

Paul Burton

Candidate for Fulton County, District 3

Tax Allocation Districts (TADs) and Economic Development

Question:

Fulton County has recently considered its participation in City of Atlanta Tax Allocation Districts and the conditions under which county tax revenues should be committed to TAD projects. What criteria should Fulton County use when deciding whether to participate in a TAD, and what financial safeguards, limits, or accountability measures do you believe should apply?

Paul Burton's Response:

Diverting county property tax growth into a TAD often forces a countywide tax increase to fund expected growth (e.g., cost of living, maintenance) in basic infrastructure and services—an impact that never reverses after the TAD ends.

Fulton County should only participate in a TAD if a project passes a rigorous, independent "but-for" test proving it cannot happen otherwise, and where the economic return clearly outweighs the amount invested.

Where TADs are approved, three non-negotiable safeguards must govern:

1. Escrow-Based Milestones: County funds must be held in escrow and released only upon meeting audited performance milestones.
2. Developer-Borne Risk: Any shortfall in revenue, project performance, or debt service must be borne solely by the developer or sponsoring city, not Fulton County. This must be assured up front.
3. Clear Caps and Expirations: Definite caps on county contributions and firm sunset dates without extensions. Fulton County should never assume financial liability for development projects it does not control.

Property Assessments and Taxation

Question:

Changes in residential and commercial property values have increased attention on Fulton County's assessment process, including valuation methods, appeals, exemptions, and the distribution of the property-tax burden. What changes, if any, would you support to improve the accuracy, fairness, transparency, and predictability of Fulton County's residential and commercial property assessment and taxation process?

Paul Burton's Response:

With roughly 400,000 parcels across Fulton County, it is impossible for staff to appraise each property manually with consistency and fairness. Unfortunately, recurring digest errors—such as missing parcels, misclassified properties, and unevenly applied standards—continue to erode public trust.

To fix this, the Board of Assessors must transition to transparent, rule-based valuation models keyed to property class, neighborhood geography, and realistic market trends (for example, a property should not see a 12% assessment spike in a market growing far slower). Rather than keeping these methodologies inside a black box, the assessment models should be published and subject to public review and comment.

Once established, modernized appraisal technology (CAMA and GIS) should apply these rules uniformly across the digest, cross-referencing permitting and satellite data so no parcel is omitted. The Board of Assessors should then function as an audit body: reviewing model outputs, investigating anomalies, and continuously tuning the algorithms to eliminate human bias and ensure fair, predictable assessments.

Finally, because technology enables the dispassionate application of these standards, every taxpayer should receive an itemized notice showing exactly how their specific assessment was calculated.

County Services and Priorities

Question:

Fulton County is responsible for major services including courts and justice, health and behavioral health services, libraries, elections, and services for seniors. What are your top priorities for improving Fulton County government over the next four years, and how would you measure whether those improvements are successful?

Paul Burton's Response:

Fulton County must focus on core statutory duties, fiscal discipline, and measurable outcomes across three key priorities:

1. Modernize Justice & Resolve the Jail Crisis

The jail crisis and court backlogs are the county's largest liabilities. We must integrate court scheduling with detention management, expand mental health diversion courts, and execute targeted facility remediation without tax hikes. This requires active collaboration with the District Attorney, Sheriff, and judiciary.

Success Metrics: Reduce average pre-trial detention for non-violent detainees by 50% and achieve a court case-clearance rate of 100%.

2. Expand Behavioral Health & Protect Vulnerable Seniors

Behavioral health is essential preventive public safety infrastructure. We must maximize crisis stabilization centers and expand co-responder teams to divert individuals into treatment before booking. Concurrently, we must protect vulnerable seniors with reliable nutrition, healthcare screenings, and home-repair assistance to help them age in place safely.

Success Metrics: A 40% annual increase in pre-booking crisis diversions and zero waitlists for low-income senior nutrition and home-repair programs.

3. Invest in Libraries, Fair Assessments & Fiscal Discipline

Public trust requires operational competence:

- Libraries: Modernize branch technology, expand literacy and workforce programs, and optimize operating hours.
- Assessments: Replace subjective valuations with transparent, published mass-appraisal algorithms.
- Fiscal Discipline: Roll back millage rates against inflationary digest spikes to protect household budgets.

Success Metrics: A 25% increase in library program engagement, a 50% reduction in Board of Equalization tax appeals, and maintaining required county operating reserves.