



LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Commissioner of Public Works
City of Atlanta Department of Public Works

Atlanta, GA

"Supporting a city build for the future."

A Special Opportunity

The heart and soul of a dynamic metro area with a population of some 6.3 million, the City of Atlanta is at the center of one of the nation's most vibrant regions. There are just over 500,000 residents in the City itself, but its services and influence spread well beyond the city's legal limits.

The City's [Department of Public Works](#) (DPW) is little known by the general public, but its work touches more residents every day than almost any other city department. Among DPW's core responsibilities:

- Maintaining, protecting and improving the public right of way
- Collecting, recycling and disposing the solid waste created by Atlanta's residents and visitors
- Maintaining the vehicles used by various city departments, from fire trucks to police cars to riding mowers, a total of some six thousand individual assets.

The effective leadership of the department is central to residents' sense of a well-run city, and the people of DPW have an outsized impact on the daily functions that most people take for granted—until there is a problem. As one resident put it, "This is government at its most basic, delivering fundamental services without which a community simply cannot function."

Atlanta's Department of Public Works has had numerous leaders in recent years. Some former commissioners have been tapped to lead other, larger City of Atlanta departments, and some have been recruited away by other government entities.

As Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens concludes the third year of what most observers expect to be the first of two terms as Mayor, he has redoubled



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efforts around an agenda to “Move Atlanta Forward.” This agenda is built on four pillars:

- One Safe City
- A City of Opportunity for All
- A City Built for the Future
- Effective and Ethical Government.

DPW may be one of the city’s smaller departments, but it has a direct impact—even an outsized one—on the overall city’s trajectory. Accordingly, we seek a public-spirited leader who understands that strategy and tactics depend on each other, and that nothing matters more than a workforce motivated by the opportunity to contribute every day to the livability of a city they all call home.

There is much work to be done. Atlanta’s Department of Public Works has experienced underinvestment in its own operations for quite some time. Employee turnover is high, especially among the most labor-intensive roles, and too much city equipment is outdated, as other funding priorities have taken precedence.

There’s good news, too: There is a stable, experienced and enthusiastic group of middle managers that takes genuine pride in the department’s contributions; as one supervisor put it, “We keep Atlanta rolling—and clean!” Recent upgrades in technology have strengthened the role of data in such areas as route management, preventive maintenance and customer service. And a larger-than-expected turnout for the department’s recent career fair showed encouraging interest in the department’s training programs (“As a second-chance employer, we change people’s lives”), resulting in a healthy number of new hires.

The Organization

Under the leadership of Andre Dickens, the 61st Mayor of Atlanta, the administration is focused on bringing opportunity and equity to the city. Mayor Dickens' agenda is rooted in **Moving Atlanta Forward**. As he shared in his first State of the City address, his vision for Atlanta is:

One city with one bright future. A city of safe, healthy, connected neighborhoods with an expansive culture of equity, empowering upward mobility and full participation for all residents, embracing youth development and an innovative, dependable government moving Atlanta forward, together.

The Department of Public Works is integral to the Mayor's commitment to a dependable government. DPW has two core functions: Solid waste services (garbage, yard waste and recycling) and fleet services (maintenance of the City's fleet of nearly 5000 motorized vehicles). Other important services include street sweeping, the Keep Atlanta Beautiful initiative and related special services. All contribute to effective services and a livable, thriving city.

Formally, DPW's mission is straightforward: Enhance the quality of life by providing environmentally safe protections for the welfare of all citizens. Informally, according to senior leadership, the Department of Public Works embodies a first-responders attitude, deploying "front-line heroes" who "deliver whatever is needed."

While the details may vary from commissioner to commissioner, at present there are four key offices within DPW:

- **Office of the Commissioner**, providing administrative leadership, strategic planning, and support for the overall management of



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the department. These services include human resources and labor relations, public relations & community outreach, budget and fiscal management, information technology, contracts and procurement, performance management, and coordination of legislative affairs for the department.

- **Office of Solid Waste Services** is responsible for the collection and disposal management of solid waste for residents within the City of Atlanta. SWS is also responsible for waste reduction and recycling, landfill post-closure management, solid waste management, and analysis.
- **Office of Special Services** is responsible for providing common-good services to the City of Atlanta. These services include street sweeping and cleaning, right-of-way mowing and cleaning, dead animal removal, combating illegal dumping, litter education and enforcement, facilitating the Keep Atlanta Beautiful Commission program, storm debris removal, and assisting with special events and emergency operations.
- **Office of Fleet Services** is responsible for the acquisition, maintenance, and disposal of the City of Atlanta’s motorized equipment fleet of 4,900 units and 1,931 other pieces of associated equipment, totaling over 6,800 items of equipment. This office is also responsible for the purchasing and dispensing of over three million gallons of fuel annually. Additionally, OFS partners with other city departments to deliver critical city fleet management services.

DPW's total proposed budget for 2025 is \$102 million, up 8% from 2024. The approximate allocation among the core departments is as follows:

- Solid Waste Services: \$45 million.
- Fleet Services: \$35 million.
- General Fund (administration, special services, right-of-way management, etc.): \$21 million.

DPW's proposed budget for 2025 can be found on pp 237-245 of the city's overall budget, available [here](#). For those interested in a detailed look at operating metrics, the department's August 2024 report to the City Utilities Committee of Atlanta City Council is available [here](#).

The Mandate

Atlanta's Commissioner of Public Works will be an experienced, adaptive and broad-gauged leader with a passion for excellence in civic services. Reporting to Atlanta's Chief Operating Officer, the Commissioner will be an adaptable leader, combining strategic perspective with tactical competence to ensure a shared vision throughout the department of major goals, priorities and the metrics to support them.

The Commissioner will bring stability and focus to a department often taken for granted, reinforcing collaborative relationships within the department and with its many stakeholders and customers.

The Commissioner must be an effective advocate for departmental employees, leveraging its reputation as a second-chance employer to promote a people-first environment. That does not mean the Commissioner should be a soft touch; to the contrary, a transparent management style that expects and rewards mutual accountability would be fully consistent with the management culture being sought throughout Mayor Dickens' administration.



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In June and July of 2026, Atlanta will host eight FIFA World Cup matches, including one of the semifinal matches. Although large events are relatively commonplace in Atlanta, one of the country's most active convention centers, the reputational impact of World Cup matches will be exceptional. They also provide a handy marker for the level of service global visitors expect—and Atlanta residents deserve.

Key Responsibilities

The Commissioner of Public Works has a multifaceted role, with many overlapping responsibilities. Here are just a few of the priorities the next Commissioner can expect:

Executive Leadership

- Lead and oversee the Department of Public Works, ensuring the department's people, processes, outcomes, and impact are sources of pride within city government and across the larger community.
- Provide strategic direction and tactical support to division directors in support of policies and priorities subject to Mayoral and/or City Council approval.
- Leverage data and analytics to monitor progress, assess performance and inform decision-making processes; ensure that relevant data are being collected, analyzed and utilized to best effect in monitoring and supporting desired outcomes.
- Lead the department with respect and transparency, reinforcing a service-oriented atmosphere at all levels of the organization and promoting *connectivity* between and among the deputy commissioners and the three divisions.

- Ensure the department's communications are timely, responsive and relevant, anticipating the needs of stakeholders and customers, not merely responding to them.
- Be vigilant about the department's long-term priorities, minimizing the risk of their getting lost among the ever-present immediate needs intrinsic to DPW's work—in effect, promoting preventive maintenance for the department, not just for the vehicles in its care.

Financial Planning & Oversight

- Oversee the development and management of the department's operating and capital budgets, enforcing fiscal responsibility and efficient allocation of resources.
- Represent the Department before the City Council, the City Utilities Committee and other oversight bodies as appropriate.

Human Resources

- Lead, support and mentor departmental staff, fostering a culture of excellence and continuous improvement.
- Ensure the department's workforce is well-trained, well-led and equipped to meet the challenges of a modern public works department.
- Be a visible, respectful leader, quick to affirm team and individual contributions in what is often a gritty operating environment.
- Oversee the recruitment, hiring and onboarding processes to ensure the department attracts and retains the talent its plans require.

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The Candidate

The next Commissioner of Public Works will be an operationally oriented leader who combines vision and strategy with an inviting management style. We are open to prospects from a variety of backgrounds, but the most compelling contenders will likely be those who combine a record of meaningful civic leadership with the business and operating acumen to lead a \$100-million department.

Among the attributes, experience and characteristics being sought:

- An engaging and inspiring leader committed to collaboration, ethics, equity and inclusion. A superior communicator, the Commissioner will establish and nurture relationships within the department and with the department's customers, stakeholders and communities being served.
- A leader with an innovative lens, who can evolve the department's operations and technology to meet emerging needs.
- A systems manager with the proven ability to coordinate logistics to ensure operational effectiveness and increase the department's efficiency.
- A transparent leader who communicates with clarity, respect and a learning mindset.
- An authentic, empowering leader who inspires by example, welcoming both people and ideas.
- Superior listening, communication and relationship building skills.
- A proactive, forward-thinking manager who leads with both confidence and humility.
- A consensus builder with the courage to make tough decisions.

- A record of leading a diverse team, largely made up of blue-collar workers; demonstrated respect for front-line workers, without whom all other plans are meaningless.
- Strong analytical and problem-solving abilities combined with a knack for interpreting complex data in making informed decisions.
- The ability to communicate authentically with people at all levels of the hierarchy, from the mayor to the maintenance shed.
- A self-aware executive with a curious mind; a courageous, empathetic leader who is not averse to taking smart risks.

The Relationships

The Commissioner of Public Works reports to:	Chief Operating Officer, City of Atlanta
And manages a department of some 750 FTEs through:	Three Deputy Commissioners <i>(Two of the three current deputies are interim appointments, pending the naming of the Commissioner)</i>
And engages with a variety of stakeholders, including:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atlanta City Council • DPW customers (City of Atlanta agencies, residents and businesses) • Peers in other jurisdictions

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The Department of Public Works seeks a leader with an innovative lens, who can evolve the department's operations and technology to meet emerging needs.





The Location

Situated among the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, Atlanta features a picturesque topography that includes rolling hills, lush greenery and one of the densest tree canopies of any major city in the U.S.

Atlanta is the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement and the home of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. It boasts the world's busiest airport, 66 colleges and universities, several professional athletic franchises, numerous national and global nonprofit organizations, and nearly 20 corporations in the Fortune 500.

Additional information on Atlanta, the nation's sixth-largest metro area, can be found on the Metro Chamber's website [here](#). The [Atlanta Regional Commission](#) has a wealth of information on the area, as does the City's official [website](#).

For potential consideration or to suggest a prospect, please email relevant materials to

ATLDPW@BoardWalkConsulting.com

or call **Diane Westmore, Sam Pettway**, or

Cynthia Moreland at 404-BoardWalk (404-262-7392).

For the current status of this and other searches, please visit

www.BoardWalkConsulting.com
