised in Atlanta and attended Atlanta public schools. Her father was the R&B star Major Lance, who had a successful music career in the 1960s and 1970s. Bottoms described him as “the most wonderful, kind-hearted, loving person” she knew. However, Lance struggled with addiction, which, she noted, “led to some very bad choices and eventually incarceration.” Bottoms had vivid memories of visiting her father in prison: “I can remember the smell of the prison; the sound of the doors locking and unlocking. I remember standing in a large gymnasium with groups of people all over the room. An incarcerated Black man was in the center of each group and his family would be standing or sitting all around. I remember thinking about the sheer number of Black men in that prison.”

Bottoms was raised mostly by her mother. When Bottoms was in high school, local attorney Alvin Kendall became a friend of the family and eventually a central figure in Bottoms’ life. He remarked, “I know Keisha like she’s my own daughter. She worked summers in my law office through college while she was going to Florida A&M, and I encouraged her to go to law school at Georgia State. Then after she graduated, I gave her her first job as a lawyer.”⁴ Bottoms noted that her family’s experience with

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the justice system and incarceration led her to pursue a career in the law after her graduation in the early 1990s. She hoped to help others who had the misfortune to end up in her father's position, or prevent them from heading down a path that would lead to prison.

In the 1990s, Bottoms worked as a prosecutor and represented children in juvenile court, then in 2002, she became a magistrate judge. In 2008, she ran for election to unseat a Fulton County (Atlanta's county) judge, but lost. Then in 2009, she won a seat on the Atlanta City Council to represent District 11 in southwest Atlanta. She was reelected in 2013. She described her work ethic and upbringing as appealing to her constituents, "I've always been a workhorse, not a show horse. That has served me well. As a member of the City Council, it's easy for your constituents to see and feel who you are when you're representing them. I have a strong sense of right and wrong, and I'll fight for fairness. My mother taught me to treat people the way I want to be treated, not the way they behave towards me. When you do that, good will always come back to you."

Bottoms' time on the City Council coincided with the mayoralty of fellow Democrat Kasim Reed, a former state representative and state senator. In 2017, as Reed's second term ended and he was precluded from running again due to term limits, Bottoms announced her candidacy. Reed endorsed her in October 2017. Bottoms ran on a progressive platform. She advocated for criminal justice reform, improved housing affordability, economic mobility, and transportation equity (see **Appendix 1**).

On election day, Bottoms was the top vote-getter among many candidates but only won 26% of votes. Georgia elections required an absolute majority to win, so Bottoms was forced into a run-off election with the second-place candidate, independent City Councilor Mary Norwood. Bottoms won the run-off in December 2017 and was sworn into office as Atlanta's 60th mayor on January 2, 2018. Bottoms was the sixth Black mayor of Atlanta and the second Black woman to hold the office.

Atlanta, Georgia

Established in 1837, Atlanta originated as a terminal for the Western and Atlantic Railroad. By the 1860s, additional railroads expanded to the city, transforming it into a central transportation hub in the American South.⁵ Atlanta was a significant center of Confederate activity during the U.S. Civil War, prompting Union General William Tecumseh Sherman to besiege and burn large swaths of the city. After the war, Atlanta quickly re-established economic ties with the North.⁶ In the mid-twentieth century, Atlanta became a focal point of the Civil Rights Movement. Martin Luther King, Jr. was born and raised in the city, and in 1973, Atlanta elected Maynard Jackson as its first Black mayor.⁷ By the 1970s, the city cultivated a reputation as a place where Black Americans could prosper, prompting *Ebony* magazine to dub Atlanta "the Black Mecca of the South."⁸

Many Atlantans still lived in racially segregated neighborhoods in 2021—one source ranked Atlanta as the second-most segregated city in the U.S.⁹ The southern part of the city was predominantly Black, while the most northern districts were predominantly white (see **Appendix 2**).¹⁰ Some observers attributed the trend to redlining, a policy from the 1930s that refused to grant mortgages for homes in areas deemed "high risk," typically neighborhoods with high Black populations.¹¹

Atlanta was one of the fastest-growing areas in the U.S., with the population increasing by more than 700,000 during the 2010s.¹² Some experts anticipated that the area's population would increase by another 3 million residents by 2050.¹³ Local leaders stated that they believed the city would experience more growth than the region's suburbs and was "poised to benefit from national trends of population shifting from suburbs to exurbs back to urban cores driven by transportation costs, traffic congestion, and a renewed interest in urban living, which is particularly prevalent in the Atlanta metro region."¹⁴

By 2021, roughly 520,000 people lived in Atlanta. Slightly more than half of the city's population was Black, while 41% was white.¹⁵ However, the proportion of Black Atlantans relative to the overall population had declined 10% since 2000.¹⁶ Atlanta households' median income was roughly \$60,000,¹⁷ while almost 21% of city residents lived in poverty.¹⁸ Black families in Atlanta were generally poorer than other demographics, with a median household income of just \$28,000, compared to \$43,000 for Latino families, \$67,000 for Asian American families, and more than \$83,000 for white families.¹⁹ The average Black-owned business in Atlanta was worth just 8.8% of the average white-owned business.²⁰

Mayor Bottoms' Early Successes and Setbacks

Bottoms entered office in 2018 looking to fulfill her campaign pledges. Jon Keen, the city's chief operating officer, a senior member of Bottoms' staff, explained, "She came into office focused on equity-related agenda items. We developed plans and had key metrics associated with each area—housing, transportation, economic mobility, and criminal justice. Atlanta had the highest levels of inequity in the nation. We all felt we needed to address these issues...and then other things started to get in the way."²¹ (see **Appendix 3** for staff bios.)

In her first week in office, Bottoms proposed eliminating cash bail bonds for pretrial detainees. Cash bail bonds served as a way to ensure that individuals accused of crimes would show up for trial. Unusual in other parts of the world, cash bail bonds were common in much of the U.S., and an industry of bail bondsmen had developed to provide the bail money at a low upfront cost to the accused and guarantee the debt with collateral. Some saw cash bail as discriminatory against poorer people and people of color more likely to end up in jail because they could not produce enough bail money.²²

In Atlanta, pretrial detainees who could not make bail were taken to the Atlanta City Detention Center (ACDC), a seven-story jail in the heart of the city with room for about 1,500 prisoners (see **Appendix 4**). Bottoms wanted Atlanta to "get out of the jailing business," and her proposal to eliminate cash bail was the first step in that process.²³ By early February 2018, the City Council passed the proposal, and Bottoms signed it into law. The prisoner population in ACDC quickly dropped as many more pretrial detainees were released on signature bonds and did not have to worry about posting bail.

Then on the morning of March 22, 2018, hackers conducted a ransomware attack on the city's computer system. The attack locked down all data on infected computers, and the hackers demanded a ransom payment of 6 Bitcoins, worth about \$50,000 in total at the time.²⁴ The city immediately shut down its computer network to try to stop the spread of infected machines. City Hall staff turned to pencil and paper to continue working. Bottoms remarked, "The cyberattack took us down for months, and we never fully recovered all that was lost." It cost the city almost \$17 million;²⁵ Bottoms did not pay the ransom, noting, "Instead, we chose to put resources toward building the systems that we

should have had in place before the attack and that we would need to withstand potential future attacks.”

Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Atlanta had begun investigating the Reed administration that had just departed City Hall. Bottoms added: “I had a good relationship with Mayor Reed when I was on the City Council, and he endorsed my candidacy,” Bottoms said. “To some, that means I’m tainted. I have had to go out of my way in many cases to make a clear break with the Reed administration because of the distrust the investigation engendered.” Added City Attorney Nina Hickson: “From the early days of the new administration, we’ve been getting subpoenas from the Department of Justice. We’ve produced millions of documents and spent millions of dollars on outside counsel. The investigation cast a cloud over our administration. We’ve lost good employees who hadn’t bargained for the added scrutiny that came with the investigation. People assume that Mayor Bottoms and her administration are corrupt because the previous administration is being investigated. It’s very hard, and it takes up a lot of energy, resources, and time.”²⁶

Despite the distractions, Bottoms and her team forged on with their work. In June 2018, Bottoms issued an executive order terminating Atlanta’s contract with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) which had allowed ICE to house their detainees in ACDC while they were awaiting deportation. Atlanta’s Hartsfield-Jackson Airport was one of the busiest in the world, and many deportees left the U.S. on flights from the airport, which made ACDC a convenient site for the agency.

Ending the ICE contract further decreased the population in ACDC—down to about 200 people every night. ACDC detainees were typically housed for seven days or less, and many detainees were not sentenced to any prison time after their trial. The most serious crimes that ACDC detainees were accused of included possession of small amounts of drugs, vagrancy, homeless people trespassing on private property, or people driving under the influence of alcohol. Violent crimes, drug trafficking, major theft, or other more serious issues were handled at the county, state, or federal level.

Bottoms and her administration believed that the \$30 million the city spent annually to run and upkeep ACDC could be better spent on mental health services, addiction counseling, homelessness reduction, and other services that would keep people out of the criminal justice system. In August 2018, she called on the City Council to explore the sale of ACDC and replace it with a center for equity.

The Gulch Redevelopment

The Gulch, also known as Centennial Yards, was in central Atlanta just east of the city’s National Football League (NFL) stadium and south of its National Basketball Association (NBA) arena. It was a mix of vacant lots, parking facilities, railroad tracks, and roadways. Bottoms and her team saw the area’s redevelopment as important to improve economic mobility and make a dent in housing affordability in Atlanta. To Keen, it was “basically a hole in the middle of downtown.”

The Gulch redevelopment was an extraordinarily complicated transaction. Pieces of land for the deal were separately owned by railroad companies, the City of Atlanta, the city’s mass transit agency, the state of Georgia, and other owners. During the Reed administration, the Georgia State Legislature had passed a bill allowing the city to begin negotiations with CIM, a Los Angeles-based real estate

developer, to buy and redevelop the property. CIM co-founder Richard Ressler's brother, Tony Ressler, was the principal owner of the Atlanta Hawks NBA team, so CIM was familiar with the site and the possibilities it offered for redevelopment. Negotiations began soon after Bottoms took office. She assigned Kendall to lead the discussions for the city beginning in February 2018.

Negotiating with CIM

Kendall remarked, "People were a bit surprised when the mayor picked me to negotiate the deal. I don't know anything about a \$5 billion deal, but then again, no one in the government of Atlanta had ever negotiated a \$5 billion deal, so I knew just as much as anyone else. She asked the city attorney to give me an engagement letter to make it official."

It was still early in Bottoms' administration, so Kendall saw some second-guessing among City Hall staff who had held over from Mayor Reed's administration. He continued, "There was a feeling of, 'Who is this guy? Why is she choosing him?' I had served time in federal prison in the 1990s and had my law license revoked, but later, when I got out, the Supreme Court of Georgia reinstated me. Some people held that against me, but the mayor said, 'If you have a problem with his qualifications, take it up with the Supreme Court of Georgia.' The city attorney refused to give me the engagement letter, so by March or April of 2018, the mayor asked her entire cabinet for resignation letters and decided whom to keep. The engagement letter arrived the next day. A new city attorney started later that summer."

Kendall and the other members of Bottoms' team worked with CIM for months to craft an agreement. CIM's negotiations with the Georgia State Legislature had resulted in the creation of an enterprise zone that would allow CIM to use some of the sales tax generated by the development to pay for some of the costs of the development. CIM wanted Atlanta to issue \$400 million worth of bonds to cover some construction costs and proposed using their enterprise zone sales tax revenue to pay back the bonds.

The city agreed to those terms, but required concessions from CIM, including \$28 million for an affordable housing trust fund, guarantees that a certain percent of housing units in the development would be affordable, a \$12 million economic development fund, construction of a police station and a fire station on the site, and many other concessions (see **Appendix 5**). The negotiations were long and hard. Bottoms got personally involved in discussions with Ressler on several occasions to ensure the deal kept moving forward. Hickson, who was the new city attorney who took the job in August 2018, noted, "It really took Mayor Bottoms' presence and participation to get the deal over the hump."

Charletta Wilson-Jacks, Bottoms' deputy director of government affairs, who was charged with liaising with City Council, explained that the Gulch deal was personally important for Bottoms: "The mayor has always been focused on the groups in the city who have historically been disenfranchised. A lot of those groups were her City Council constituents on the southwest side of Atlanta. This development would not only revitalize a hole in the ground downtown, but it would employ a lot of people from the southwest side, and the residual benefits of the Gulch development would be felt in those neighborhoods. Some people viewed this development as Mayor Reed's because the deal started under his administration. But Mayor Bottoms saw this development as a major revitalization and economic boost for affordable housing, employment, and redevelopment of vacant and underutilized parcels. She was genuine in her commitment to this development for the benefit of all Atlanta."²⁷

Negotiating with the City Council

In August 2018, Bottoms and her team released the deal details to the public and City Council and asked the council for support. “That was a mistake,” explained Bottoms. “I was very naïve entering the negotiations. It was early in my tenure. I approached the Council from the vantage point of my time there. Even if I disagreed with Mayor Reed, if it was a good policy, I supported it. I assumed all of my council members thought the same way. I didn’t include them in the negotiations at all. We tried to anticipate anything anyone would ask for and build it into the deal. I think it was an extraordinary deal, but we didn’t allow anyone else to feel like they had input.” Early support from City Council was tepid.

Public opposition to the deal sprang up quickly. A group called Redlight the Gulch formed and began protesting. One of its leaders, Julian Bene, said, “The benefits don’t even come to a fraction of what we’re giving up. [. . .] It’s clearly a ridiculous trade.”²⁸ (See **Appendix 6** for more examples of opposition to the Gulch deal.) Keen noted, “We saw the deal as a very progressive win, but we were getting hammered from the progressive side of the city. They didn’t think we were getting enough out of it.”

Bottoms faced an early setback when City Council’s Community Development/Human Services subcommittee held a hearing on the deal. She personally attended the meeting to advocate for the deal—a step that Atlanta mayors had rarely done in the past, but the committee rejected her arguments and voted against it. “That’s when we realized this wouldn’t be easy,” said Keen. Several members of the City Council voiced opposition to the deal. The mayor and her team had conversations with councilmembers, but as Chief of Staff Carmen Chubb noted, “With some Councilors, there was no point of satisfaction. We would agree to certain changes, but it didn’t change their vote.”²⁹

Through September and October 2018, Bottoms and her team negotiated with City Councilors and CIM to adjust the deal and build support for a vote. One surprising ally was City Councilor Howard Shook, who represented a district on the north side of the city. He opposed the deal from day one and would never change his vote, but, noted Wilson-Jacks, “We could appreciate his honesty in letting his ‘no’ be his ‘no.’ He was instrumental in helping us navigate some of the other ‘no’ votes on council.” Hickson added, “Many of the City Councilors were newly elected. They were trying to make a name for themselves, and standing up to the mayor was one way to do that. The opponents of the project were so loud that these councilors thought supporting them could be a springboard to their next step.”

On November 5, 2018, the City Council voted 8 to 7 to support the deal. Bottoms commented, “It was a heavy lift. I got a lot of gray hair during that negotiation, but the community benefits will be incredible. It will deliver everything I hoped.”

From Crisis to Crisis

In early 2019, Bottoms and her team took the next steps towards closing ACDC and replacing it with a Center for Equity. In May, she signed legislation into law creating a task force to repurpose ACDC, reporting back within a year. Deputy chief of staff Philip Gilman, who was involved with the task force, explained, “We were on a clear glide path to close down the jail. The early steps we took on bail reform and ending the ICE contract had dropped the detainee population to a point where it did not make sense to keep spending millions of dollars to run ACDC. The groundswell locally and nationally was in

the direction of encouraging police reform and criminal justice reform. The task force included people from all sides, but the conversation was very advocate heavy in support of closing the jail.”³⁰

The task force considered the logistics that came with closing ACDC—what to do with the building, how to retrain and reassign jail staff, what services the center of equity would provide, how individuals would access it, and many more questions. The task force prepared its report for Bottoms in March 2020, but as it was about to deliver it, the COVID-19 pandemic began, and everything ground to a halt.

COVID-19

In late 2019, the SARS-CoV-2 virus was first detected in Wuhan, China. This novel coronavirus was highly contagious and much more deadly than other coronaviruses, such as the common cold. It caused upper respiratory infection that could sometimes lead to pneumonia and other severe complications. It swiftly spread worldwide and overwhelmed health care systems before scientists and public health officials had time to study it and make recommendations about how to combat and prevent its spread. By March 2020, the U.S. and other countries enacted lockdowns to slow the spread of the disease. Businesses were forced to close, schools transitioned to online learning, travelers frantically returned from trips abroad, and entire societies faced major disruption.

In the U.S., cities in the Northeast and West Coast first felt the brunt of the pandemic, but soon other areas of the country reported community transmission (see **Appendix 7**). Atlanta, like other cities, responded to the crisis by instituting a work-from-home policy for city employees, hosting city and community meetings on digital platforms such as Zoom, and rolling out a public health program to keep citizens informed about how to stay safe and continue to live their lives. Virtually all of Bottoms’ time, energy, and resources transitioned to fighting COVID-19 and keeping her city safe.

George Floyd and the Fight for Racial Justice

The ACDC task force delivered its report to Bottoms in May 2020, explaining, “It is our recommendation that (the city’s jail) be closed, demolished, and replaced with the Center for Equity to support the many Atlantans that need its services.”³¹ Then on May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a Black man in Minneapolis, was murdered by police officers during an arrest. The incident was caught on camera, and the video was viewed by millions of people stuck at home during COVID-19 lockdowns around the world. In the days and weeks following Floyd’s death, the event sparked protests against police brutality, systemic racism, inequity and injustice across the U.S. and around the world.

Protests broke out in Atlanta. Bottoms supported much of what the protesters called for, but as crowds swelled and the pent-up energy of months of lockdowns broke free, things turned violent. Protesters set fires, broke windows, and began looting. Bottoms soon understood she needed to act to calm down the city. She assembled her team at the city’s emergency response joint operations center. As they watched the protests growing and becoming increasingly violent, Bottoms announced that she would hold a press conference. Chubb remembered, “We asked her what she would say, and she responded, ‘I don’t know, but we have to say something.’ We prepared remarks and gathered community leaders to stand with her in support, including Reverend Joe Beasley, Bernice King, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s daughter, and the rappers and activists T.I. and Killer Mike.”

Bottoms stepped to the podium and unleashed an impassioned plea: “Let me just speak to what’s happening here today. Above everything else, I am a mother. I am a mother to four Black children in America, one of whom is 18 years old. And when I saw the murder of George Floyd, I hurt like a mother would hurt. Yesterday when I heard there were rumors about violent protests in Atlanta, I did what a mother would do. I called my son and I said, ‘Where are you?’ I said, ‘I cannot protect you, and Black boys shouldn’t be out today.’ So, you’re not going to out-concern me and out-care about where we are in America. I wear this each and every day, and I pray over my children each and every day. So, what I see happening on the streets of Atlanta is not Atlanta. This is not a protest. This is not in the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr. This is chaos. A protest has purpose. When Dr. King was assassinated, we didn’t do this to our city. So, if you love this city, this city that has had a legacy of Black mayors and Black police chiefs and people who care about this city, where more than 50% of the business owners in metro Atlanta are minority business owners. If you care about this city, then go home!”³²

The speech was broadcast on national news and drew praise from commentators.³³ She later remarked that she was speaking from the heart, rather than reading what had been prepared for her. She said, “My 18-year-old son was standing in the room, and I was speaking directly to him and to parents of other teens. It was a very emotional moment for me and for all of us.” Her speech was effective, and protests in the city became more peaceful in the following days.

Rayshard Brooks

Then on June 12, 2020, Atlanta police officers shot and killed a Black man named Rayshard Brooks. Brooks was intoxicated and had fallen asleep in a Wendy’s drive-through. Police officers Garrett Rolfe and Devin Brosnan responded to the scene, woke Brooks up, and administered a breathalyzer test. When it revealed that his blood alcohol content was above the legal limit, the officers moved to arrest Brooks. While being handcuffed, Brooks grabbed Brosnan’s taser and ran away. Rolfe pursued Brooks on foot; Brooks turned and shot the taser towards Rolfe, but missed. Rolfe then shot Brooks with his pistol. Brooks died in the hospital that night.³⁴

Once again, Bottoms and her team went to the joint operations center and to review police bodycam footage. Gilman explained, “We were pivoting from crisis to crisis—from COVID to the demonstrations to the shooting. There was a heightened stress level across the board. You can watch one bodycam and generate an entire narrative from that. Then the next one can completely change your thinking. We would watch one, pause, have a conversation, then turn to the next. Mayor Bottoms asked everyone in the room for input—the police chief and all senior staff.” Chubb added, “Mayor Bottoms likes input. She seeks it out and triangulates it from multiple perspectives. She’s not looking for advice; she wants different perspectives. She wants people to disagree. You don’t get pushed out of her inner circle for disagreeing with her. She asks her team not to be ‘yes’ people. In the case of the Brooks shooting, she listened to everyone’s perspective, went to her office and considered everything, then decided.”

Bottoms fired both officers, and the chief of police, Erika Shields, resigned her position. Chubb noted, “She didn’t fire those officers to satisfy the masses. The police chief supported her decision.” Despite Bottoms’ actions to hold the officers accountable, protesters took to the streets. Brooks was just the latest in a long string of Black Americans killed at the hands of police officers, and across the country, people were marching to express their anger about the issue. In Atlanta, the protests after Brooks’

killing quickly escalated out of control. The Wendy's restaurant where Brooks was killed was set ablaze, and an 8-year-old girl was shot and killed near the site in the weeks following the incident.

The two fired officers appealed Bottoms' decision, arguing that due process had not been afforded them. The police union supported the appeal. The local district attorney filed criminal charges against the officers. Chubb commented, "The DA was running for reelection in the fight of his life against a former staff member. The public perception was that charging the officers was a political move, but the result was that it changed the whole tone of the situation. It was no longer just an administrative action. The public didn't see the difference between the mayor's actions and the DA's actions."

COVID-19 Surges

As the summer of 2020 wore on, COVID-19 cases surged across the South, peaking in late July at a higher per capita case count than the initial spring 2020 surge in the Northeast.³⁵ Bottoms announced that she had tested positive for COVID-19 on July 6, 2020. However, several months into the pandemic, scientists had begun to learn more about how the virus was transmitted and how to slow its spread. Social distancing, capacity limits, mask-wearing, and handwashing guidelines and/or mandates were put in place around the country. President Trump and other White House officials consistently downplayed the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the summer of 2020.

On July 8, 2020, Bottoms issued a mask mandate for the City of Atlanta, which required the public to wear masks inside stores, restaurants, or public buildings. Bottoms' order came days after Georgia Governor Brian Kemp had issued an order forbidding municipalities from putting COVID-19 restrictions in place that were stricter than the state regulations, which did not include a mask mandate of any kind. Before issuing her order, Bottoms talked to the Governor to get his approval, which he did not give, but he had not challenged several other Georgia cities that had issued mask mandates.

Just days after Bottoms issued her order, however, Governor Kemp sued Bottoms personally to stop her from implementing the mask mandate. She commented, "I didn't know much about the Governor when he was elected. I had heard he was moderate and easy to deal with, so I wanted to give him the opportunity to govern. When the pandemic began, we talked regularly, but he quickly began mimicking whatever he had been hearing from President Trump. I would hang up the phone and not know who I had just been talking to, he sounded so different. Things quickly went off the rails."

Bottoms and her team negotiated with the Governor and his staff. Chubb explained, "We considered some compromises. The mayor would not support any solution that didn't require people to wear masks. She wasn't being stubborn, she believed that mask wearing was important to slow the spread of COVID. The Governor's lawsuit to block the city's mandate was contrary to the recommendations of public health experts. One day, as we were in the middle of negotiations, we heard on the news that he had dropped the lawsuit, and that was the end of it."

COVID Crime Surge

During the COVID-19 lockdowns in early 2020, crime in Atlanta and across the country dropped.³⁶ However, the protests and counter-protests that swept the country after George Floyd's death brought

millions of people out of their homes, and crime statistics quickly returned to their pre-pandemic state (see **Appendix 8**). Nationally, some protesters called for “defunding the police,” which sometimes caused strain in the relations between police departments and communities.³⁷ In Atlanta, Bottoms had negotiated a 30% raise for police officers in 2018, yet in August 2020, 28 police officers resigned, 11 retired, and 3 were dismissed, a higher attrition rate than normal.³⁸ Violent crime surged in Atlanta in what Bottoms described as the “COVID crime wave.” Murders grew by more than 50% over the previous year.³⁹ Chubb noted that the public placed some of the blame for the increase in crime on the interactions between the mayor and the police department in the aftermath of the Brooks shooting.

Meanwhile, Bottoms was considering what steps to take on ACDC after receiving the recommendations from her task force. The politics of criminal justice in Atlanta were quickly shifting. Keen explained, “As crime spiked, the local conversation went from ‘We need to help people with mental health issues not be part of the criminal justice system,’ to ‘We need to lock more people up.’ Despite the fact that there were no violent criminals held in the ACDC and there never would be, people hear: ‘There’s a spike in violent crime and you’re trying to close the jail.’ For us to move forward in that context became a significant educational and community engagement exercise.”

Most violent criminals in Atlanta ended up in Fulton County Jail, an aging, overcrowded facility about four miles northwest of ACDC. Some members of the public and City Council began floating the idea of Fulton County using ACDC as an overflow facility for their prisoners. In fall 2020, Pat Labat, who had been the head of ACDC, was elected the sheriff of Fulton County. Labat had been on the task force reimagining ACDC. Although he disagreed with its recommendations, he did not stop the report from being published. Keen noted, “Labat ran on a tough on crime platform and now he’s out there on the exact opposite side from the mayor, making it more difficult to get anything done on ACDC.”

In January 2021, Labat proposed buying ACDC, but the mayor disagreed. She said, “What I know is what we all know: Black men are more likely to be incarcerated. They don’t have the tools and resources to deal with the challenges they face today. To have a physical place, somewhere you can drive by and know if I’m in trouble, that’s where I can go, would be transformative for our city and state. As long as the ACDC is just another jail, we won’t have that. So I’m going to keep pushing to keep hope alive for change.” Labat and Bottoms negotiated over Fulton County’s use of ACDC through the spring of 2021, but had not reached any agreement by May.

Ending Her Term on Her Terms

Despite the challenges of 2020, Bottoms still had a city to govern. Lawsuits to halt the Gulch development were all dismissed by the courts over the summer of 2021. More than \$2 million had been put towards workforce development training programs, and millions had gone into the affordable housing trust fund. ACDC was still open, but Bottoms was still fighting to close it. In May 2021, a judge reinstated officer Rolfe, although he and officer Brosnan were both still facing criminal charges. Rolfe was placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of the criminal case.

Bottoms expressed confidence in her decision not to seek reelection. “It was my decision,” she remarked. “If I had run a poll and the numbers were bad, I would have run for reelection just to prove a point, but I had 68% approval. That’s when I knew I could leave on my own terms.”

Appendices

Appendix 1 Mayoral Candidate Keisha Lance Bottoms' First 100 Days Agenda

Criminal Justice Reform

Atlanta has taken some initial steps toward meaningful criminal justice reform, but there is an urgent need to move faster, expand programs and act more aggressively to disrupt the school- to-prison pipeline, address repeat offenders who are responsible for much of the petty crime happening in our city, and reform the Municipal Court so that poor Atlantans are not jailed simply for their inability to pay bond.

Keisha Lance Bottoms will move Atlanta away from broken-window style policing toward community policing.

Keisha Lance Bottoms will:

- Expand the Pre-Arrest Diversion Initiative, which was launched in 2017 through a partnership with the City of Atlanta and APD, Fulton County and numerous social justice and faith-based organizations.
- Direct additional resources to the Pre-Arrest Diversion Initiative to strengthen its impact and broaden its reach.
- Expand the City of Atlanta's new deportation defense legal program, which offers pro- bono legal assistance to immigrants facing deportation in our communities. We must not waver in our support for our foreign-born residents when the regional federal ICE office reports an 80 percent increase in arrests under President Trump.
- Increase resources available to the Public Defender's Office, including identifying opportunities to partner with legal aid clinics and organizations, and seek grant support to fund additional public defender and social worker positions.
- Ask the Criminal Justice Reform Commission to identify ways the Atlanta Police Department can enhance bias training and cultural awareness training, especially for interacting with LGBTQ individuals and immigrant communities.
- Ask the Criminal Justice Reform Commission to identify recommendations for reforming money bond policies at the Atlanta Municipal Court to ensure no one is jailed because of their inability to pay bond.

Affordable Housing

Keisha Lance Bottoms will:

- Ask the Affordable Housing Commission to identify tools available to the City of Atlanta right now that can be utilized to preserve and expand the number of affordable housing units currently available.
- Accelerate legislation to implement recommendations from the Atlanta City Design, developed by Commissioner Tim Keane, to promote density and reduce parking requirements, which significantly raise the cost of new apartment buildings.
- Keisha Lance Bottoms will also form a new Working Group with Commissioner Tim Keane and the Department of City Planning and MARTA to accelerate transit-oriented development projects, including a robust commitment to affordable housing at those new developments, in order to house working families directly on MARTA lines, reducing the need for parking and the cost of commuting.
- Use the new deportation defense program as a model for an Eviction Defense Program. Fulton County has an eviction crisis, and while the City of Atlanta has no jurisdiction over evictions, Mayor Bottoms will establish a new pilot program to offer pro-bono legal assistance to City of Atlanta residents in Fulton County facing eviction. Eviction throws families into chaos. Children are forced to move schools, disrupting their education and stripping them of the opportunities available to children living in stable

homes. The costs of repeatedly moving are a burden on working families and are a drain on savings and take-home pay. Housing stability is essential for supporting working and low-income families.

- Pursue her \$1B public-private plan to raise \$1B in dedicated funding to fight displacement and ensure that Atlanta has enough quality, safe, affordable housing for all our communities.
- Establish a rental housing initiative to support the fifty percent of Atlantans who rent their homes.
- Pursue the expansion of inclusionary zoning throughout the City's boundaries, so that every new development contributes to maintaining affordability for Atlantans.

Homelessness

We see far too many people still in need of services and housing. Atlanta is too progressive and prosperous to leave these individuals behind. Our homeless residents must be treated with dignity and respect.

Keisha Lance Bottoms will:

- Ask the Homelessness Commission to develop a proposal for a day-time resource center operated by the City in partnership with a non-profit organization, which would serve meals, offer people access to a complete range of services, as well as computers and phones.
- Accelerate development of new, smaller shelter facilities, including low-barrier shelters and shelters for women and families.
- Work with organizations to identify interventions and solutions for homeless LGBTQ youth, and direct additional resources to organizations providing services to this vulnerable population.
- Seek greater public input on solutions to address homelessness, especially with faith-based organizations, and seek private philanthropic support to maximize the impact of our city's homeless service providers.

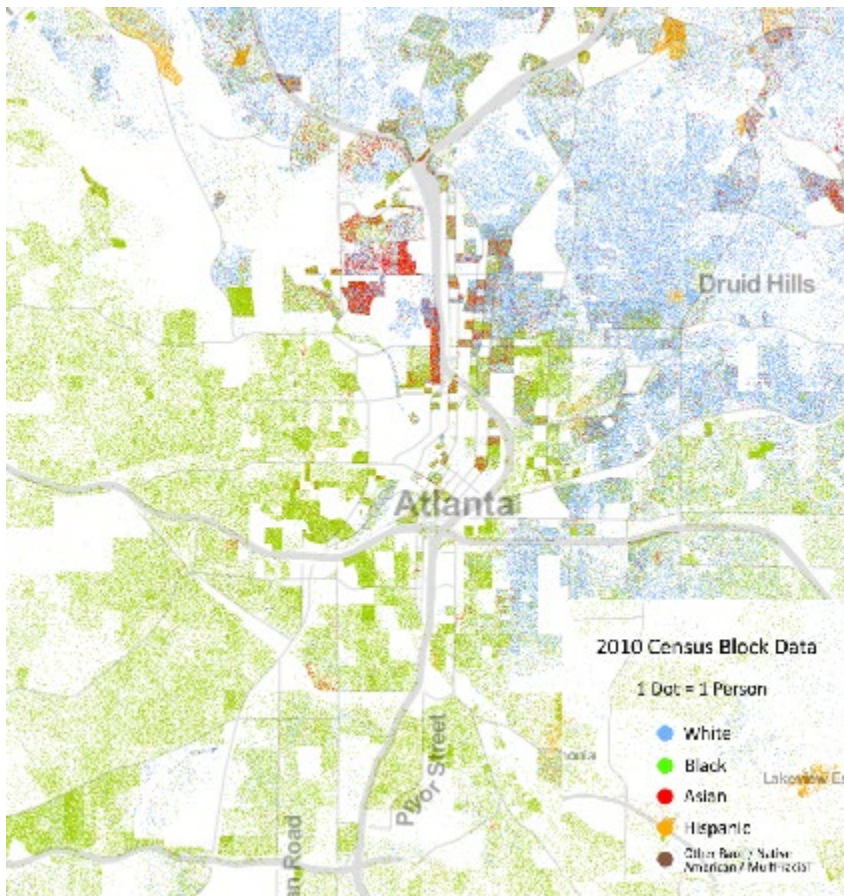
Economic Development and Workforce Development

Keisha Lance Bottoms will:

- Re-establish the successful Hire One initiative, and expand it to include formerly incarcerated individuals, formerly homeless individuals and individuals living in specific zip codes in the city with higher rates of unemployment.
- In addition to passing strong legislation to ensure airport workers keep their jobs during transition periods, work with SEIU and Unite Here! to push for all airport concessions and retail workers to earn \$15 per hour.
- Leverage the Atlanta-Fulton County Recreation Authority to secure agreements for workers at Philips Arena and the Atlanta Zoo, including all contract workers, to earn \$15 per hour, the livable wage for our community.
- Encourage city contractors and vendors to hire city residents, particularly for infrastructure projects, and consider performance incentive program for firms which meet a threshold of 30 percent or more employees living within city limits.
- Ask the Economic Development and Workforce Development Commission to make recommendations to maintain Atlanta as a progressive city where high-tech sector jobs grow and relocate.
- Ask the Economic Development and Workforce Development Commission to make recommendations for innovative new opportunities to partner with potential corporations considering relocating to Atlanta to support new affordable housing development, new transit development and new educational opportunities.

Source: Keisha Lance Bottoms Mayoral Candidate Website.⁴⁰

Appendix 2 Racial Dot Map of Atlanta, 2010 Census Data



Source: University of Virginia Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Racial Dot Map.⁴¹

Appendix 3 Senior Staff Bios

Carmen Chubb, Chief of Staff—Carmen oversees key city functions, top personnel, policy, and legislative matters. Prior to her appointment by Mayor Bottoms, she served as Deputy Commissioner for Housing at the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, where she served for more than 25 years. She joined the Georgia Housing and Finance Authority in 1990 as an accounting manager before the agency merged with the Department of Community Affairs in 1996. During her tenure with the state, Carmen led all statewide programs and resources for affordable housing, including 250 staff members, more than \$275 million in program resources, and a \$30 million operating budget. She earned a BA in economics from the University of Georgia and an executive MBA from Kennesaw State University.



Philip Gilman, Deputy Chief of Staff—Philip leads key initiatives across the administration’s platform, organizes data- and expert-informed COVID-response guidance, and has worked to ensure that the mayor’s office recruits and retains a high-quality team. After working with Habitat for Humanity and Enterprise Community Partners, Philip moved to Atlanta in 2013 to work for the state of Georgia, where he became the director of the Office of Housing Finance, responsible for the distribution of over \$500 million in federal and state tax incentives. He completed his undergraduate work at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and earned an MPA from George Washington University.



Jon Keen, Chief Operating Officer—Jon serves as part of the Mayor’s executive leadership team and cabinet with responsibility for executing the Mayor’s strategic priorities and leadership of the city’s fifteen operating departments and over 8,000 employees. He joined the city in 2018 as deputy chief operating officer. Prior to joining the city, he was a leader in strategy and operations consulting for Deloitte and IBM. He also served as an Infantry Officer in the U.S. Army with the 173rd Airborne Brigade, deploying twice to Afghanistan. He attended Georgia Tech, receiving an undergraduate degree in industrial engineering, earned an MPA from the Kennedy School and an MBA from Emory’s Goizueta Business School.



Nina Hickson, City Attorney—Nina leads a department of 90 who handle the legal affairs of the city. She reports to the Mayor and City Council, managing a \$21 million budget. Prior to being appointed City Attorney, she was general counsel for the Atlanta BeltLine, Inc., the most comprehensive transportation and economic redevelopment revitalization effort undertaken by the city of Atlanta. Over her 30-year career, she has held many positions, including as ethics officer for the City of Atlanta, city attorney for East Point, Georgia, presiding judge of Fulton County Juvenile Court, general counsel for Atlanta Housing Attorney, and Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia. She received a BA in journalism from Howard University and her JD from Emory University.



Appendix 4 Atlanta City Detention Center (ACDC), 2020



Source: City of Atlanta Department of Corrections.⁴²

Appendix 5 Centennial Yard Development Community Benefits

In connection with the Gulch redevelopment project, the City, the Downtown Development Authority (“DDA”), and CIM will enter into Development Agreements that provide for the following public purpose initiatives:

1) Affordable Housing Trust Fund:

- CIM will pay \$28,000,000 into an affordable housing trust fund to increase affordable housing Citywide. Payments will be made as follows: three equal payments in years 2018, 2019, and 2020 totaling \$14,000,000 and three equal payments in years 2022, 2023, and 2024 totaling \$14,000,000. The fund will be administered by the City or one of its agencies.

2) Onsite Affordable/Workforce Housing (Rental and For-Sale Units):

- CIM or the housing developer (as applicable) will provide a minimum of 200 residential units or 20% of the total residential units constructed in the Gulch (whichever is greater) as affordable housing for a term of not less than 99 years.
- A land use restriction agreement and memorandum of affordable housing will be filed in the Fulton County, Georgia land records to ensure compliance with the 99-year affordability requirement.
- The residential rental units will be made available to households with an income that does not exceed 80% of Area Median Income (“AMI”).
- If AHA provides vouchers for residential rental units to the housing developer, the housing developer must provide an additional 10% of the total residential rental units to households whose income does not exceed 30% of AMI.
- Regarding for-sale residential developments of 5 units or more, CIM must incorporate a mix of housing types that are affordable to market and workforce households with a minimum of 20% of the proposed for-sale units allocated to households earning 120% and below of AMI.
- Invest Atlanta and/or DDA will have a right of first refusal to purchase a for-sale unit, directly or through another government entity or non-profit, prior to CIM marketing the unit to the public.

3) Economic Development Fund:

- CIM will pay \$12,000,000 into an Economic Development Fund to promote economic development Citywide. Payments will be made in four equal payments made in years 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021.

4) APD Mini-Precinct:

- CIM will construct and lease to the City for \$1 per year a 1,500 square foot mini-precinct at the Gulch project.
- The leased premises will be delivered to the City in a warm shell condition, and the City will be responsible for its tenant improvements.
- APD will be provided 10 surface parking spaces and an additional 10 spaces in the adjacent parking deck.

5) Office Space for Economic Development Services:

- Invest Atlanta will have the opportunity to lease 20,000 rentable square feet of office space in the Gulch project for a term of 15 years at a base rental rate that is 50% below market rate. Invest Atlanta will be responsible for other operating costs associated with the lease.
- The lease provides the opportunity to create operating cost savings to Invest Atlanta that would be reallocated to provide additional support for economic development strategies/programs such as affordable housing, business support services, job creation, neighborhood revitalization, home ownership, etc.

6) Peach Drop:

- The Peach Drop will be held at the Gulch project for a period of ten (10) years at no rental cost to the City. The City or event sponsors will be responsible for the costs to host event (security, setup, tear down, etc).

7) Security Enhancements:

- CIM will provide security enhancements including public safety call boxes and cameras in the Gulch project. The cameras will be permitted to connect to the City's Video Integration Center.

8) Nelson Street Bridge:

- Nelson Street Bridge has been closed since 2009 due to its deteriorated condition. Under an existing agreement with Norfolk Southern, the railroad is responsible for demolishing the bridge and the City is responsible for constructing a new bridge. The costs associated with construction of the new bridge are estimated at \$5,000,000.
- CIM will demolish, reconstruct, and maintain the new bridge.
- The City will continue to have perpetual easement across the bridge for the benefit and enjoyment of the public.

9) Fire Station:

- CIM will construct and convey to the City a seven bay, 16,000 square foot fire station in a location in the Gulch project to be agreed upon by the City and CIM. The estimated cost of the fire station is \$12,000,000. The fire station would be conveyed to the City in exchange for the existing Fire Station No. 1 property, subject to City Council approval of the exchange transaction.
- If City Council doesn't approve the proposed exchange transaction, then CIM will pay \$12,000,000 to the City for the cost to purchase land and construct a new fire station.

10) Carrie Steel Honor:

- CIM will install a commemorative plaque or marker at the Gulch project recognizing Carrie Steele Logan's efforts to foster orphans and in creating the first orphanage to serve African American children in Georgia.

11) Workforce Development Implementation Plan:

- CIM will donate \$2,000,000 to assist with the implementation of the Workforce Development Plan as created by the Atlanta Committee for Progress.
- The goal of the Plan is to place more City residents into living wage jobs and increase economic inclusion by creating a pipeline of City residents who are prepared for careers that are in demand.

12) Equal Business Opportunity ("EBO"):

- CIM has agreed to use best efforts to achieve a goal of 38% utilization of Minority and Female Owned Business Enterprises ("M/FBE").
- M/FBE utilization at the Gulch project is subject to monthly reporting requirements which will be certified by the City.
- CIM has agreed to make offers to one or more M/FBEs to acquire 10% equity interest in the ownership of the Gulch project.

13) Fees:

- CIM will pay all of the customary fees associated with redevelopment projects, including affordable housing monitoring, professional services fees, and administrative fees.
- CIM will also pay the costs associated with a Verification Agent, who will be engaged by DDA, to certify that costs submitted are eligible for reimbursement from sales and property taxes.

Source: City of Atlanta documents.

Appendix 6 Centennial Yard Development Sample Opposing Voices

Vincent Fort: Former Democratic member of the Georgia State Senate, ran against Bottoms for mayor in 2017: “It’s a giveaway to billionaire developers without anything for the neighborhoods and the city that’s going to be impacted by it. It’s striking how little the city’s getting in return, and ultimately, we think that it’s going to add to the gentrification of the city of Atlanta.”

Livvy Feeney: Writer for the Housing Justice League: “So we could take Mayor Bottoms’ word that this development will come at no cost to taxpayers and without incurring consequences for longtime residents through displacement... or we can look at the clear precedent that has already been set to see what happens when decisions are made by corporate developers, rather than the residents who actually understand, inhabit and sustain the communities.”

“The mayor attempted to push this deal through quickly, leaving minimal space for public comment and little time for City Council to read through the dense, complex 700-page plan before voting.”

Andre Dickens: At Large Post 3 representative on the Atlanta City Council: “There are tons of opinions about the merits of the deal and the process. One fact remains clear after all these discussions, there isn’t broad support for the proposed deal. I have a substantial amount of unreadiness and can’t support it at this time.”

“Developing publicly owned land in the heart of downtown Atlanta must be planned very carefully. Land is a finite resource. We must take our time to get this right. There are so many more possibilities to create positive social, cultural, and economic outcomes on land owned by the people over land that is privately held.”ⁱ

Source: Quotes from various published sources.⁴³

Appendix 7 COVID-19 Case Counts in Fulton County, Georgia

New reported cases throughout the pandemic

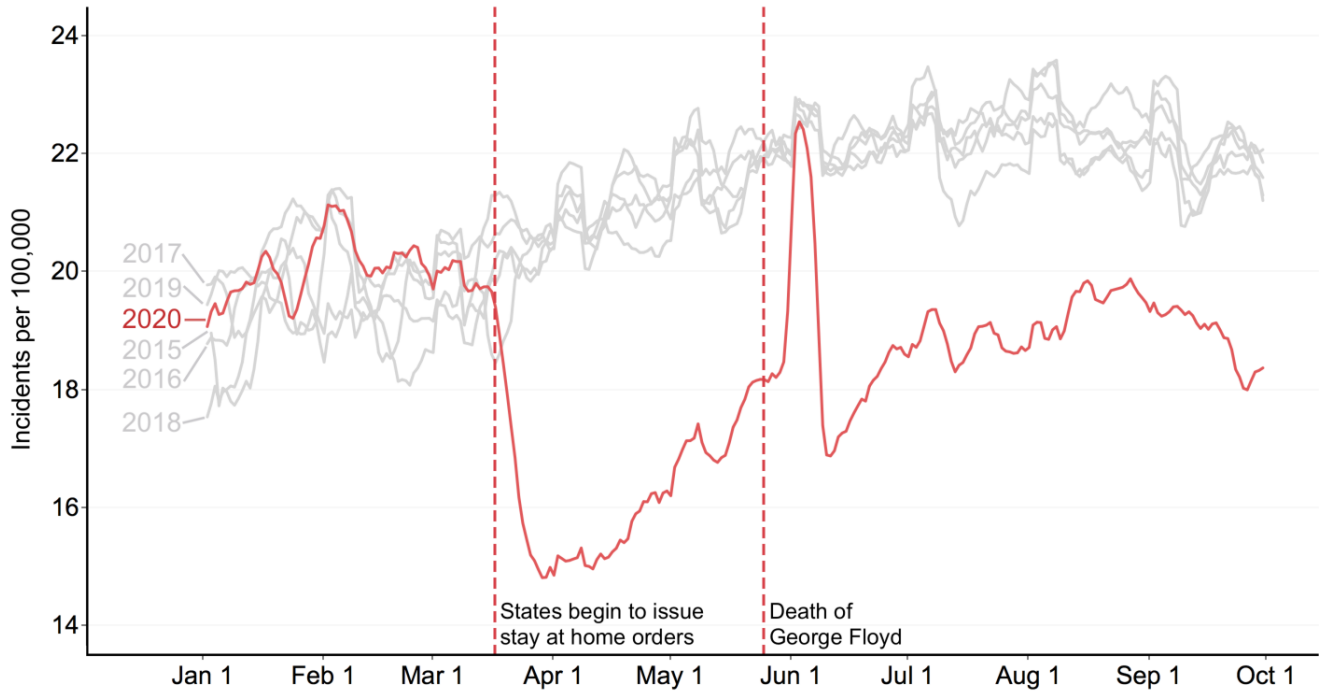


Source: New York Times data.⁴⁴

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Appendix 8 COVID Crime Surge

OVERALL CRIME INCIDENTS PER CAPITA FOR 25 OF THE LARGEST U.S. CITIES, 2015-2020



Source: CityCrimeStats.com, University of Pennsylvania

EconoFact econofact.org

Source: EconoFact, "Crime in the Time of COVID."⁴⁵

Endnotes

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