

By Eloisa Klementich

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The University of Georgia School of Business' [prediction of economic growth](#) for our state in 2025 is welcome. At the same time, the chance to escape poverty for an Atlantan born into it hasn't improved in more than a decade. A world-class city is one that empowers every citizen with the opportunity for upward mobility. In Atlanta, though, [about 18% of our neighbors live below the poverty line](#). Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to benefit from economic growth is easier said than done.

Let's resolve now to redouble our efforts to leverage the government's investments in disinvested communities to catalyze wealth creation for families. This is an opportunity to bring about lasting, impactful change that breaks the cycle and makes economic mobility possible. It is a way to realize the justice and equity the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. envisioned in the beloved community.

How do we know where to invest? Based on 32 metrics — such as third grade reading levels and disposable income — [Invest Atlanta](#) created a tool that has statistically identified where in Atlanta greater government focus is needed. No surprise: There is a concentration of focus in south Atlanta.

Armed with this data and insight, we are creating ways to support these disinvested neighborhoods. This focus is changing the tide. For example, understanding that [more than 13% of our fellow Atlantans are food insecure](#), we are targeting food deserts throughout the city. The goal is to ensure that everyone in Atlanta is within a half mile of access to fresh foods. Invest Atlanta is not waiting for the market to step in, though we welcome collaboration. Our strategy includes leasing grocer space, investing in innovative approaches to improving food security such as supporting independently owned markets that use cutting-edge technology for a consumer to bypass checkouts to enhance the shopping experience, supporting community stores and creating partnerships with long-standing organizations such as the Atlanta Food Bank.

Another example is providing tax relief for Atlanta's legacy residents. Welcoming new people into a community adds diversity, which is at the foundation of our country. As we do so, we want to ensure our longtime residents are not displaced from their neighborhood. Tax relief programs that put a ceiling on property taxes are essential. They ensure that for the next 20 years, what a senior pays in taxes will not change. These investments are game changers for seniors who might have otherwise had to make tough economic decisions between food, medicine or taxes.

Recognizing no one entity can do this work alone, a concerted focus by business, philanthropy and government on these disinvested neighborhoods will drive the impact we all want to see. We can join in a shared mission of individual and community empowerment with a mandate to turn the tide and create wider pathways toward economic freedom. After all, the converse of "a rising tide lifts all boats" is "a receding tide sinks all ships." Surely that's not the outcome we seek.



Credit: Handout

Eloisa Klementich