

# CHATT ... About



*A monthly publication of the Chatt Hills Community, a citizen-run news service that connects, informs, and engages friends & neighbors of Chattahoochee Hills, GA.*

## Voting Matters . . . in Chatt Hills

*By: Laurie Searle, Citizen Reporter*

This Special Edition of the Chatt About Newsletter provides information about the November 7, 2017 municipal election in Chattahoochee Hills.

For more information about the election contact Dana Wicher, City Clerk at (770) 463-8881 or [dana.wicher@chathillsga.us](mailto:dana.wicher@chathillsga.us).

### Essential Election Information – By Dana Wicher

- The Municipal Election will be held on November 7, 2017 for the offices of Mayor, District 2 Council and District 4 Council.
- The last day to register to vote is October 10, 2017.
- The Fulton County Voter Registration Office handles voter registration; however, applications can be picked up at city hall or downloaded at the Georgia Secretary of State website: <https://registertovote.sos.ga.gov/GAOLVR/welcome.do#no-back-button>).
- Early voting begins October 16, 2017 and ends November 3, 2017. Early voting hours are Monday – Friday 8:30 am – 5:00 pm at city hall.

### Qualified Candidates

The following candidates have qualified for the election:

#### Mayor (At Large):

Tom Reed (I)  
Marcia C. Lee

#### City Council District 2

Richard Schmidt (I)

#### City Council District 4

Alan Merrill  
Rebekah Michaels

### Meet the Candidates – By Laurie Searle

I extended an invitation to the candidates to answer the list of questions that was prepared by the League of Women Voters of Georgia and the AJC newspaper in 2011. The questions are the same, with the exception of number 7. This one had to do with approving a 1 cent sales tax, which since passed, so another question was substituted. The candidate responses begin on the next page.



# Tom Reed – Candidate for Mayor

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Name:	Tom Reed
Occupation:	Business Founder/Owner, focused on start-ups; semi-retired
Education:	BBA from the University of Georgia (Go Dawgs!)
Family:	Married for 28 years to my amazing wife Karen, with three children (Max, 25; Emmeline, 24, and Annabel, 21), and (currently) two dogs and one cat.
E-mail:	tom.chatthills@gmail.com
Website:	

## 1. Why are you running for office?

Because I love Chattahoochee Hills, and the people here, and I want to continue to do everything I can to make our city strong, and to protect our community from the sort of negative development that has ruined most of the rural areas near Atlanta. When I was first elected the City was on the edge of financial collapse. Since then, we've made huge progress in making the city fiscally stable and operationally sound, and in implementing our special zoning. But there is still a lot of work to be done. The Atlanta region is full of examples of what can happen to a beautiful community like the Chattahoochee Hills if it isn't protected from uncontrolled development. We are, by far, the best place in the Atlanta area, and with concerted effort will continue to be. While we've made amazing progress, there's more that needs to be done – I want to finish the job.

## 2. Describe your education, training and experience that qualify you for this position.

As a serial entrepreneur who has founded and grown several very successful companies, I have the start-up skills and bootstrapping experience needed in an environment like the still-new city of Chattahoochee Hills. I am used to operating in an environment with insufficient funding, a small staff, and high workload – the kind of environment where failure just isn't an option. And I've got a lot of experience in building a great team. But the most important training I've had for Mayor has probably been actually doing the job for the past 6 years. Being Mayor means having to listen. And listening to this community for so many years, as a father and husband, as a neighbor, as a citizen, as a volunteer, and as Mayor – all of the people I've met and talked to and learned from – that's been my most important experience, and has been fundamental to the improved state of the City over the course of the past few years. From my friends in Rico to Friendship, County Line to Campbellton, Serenbe to the Crossroads (and all of the areas in between); from Providence to New Hope to Campbellton Baptist and the rest of our faith communities; from the Charter School to the Chatt Hills Business Association; from the Planning, Parks and Tree Commissions to Brickworks and all of the other volunteer organizations in the community – your input and help has been pivotal to my education, and our success.

On a more technical level, in the past twelve years I've also attended dozens of conferences and seminars and met with the leading conservation experts in the country, all to learn more about implementing and paying for conservation-

oriented planning and zoning. Our comprehensive plan and zoning codes are the most important tools that we have for protecting the rural character of our community, and I have become intimately familiar with both the theory and the practical application of those tools – skills that are critically important as we continue to work to minimize the impacts and maximize the community benefits of the development we have, to seek development that is sympathetic to our vision, and to improve our tax base to take more of the burden of paying for services off of our long-time residents.

With the support of our City Council, I've also been able to leverage my business experience to turn a huge budget deficit to a surplus, right-size our government, and make good progress on improving many areas of the city's services and operations. I want to continue to work for our citizens to finish that job.

### **3. What will be your priorities during your term of office and how will you pursue them?**

My biggest priority is to continue the fight to preserve as much of our City's rural character as possible, and to continue to create an environment where ALL of the citizens of the City are heard and included in the process of continuing to develop and implement the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning. I want to honor the many people in the community have come together over many years ago to develop those documents and the vision they contain. I've been involved in dozens of public processes in the City that have always reaffirmed the basic concepts of that vision. I will continue to strive to make the work of implementing and refining our zoning in an atmosphere of openness and trust.

Chattahoochee Hills is uniquely positioned as the largest entirely undeveloped land mass this close to a major metropolitan area and airport in the country. The development pressure around us is huge, but not necessarily positive, with huge warehouses planned all around us. Those have huge traffic impacts – with thousands of trucks on the roads – but little employment or tax benefit. Our land plan is so different, and so much better, but it will require a change in people's perception of Chatt Hills as a part of 'South Fulton' to actually implement that plan. If we succeed, we will permanently save over 70% of our 40,000-acre area as family homesteads, forests and farms, while concentrating low-impact, highly tax efficient, buffered, mixed-use growth in relatively small, mostly buffered areas. That concept is unique in the nation, and will be highly attractive to sustainability oriented businesses. Because of our location and our zoning, we have a true opportunity for a better outcome than anyplace else in Atlanta. But we have to work to make that happen. We have to make those businesses and the people are attracted by the idea of living or working surrounded by a beautiful rural landscape aware that we exist – bringing in development that comes here because of our zoning will eliminate the need to battle developers opposed to it. We need to focus on developing and marketing our vision, to bring like-minded people and businesses to our community (and not coincidentally bring the tax base that we need to support our preservation vision and continue to reduce our citizens tax rates).

### **4. What is the city's biggest challenge and how would you address it?**

Chattahoochee Hills' biggest challenge is still financial. While we've made HUGE progress, but the budget requires constant vigilance and care. Our short-term focus must be on continuing to tightly control our spending – providing the services that our communities need within the constraint of the limited funds available. While our fund balance is in surplus, there is more money needed to keep our roads in good shape long-term, for example. We have to avoid the impulse to 'buy things' and expand services, and avoid over-reaching in taking on new responsibilities. (I address that issue further in my response to question 6, below.)

### **5. How will you engage voters in identifying issues that are important to them and how will you ensure progress is made on these issues?**

I will to continue to work hard to engage our community. The town of Chattahoochee Hills exists in great part due to amazing volunteer efforts and participation over the course of the past decade and more. Those efforts need to be

honored by a transparent governmental process that openly values citizen input and engagement. One example of that in action is how I changed our short, proscribed Council Meeting to add longer public input sessions, and more importantly, added an open town hall session to each Council Meeting to encourage interaction, the sharing of information, and productive community input. Lack of good information is the biggest impediment to useful community participation, so our elected officials and city staff must commit to supplying as much detailed information and background about the issues that affect our community as is physically possible, and spending as much time as is needed to inform – and get feedback from – our community.

Things like See-Click-Fix – a phone App that lets people quickly send geo-located locations of problems (like a pothole, for example) will help with operational communications, too. And, as always, I am available to meet with or talk to anyone, anytime, anywhere, about anything having to do with the City – so many of you have already experienced that!

**6. Due to falling revenue many cities are making tough choices about city services. How would you prioritize the city budget and other financial investments involving tax dollars?**

Good financial management has us in the enviable position of not dealing with falling revenues, although as I have mentioned previously, keeping a tight grip on our finances is critical to future success. My past budgets give good insight into my priorities in that regard. The budgets that I've drafted and the Council has supported have turned a \$500,000 per year deficit into a \$500,000+ per year surplus, which we are now able to put to use more efficiently than ever.

The first priority is and always has been Public Safety. Having a well-equipped and well-staffed team of experts available in an emergency is critical, especially in a community scattered over such a wide area, and with so many older folks. I'm incredibly proud of the team that we've put together, and the way that we stretch our limited resources to continually improve response levels and capabilities. We have expanded the Police and Fire Department. Because of our aging population and rural location, we've added Paramedics on each Fire shift, and will soon be adding an emergency transport capable vehicle as a backup to our often-too-slow state-mandated ambulance provider. We've added equipment and upgraded radios to ensure the ability to communicate in every corner of the City.

Second priority is maintaining the public assets of the city. We've made huge strides there as well. We have finally been able to afford to buy a motor grader with a tilt blade that can fully rebuild our gravel roads – more of that work has happened this year than in the entire time since the City was founded. Public Works now has three crews (so that gravel road work, roadside cutting, and city facilities work can happen simultaneously), but we're still falling behind on necessary paved road maintenance. The TSPLOST has been a huge help there – between our improved finances and our TSPLOST funds, we'll pave more road-miles in the next 12 months than we have since the City was founded – but with over 100 miles of roads, we will still need additional revenues to get ahead of the maintenance requirements.

And then we need to do a good job of 'everything else' – all of the little things that go into running a city. We've reconfigured and added staff to be sure that permitting, court service, Planning – all of those other areas where a citizen might come into contact with or need the City – are efficient, easy to work with, and responsive. We've made huge improvements on every level there as well.

**7. How do you plan to establish and/or nurture important relationships with the City of South Fulton, Fulton County, and other cities and agencies that are critical to the success of Chattahoochee Hills?**

I will continue the work that I've been doing for years now in bringing those groups together. I helped restart the South Fulton Municipal Association, for example, which brings all of the elected officials of South Fulton together on a monthly basis. I've also helped form South Fulton Connect – an organization composed of the cities of South Fulton and Fulton County which will actively market the very specific economic development desires of each of the cities, with an eye

toward coordinating development to prevent mismatches, and improve the overall quality of development on the entire south side (because poor quality development right outside of our City could have enormous negative impacts on the City, and while we can't control what happens outside of our borders, at least we can influence it). In my years as mayor, I've also developed deep relationships with our other elected officials at all levels, and the other people who run and work for almost all of the local agencies that might impact us. There are so many examples of how that's had a positive impact that it would take a while to list, but it's helped in everything from grants that the City has received, to our purchase of our parks, to support of our Comprehensive Planning process. Those connections are hugely beneficial and important, and are the result of a lot of cultivation – and it is experience that only I bring to this job.

For the mayoral candidates, please answer the following:

**8. Georgia's unemployment rate is approximately 5% In your capacity as mayor, if elected, what will you do to encourage economic growth and job creation in your city?**

One example of the benefits of our zoning is demonstrated in the one development currently building in the context of those rules. Serenbe has already created a home for over 200 local jobs, while also providing business to many other (external) local small businesses in Chattahoochee Hills (like engineers, plumbers and HVAC providers, for example). And, because we have tens of thousands of acres of productive farmland, I will continue to encourage efforts to expand the number and scope of organic farms in Chattahoochee Hills, and associated agribusinesses. Because of our beautiful landscape, we should also focus on expanding our eco and agri-tourism opportunities, and providing support for other local businesses that can serve that community as it grows. And we should leverage the preservation message that our unique zoning so strongly makes into business opportunities. While we continue to support our small business community, by being efficient and light-handed, we will also continue to look for light impact, high tax value businesses that can work in a buffered mixed use environment – things like movie studios, educational facilities or alternative energy providers. Something like a solar farm for example, would provide a great income for a local farmer while also providing work to local electricians and contractors.

Thank YOU, Laurie, for providing this opportunity to communicate with your many readers, and for all that you do for the city and its citizens!

Mayor Tom Reed, Chattahoochee Hills GA

# Marcia Lee – Candidate for Mayor

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Name: Marcia Lee

Occupation:

Education:

Family:

Email:

Website:

## 1. Why are you running for office?

I am running because I believe the mayor of Chattahoochee Hills should always represent the people of the city and that's what I intend to do. Too much of the city's business is done behind closed doors and too many plans for Chatt Hills are being made by people outside of the city without the peoples input or knowledge.

## 2. Describe your education, training and experience that qualify you for this position.

I have lived in what is now called Chatt Hills for over 20 years. I raised my family here and ran a successful business here. My children have grown and moved away but they still call Rico, now Chatt Hills their home. I didn't just buy a house here to become mayor, I don't have aspirations to move on, up and out for a better political position. I have no plans to leave Chatt Hills until God calls me home. That is the foundation of my experience. Home, family, business, all in Chattahoochee Hills.

I also have experience with the ins and outs of city business. I go to just about every type of meeting the city has: Council meetings, Planning and Zoning Commission meetings, Parks Commission meetings, work sessions and special called meetings for transportation. If I am unable to attend a meeting I find out what transpired during that particular meeting. I am proud to have been a member of the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, which developed a new, more inclusive vision of the city that made several breaks from the earlier comp plan. I served on the board that helped select new officers for the Police Department. I think its fair to say that I am up to date on the current issues and developments in the city and well versed in city policy and ordinances.

What I don't have experience in is becoming entangled with big developers who want to take advantage of the resources that the people here for generations have protected. I have no experience in trying to keep the citizens here in the dark while I determine the future of their community. I'm not experienced in lying to the residents I am suppose to represent and I never will. There are some experiences that I don't want and that comes when residents and representatives become politicians.

## 3. What will be your priorities during your term of office and how will you pursue them?

My first priority would be to the people who live here, to remain loyal and steadfast in what their vision for this city is.

#### 4. What is the city's biggest challenge and how would you address it?

The mayor must trust the people to define their own vision and to help bring it about. Over the past few years that vision has come from one person and we can't continue like that. The people who have lived here are the people who have saved the land, built a community and the people who have moved here more recently came here because they fell in love with this land and community. These people can be trusted with defining their own futures.

This means the residents in rural areas shouldn't have their freedoms taken away by needless ordinances limiting what they can do with and on their properties. The people in hamlets may have chosen to live with more rules and regulations but that doesn't mean they should be powerless and should be protected from ruthless developers who refuse to hand the reigns of the community to the residents.

Once the people of the city are given a voice we need to address a pressing issue. We need more tax revenue for our city to remain viable. At the same time we don't need unending growth and development. We as a city must remain vigilant in maintaining what makes Chatt Hills special and that is our ordinances that protect our land, maintain the green space and buffer our rural areas from development. Without these things we are just another city waiting to be eaten up by suburban neighborhoods.

Some people say that the slowing of the economy saved our city and I would agree that is partially true. We don't have the dense development that was expected but the threat of that is still there. We have several neighborhoods that were started under Fulton County zoning and developers are still going to try and build under those rules. We also have a 6000 home housing development and several million-plus square foot warehouses that are planned right at our doorsteps. So, we might very well suffer the unwanted consequences of this development without the tax revenue that comes with it.

Other challenges include spotty internet service and poorly maintained roads. We've had some improvements in the condition of the roads, but its not enough. The roads especially the gravel roads have gone too long without attention, making the maintenance very difficult and expensive. There has been little if any attention to the fact that 30 percent of the residents of this city have no internet service and many with poor cell service as well. As mayor I will address these issues that have a great impact on our economy and quality of life.

#### 5. How will you engage voters in your district in identifying issues that are important to them and how will you ensure progress is made on these issues?

Keeping residents engaged and finding out what they want for the city is my number one priority. I will use a number of ways to engage residents such as: Setting up an office at City Hall and have regular office hours but I'm not going to wait for people to come to me, I'm going to meet people in the community and speak with them face to face. You will see me at the church's, at Smith's store, at Charlie's store, in Serenbe and in the parks so get use to seeing my face. I will also hold informational meetings where I will let people know what is going on in the city and listen to concerns and take questions. If by chance I don't get to meet you face to face, anyone can just give me a call, email me or message me on Facebook. You can start now: (770) 655-1003) or at [mlee30268@att.net](mailto:mlee30268@att.net)

#### 6. Due to falling revenue many cities are making tough choices about city services. How would you prioritize the city budget and other financial investments involving tax dollars?

Small government is the best way to save money. We need to focus on maintaining our roads, keeping our police force strong and our fire department well equipped and there is no room to cut the budget for these services because we are at the bare minimum.



There have been some improvements and I thank the council, department heads, and city employees for their hard work but we have to make the best of what we have until the city finds additional revenue services. We need to maintain roads and the city's equipment we have so they don't become worn out before their time.

**7. How do you plan to establish and/or nurture important relationships with the City of South Fulton, Fulton County, and other cities and agencies that are critical to the success of Chattahoochee Hills?**

It is essential to have good relationships with other cities and agencies in the county and the state, as well as regional associations like the South Fulton Parkway Alliance even if we don't plan to participate in all their ideas and plans. We need to have an idea of what they are doing and they need to understand our priorities. At the same time we need to make it clear that the people of Chatt Hills will determine the city's priorities, not outside groups with their own interest. We have a very different character and history than the rest of Fulton County and under my leadership we will not pretend otherwise.

I will add that I will not take on leadership roles in outside associations and I will report on any decisions or proposals made that include our city. My only loyalty will be to the residents of Chatt Hills. As mayor I will ask the council to take on greater roles representing our city and gathering information about regional plans and have them report back to the residents and myself. I believe all activities taken on by city officials in the name of the city with outside interest; individuals or associations should be reported to the city and made public. There have been too many secrets for far too long and that will end in my administration.

For the mayoral candidates, please answer the following:

**8. Georgia's unemployment rate is approximately 5%. In your capacity as mayor, if elected, what will you do to encourage economic growth and job creation in your city?**

Under my leadership, Chattahoochee Hills will be a city that supports and encourages small businesses as this is keeping with our rural nature. My husband and I built a successful tree service company from the ground up starting with a pick up truck and a chainsaw. It was hard work but it made us independent and that's what being rural is about. In the city we already have a small business association that is doing great work in Chatt Hills and I would look to them to take on a greater role if they are willing.

I also think we need an economic development commission that will not only inform and advise the mayor and council but will connect us with desirable businesses and find out what they would need to come into our city.

Last but not least, I would like to let everyone know that my door is always open, please feel free to contact me with ideas or questions you may have.

I would also like to thank Laurie Searle for including this questionnaire in her newsletter.

Best Regards,

Marcia Lee



# Richard Schmidt – Candidate for Council District 2

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Note: Richie is running as an incumbent unopposed. We invited him to complete the questionnaire so that he might introduce himself to residents who are new to his district. The following response was given during a phone interview.

Name:	Richard “Richie” Schmidt
Occupation:	Business Owner (Corporate America)
Education:	Jonesboro Senior High (sales & marketing)
Family:	Missy (wife 23 years), Erica (21), Alec (18)
Email:	richardhunts@att.net
Website:	

## 1. Why are you running for office?

To ensure that our vision is met. Protecting our landscape and our way of life. And so when growth comes, to ensure that is controlled growth. We’ve got to look at everything 5 or 6 times; we’ve got to get it right. Other cities have failed. We must succeed.

## 2. Describe your education, training and experience that qualify you for this position.

A couple of things: My belief in our Lord and Savior. My understanding that as an elected politician my job is to represent the people. When I make a decision, it’s not whether it benefit s me or you, it’s because it is the right thing to do. It’s important to have a common respect for all.

Sometimes perception and reality are two different things. Citizens sometimes don’t know what they don’t know, and so it becomes easy for them to be persuaded and go along with the crowd. My training has taught me to listen to both sides, look at all viewpoints. Unless you’re willing to do that and gather all the information, you can’t really make an educated decision.

## 3. What will be your priorities during your term of office and how will you pursue them?

Early on, the mayor/council was focused on salvaging our city. We were close to losing it (due to debt.) In the last two years we finally had enough money to get out of that mindset. Now we’re on an even keel.

I see three priorities:

Police. We must maintain a professional police force to protect our citizens. We have a massive landmass within our city’s boundaries. There’s so much space between residents that your neighbor might get cleaned out and you wouldn’t even know it. We also have an increasing problem with drugs entering our city. We recently added three more police officers. I’d like to get to the point where we have enough police staff that one officer could be designated to drive our city each day. Just having a police presence makes a huge difference.

Transport vehicle. Like other cities, Chatt Hills contracts with AMR (American Medical Response), because it would be a huge financial obligation for us to have our own services. A few issues with that is response time, and because they use GPS to find our locations they are sometimes misdirected. Having the ability to provide medical transport through our

city's public safety team gives us an advantage because the city staff knows the area of Chatt Hills and may be able to get there faster. That 10 or 15 minutes might save a life. If it does, it's worth it.

Protecting our borders. With areas developing all around us and more and more traffic coming through our city, it's more important to protect our vision. You see people wanting to buy and over develop. Our job isn't to change our vision for them, it's to make sure they fit with our vision. We do that with strong zoning, and also with a strong police presence.

#### **4. What is the city's biggest challenge and how would you address it?**

Making sure we protect what we've got. We're a diamond in the rough. The mayor/council have been thoughtful about growth. And understanding that if there is development in our city, we're going to want it along the Parkway and in the villages. Is our zoning iron clad, or is it not? Our developers need to follow every rule to a T, otherwise new developers that come will bend the rules, take us to court, and maybe win. We need to hold all developers accountable to our zoning.

#### **5. How will you engage voters in your district in identifying issues that are important to them and how will you ensure progress is made on these issues?**

We need to start encouraging more citizens to a part of the process. The mayor/council are not mind readers. Citizens need to let us know when something needs addressing. It's easier for citizens to contact their council representative than the council representative to attempt to check in with everyone once a month. Community involvement up front is what brings issues to the service. Let your voice be heard. That starts with the citizens.

#### **6. Due to falling revenue many cities are making tough choices about city services. How would you prioritize the city budget and other financial investments involving tax dollars?**

Services are provided as needed. Right now we do provide the services that are needed. Police, Public Safety, and Roads. We have enough money in the budget to run the city. Could we use more? Yes. But we have to be smart about how we operate. Use volunteers where we can. Look for grants to help fund projects. Keep our vision strong and zoning solid so we appeal to developers who buy into our vision, and will build quality homes. Be thoughtful about how we develop on the Parkway – aim for college campuses, hospitals – not warehouses. Watch our budget carefully and keep adequate funds for emergencies.

#### **7. How do you plan to establish and/or nurture important relationships with the City of South Fulton, Fulton County, and other cities and agencies that are critical to the success of Chattahoochee Hills?**

It's ludicrous to tell other cities what they can and can't do inside their own borders. When the cities around us see a Walmart distribution center, they see dollars. Our train of thought has to be different.

I don't go to a lot of these meetings outside of our city because they don't pertain to us (Marta, 285, etc.) If those conversations were more spearheaded around what we were doing that would be one thing but they aren't and so it doesn't help me serve our citizens.

Because we're so unique we almost have to go into a protection mode by default because everyone wants what we've got – prime real estate ready for development. We must protect our zoning to preserve our vision. Our zoning is like having your own HOA – at least everyone knows what to expect. There are no surprises. One thing I won't have on my resume is intentionally misleading the people. Protective land space and buffers – I won't negotiate on these things in our zoning. They will preserve our ways.

# Alan Merrill - Candidate for City Council District 4

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Name:	Alan Merrill
Occupation:	Retired (34 Years managing large corporations, 5 years as a Certified Lead Carpenter)
Education:	BS University of Kentucky, MBA University of Virginia
Family:	Married to Lynn (51 years), sons living in Richmond and Nashville, 7 grandchildren.
Email:	<a href="mailto:akapops@Comcast.net">akapops@Comcast.net</a>
Website:	No website

## 1. Why are you running for office?

I have been active in public service for the 10 years we've lived in Chattahoochee Hills. I thought long and hard about whether to make the commitment to be an effective Member of City Council. Ultimately, I felt called to become a candidate. Service is a paradox, for the more you give of yourself, the greater the satisfaction.

## 2. Describe your education, training and experience that qualify you for this position.

I believe my knowledge, skills and experience will allow me to contribute significantly as member of the City Council Team. Among the responsibilities of a Council Member: Budgeting and financial management - degree in accounting and 34 years of corporate experience managing large and complex businesses; Oversight of human resources - became a successful leader of a highly effective team of people in such varied fields as manufacturing, R&D, brand management, and marketing; Strategic Planning - assessed many situations and developed and managed plans to create and capitalize on opportunities; Authorize Ordinances - Chaired Planning Commission that recommended City's current zoning and subdivision ordinances.

## 3. What will be your priorities during your term of office and how will you pursue them?

While most people think of priorities in terms of what's the number one thing, I know the hard part is determining what are the things we'd really like to do, but making the difficult decisions to recognize that we can't. Improving our roads and building our tax base are pressing needs, and I will support the current direction of City Council. But I have my eye on another prize: demonstrating sensitivity for our citizens with rural and urban mindsets, establishing a culture of mutual respect and uniting all citizens behind the goal of making Chattahoochee Hills truly "natureful." Our natural landscape and the tremendous benefits we derive from living in nature are our richest treasures.

## 4. What is the city's biggest challenge and how would you address it?

Let's begin by celebrating the progress we have made in becoming a city so that we determine what we govern and how we do it! Of course we have challenges - that's life. One is that we need a bigger tax base, primarily to maintain the 100 plus miles roads that give us access to our abundant land. We need to focus on eliminating the barriers to smart growth - that will take years of concerted effort. At the same time, we need to be more assertive in bringing high quality development to Chatt Hills, and by that I mean we must find and attract developers and employers who believe as we do that living in nature is key to extraordinary productivity and quality of life. No other city has what we have!

**5. How will you engage voters in your district in identifying issues that are important to them and how will you ensure progress is made on these issues?**

I may be a good public speaker, but my greatest strength is listening. By listening, I've earned the trust of people inside and outside District 4. At a young age, I learned that I can't live long enough to experience everything myself, so I gained experience by learning from the experience of other people. Yes, listening is a good place to start. Next you have to act, do what you say what you'll do. And in good government, do it out in the open!

**6. Due to falling revenue many cities are making tough choices about city services. How would you prioritize the city budget and other financial investments involving tax dollars?**

Our big challenge will be to resist the temptation of making "a quick buck" by selling our rural heritage. No, things won't stay just as they are - they never have, change is part of life. Our hope is in the future, protecting our naturefulness for generations not yet born. I like the proverb that says that a great community is one in which men plant trees, the shade from which they will never live to enjoy. Our hope is in those men - they are us!

**7. How do you plan to establish and/or nurture important relationships with the City of South Fulton, Fulton County, and other cities and agencies that are critical to the success of Chattahoochee Hills?**

I already have a leg up on building relationships outside of our City. In my work as Chair of the CHC Conservancy, the South Fulton Parkway Alliance and my lobbying in Fulton County, Atlanta and Washington D.C., I have formed relationships with influential people. For the most part, these people share our values. As a Member of City Council, I welcome more opportunities to work with our neighbors in the region to make Chattahoochee Hills the best possible place to live. There is no heavier burden than a great opportunity. I am willing to shoulder that burden. Are you with me? Thanks for taking time to read this message.

# Rebekah Michaels - Candidate for City Council District 4

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Name:	Rebekah Michaels
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## 1. Why are you running for office?

The City of Chattahoochee Hills will benefit from both my business experience and leadership experience.

After 10 years, the City of Chattahoochee Hills has reached a stable financial position, but that does not mean the city can abstain from further economic growth. Chattahoochee Hills needs economic growth, but growth that in no way compromises the unique rural characteristics of the city. My business experience at Delta Air Lines and consulting work with airlines around the world has given me unique insight into finding new and creative ways to create economic growth and stability even in challenging environments. To properly balance the preservation of our rural character with economic growth requires strong leadership. Such leadership listens to all sides of the discussion, bridges any cultural, social, and religious gaps that could exist, and finds the win-win solution.

My ability to use creative ideas to spur economic growth, coupled with my vision for a thriving and vibrant rural city, makes me the best choice to fill the 4th District city council seat.

## 2. Describe your education, training and experience that qualify you for this position.

I have both my MBA and BA from The Pennsylvania State University. I was hired directly out of business school into Delta Air Lines' finance organization. While in finance, I was responsible for \$250 million annual budget for seven different business units in the technical operations organization. During that time, I worked closely with the business unit leaders on a daily basis. Together, we juggled changing internal priorities and corporate budgetary constraints while negotiating with various external stakeholders to reach acceptable funding levels for the essential services each work group provided. Together, we prioritized which aspects of their business were most critical to fund at any given time and which projects and issues were currently discretionary and could be put off until later. Additionally, I built economic models to account for over \$4 billion in annual expense incurred by aircraft ownership, maintenance, and pilot expenses.

I also spent two years in Delta's strategic planning organization. I created business plans and analysis used by the Executive Committee and Board of Directors to plan the future of this Fortune 100 company.

I left Delta to go into management consulting. I worked with airlines all over the world to increase their profitability and restructure their business models to profitably meet the changing dynamics of the passengers and the industry. During this time, I worked in many cross-cultural situations, requiring me to bridge social, cultural, and religious gaps with my clients.

All of this experience has prepared me to evaluate the challenges and opportunities facing Chattahoochee Hills, work with the diverse citizens and city staff, listen to their concerns and priorities, and pursue creative strategies for a successful future.

### **3. What will be your priorities during your term of office and how will you pursue them?**

My first priority as a city councilmember is to work together with the other city officials to promote purposeful economic growth within the city while safeguarding the city's rural character as outlined in The City of Chattahoochee Hills Comprehensive Plan. I will proactively seek opportunities to bring the right kind of economic growth to our city -- the kind of growth that leverages our rural character and helps preserve our heritage. This means getting citizens' input on the types of economic growth, as well as identifying potential partnerships, engaging with them, and finding ways to work together for the benefit of Chattahoochee Hills. I will also work to ensure that city officials can articulate the real financial benefits of decisions, as well as the necessity of such development, while keeping the rural character intact. One question I will ask for every vote brought before me as a councilmember is: "Does this decision move us toward or away from economic growth while maintaining our rural character?" I used a similar line of questioning with much success in guiding my decision making while at Delta Air Lines and in my consulting engagements.

My second priority will be communication with my constituency. My full plan for improving communications is outlined in Question 5 below.

Another important priority is promoting unity. To bridge the gaps that may exist within the family of Chattahoochee Hills, we need to be communicating and discussing issues and ideas to find our way forward together. This requires strong leaders to listen to all sides of the discussion and make fair-minded choices.

And to reemphasize, all of these other priorities serve the goal of ensuring that Chattahoochee Hills remains deliberately rural as outlined in Comprehensive Plan. I will work diligently to ensure everything approved by city council both promotes and encourages the rural nature of the city.

### **4. What is the city's biggest challenge and how would you address it?**

The biggest challenge to the City of Chattahoochee Hills is ensuring that the city's rural character is protected and sustained while promoting purposeful economic growth within the city.

The financial stability and financial growth of Chattahoochee Hills is paramount to the continued success of the city. Financial stability allows decisions to be made without compromising principles. Financial growth gives the city greater ability to implement discretionary projects. This gives the city flexibility to accept or reject economic growth based on impact to our rural character and not give up aspects of our unique rural essence merely to meet budgetary needs.

If elected, I promise I will not compromise our city's unique rural characteristics for the sake of economic growth. On the contrary, I will work with the other city council members, the mayor, city staff, and the people of Chattahoochee Hills to seek out the best economic growth which both compliments and enhances our cherished rural nature.

**5. How will you engage voters in your district in identifying issues that are important to them and how will you ensure progress is made on these issues?**

Communication with my constituency is a top priority. I will proactively communicate with citizens and also maintain an open, listening posture to hear their concerns. To this end, I will hold, at minimum, quarterly town hall meetings, preferably with other elected officials and city employees. These meetings will both inform voters of the issues that City Council is currently discussing and solicit input from the constituents. I will take all of the input from the citizens and bring it to City Council and city officials for their consideration. In addition, I will advocate for the issues at City Hall and give progress updates at the next town hall meeting.

I will encourage better communication between city hall and the citizenry by better utilizing all available media similar to Chief Greg Brett's Code Red Initiative. Instead of merely directing people to the city website, I will provide a conduit by which interested parties can request that information be pushed to them via such platforms as Twitter, Face Book, text messages, email, etc. In addition, I promise to respond to all communications from constituents in a timely manner.

**6. Due to falling revenue many cities are making tough choices about city services. How would you prioritize the city budget and other financial investments involving tax dollars?**

Essential services are always critical: fire, police and paramedic services will never be compromised. Beyond that, priorities change with changing needs. To determine current priorities, I will sit down with various stakeholders to understand the greatest needs at the moment. While at Delta, I was responsible for \$250 million of profit and loss for seven different business units in Delta's technical operations organization. During this time, I worked closely with the business unit leaders. We worked together on a daily basis, juggling changing internal priorities and corporate budgetary constraints. Together, we prioritized which aspects of their business were most critical to fund at any given time.

As a member of city council, I would meet on a regular basis with city department heads, fellow council members, and the citizens of Chattahoochee Hills to discuss their priorities, just as I did on a regular basis during my time at Delta Air Lines. Maintaining frequent communication with stakeholders and working to understand the issues in depth would enable me to intelligently prioritize the needs and wants of the citizens of Chattahoochee Hills.

**7. How do you plan to establish and/or nurture important relationships with the City of South Fulton, Fulton County, and other cities and agencies that are critical to the success of Chattahoochee Hills?**

I believe it is imperative to build both professional and personal relationships with colleagues in neighboring city and county governments and agencies. The way I will do this is exactly how I established my relationships with the current city council and city staff of the Chattahoochee Hills – by asking them to sit down and discuss issues and concerns and successes and achievements over a meal or cup of coffee. This would not be a one-time event, but ongoing interaction over time.

When people sit face-to-face with others and listen to them talk about experiences and speak about their own, they develop an understanding of what is important to people and build a rapport that promotes cooperation and trust. That cooperation and trust will be the critical factor when other governments' and agencies' assistance is advantageous in the success of the City of Chattahoochee Hills.



# Chattahoochee Hills City Council District Map

Source: <https://gis.fultoncountygga.gov/apps/VotingDistrictsMapViewPublic>

