

Night Mayors: Addressing the Challenges of Atlanta's Nighttime Economy

August 4, 2021

District2Atlanta

The Heart of the City

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Overview

The city of Atlanta is experiencing challenges to its nighttime economy. These challenges include concerns around public safety, road congestion, the vitality of local businesses, and a resulting decline in quality of life for residents. In order to address these challenges, Atlanta could introduce a *night mayor*. Across different cities, the authority, government affiliation, selection process, and even official titles of night mayors vary widely. But broadly, they are officials who act as liaisons between the various stakeholders of nighttime economies.

This report will provide an overview of the various night mayor models, both domestic and abroad, and recommend a framework for Atlanta to adopt.

Problem Statement

The quality of life and economic vitality of Atlanta's nighttime economy is threatened by issues related to public safety, traffic, and pandemic recovery. Over the course of 2020 and into this year, Atlanta, like many other cities in the US, has been experiencing a surge in violent crime. This rise in crime has impacted the public safety of residents who participate in the city's nighttime economy, as criminal activity tends to increase at night. In terms of traffic, nighttime traffic and street racing have become a problem within Atlanta's busy nightlife districts. This has created noise concerns for residents and pedestrian safety issues for the patrons of nocturnal businesses. Lastly, the city's nighttime economy is recovering from the impact of the pandemic. Many of Atlanta's restaurants, bars and nightclubs were forced to close in 2020 due to reduced public gathering and revenue losses. Struggles continue as adjacent crime and a workforce shortage persist.

Background

Night Mayors: Role and Responsibilities

Night mayors are liaisons who perform mediation and advocacy functions among citizens, businesses, and local government officials. An example of mediation includes New York City's Nightlife Mayor conducting a listening tour to resolve conflict between the city's residents and nightlife industry.

They may also offer policy solutions. An instance of policymaking includes Amsterdam's night mayor expanding hours of operation by offering twenty-four-hour licenses to ten trial venues. Additionally, they may enhance the built environment in order to improve quality of life. For example, Orlando's Nighttime Economy Manager introduced a pilot program that created two rideshare hubs to streamline evening transit.

Historical Context

The night presents unique challenges. Economically, culturally, and socially, a thriving nighttime economy is a valuable asset to a city. However, there are negative affiliated externalities such as noise, crime, and antisocial behavior, like disorderly conduct.

To mitigate the latter, systems of urban nocturnal governance exist, which have traditionally involved some mix of state and non-state actors. For instance, on crime, this ranges from local police to privately formed neighborhood watches. The common limitation associated with these systems is that they typically employ day-time law enforcement strategies, overlooking the unique characteristics of the evening. This lack of distinction leads to things like over-policing and the overregulation of nightlife businesses.

Subsequently, a new wave to thinking has arisen, which is tailored to the uniquely nocturnal facets of city life. Examples include the cultivation of inclusive spaces and improvements to the public health of nighttime patrons. There is less emphasis on tackling crime through enforcement alone, with greater focus on city planning and collaboration between stakeholders. This has paved the way for the night mayor, a position crafted to facilitate the success of these goals.

In the early 2000s, Berlin and Amsterdam became the first to install night mayors. The Netherlands would go on to appoint over 20 night mayors, or *nachburgermeesters*. As of 2020, over 45 cities globally have installed them. This includes New York City, Detroit, Washington D.C., and Seattle.

Case Studies

Amsterdam

Amsterdam's first night mayor, or *nachtburgemeester*, was elected in 2014. Since then, they have had a large impact on nighttime city planning and policymaking. Amsterdam's night mayor is charged with fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and safe 24-hour economy. They liaise between local politicians, entrepreneurs, and residents, solving the night's problems by promoting dialogue and building coalitions. The night mayor also advises the private and public sectors on policy.

The position is housed within a private non-profit, the Night Mayor Foundation, that receives funding from the municipality and nighttime businesses. The night mayor is subject to an electoral process that is administered by the Night Mayor Foundation. Elections are conducted in three phases: online, town hall, and jury votes. The winner holds office for two years, during which they lead the Night Mayor Foundation and are responsible for setting the organization's agenda.

Despite involvement in policy making, Amsterdam's night mayor is not directly affiliated with the city's government. Consequently, the night mayor does not have any direct enforcement or regulatory power, and the office's relationship to City Hall is strictly advisory in nature.

London

London's first Night Czar was appointed in 2016. The position was created as part of a broader effort to protect the city's 24-hour economy. In coordination with the policy-developing Nighttime Commission, the Night Czar ensures the implementation of the Mayor's plan to support London's night life. They hear the concerns of the residents, workers, and businesses involved in London's night life. They also safeguard London's nocturnal venues, working to prevent their closure by advocating for their interests in City Hall.

The Night Czar is appointed and administered by the office of the Mayor, directly incorporated within local government. Interested candidates apply for the position online through a government-operated hiring portal.

New York City

New York City's Office of Nightlife was first established in 2017. A complementary 14-member Nightlife Advisory Board was established simultaneously to recommend policy solutions and closely collaborate with the Office of Nightlife. The executive director of the Office of Nightlife is charged with promoting a safe and vibrant afterhours economy. They recommend and coordinate the implementation of programs to support the city's nighttime economy and culture. They also serve as the night life's central point of contact, liaising between businesses, residents, and government agencies. Additionally, the officeholder mediates conflict between neighborhoods and nocturnal establishments.

Interested candidates apply for the position through a traditional city employee hiring portal. Ultimately, the executive director of the is appointed by the Mayor. The role is housed entirely within local government, situated within the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment. While the officeholder has the power to implement city wide campaigns and programs, they play an advisory role on policy.

Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C.'s Office of Nightlife and Culture was established in 2018. The same legislation also created the Commission on Nightlife and Culture, a 15-member body that recommends policy solutions to local legislators and closely collaborates with the Office of Nightlife. The Director of Nightlife and Culture is charged with promoting an economically and culturally vibrant night life. They serve as a liaison between businesses and local government, ensuring compliance with District policies and procedures. They also advise the Mayor and City Council on policy. Additionally, the officeholder fields residents' complaints and resolves their disputes.

The Director of Nightlife and Culture is appointed by the Mayor. This hiring process is facilitated by the Mayor's Office of Talent and Appointments. It is a cabinet-level position, and the officeholder reports directly to the Mayor. Although directly incorporated within local government, this position does not hold any regulatory or enforcement power.

A Solution For Atlanta

This report has covered how cities, both domestic and abroad, have adopted night mayors to support their nighttime economies. That analysis has yielded three main policy options that Atlanta could adopt:

1. **Maintain status quo:** Maintaining the status quo would mean changing nothing. The Atlanta Police Department's current plan to address violent crime is to improve video surveillance systems, increase police presence on the streets, and encourage night clubs to hire off duty officers as security. Their primary approach to traffic and street racing issues has included targeted street closures. In terms of pandemic recovery, there has not been an effort on the local level to specifically aid the nighttime economy.
2. **Implement an Amsterdam-model night mayor:** Atlanta could implement a night mayor that is modeled after the position in Amsterdam. The night mayor would be responsible for liaising between local politicians, entrepreneurs, and residents. The officeholder would also advise the private and public sectors on policy. They would not be directly affiliated with the city's government. Rather, the position would be housed within a private non-profit that receives funding from the municipality and nighttime businesses. The night mayor would be subject to a public electoral process that is administered by the non-profit.
3. **Implement a US-model night mayor:** Atlanta could introduce a night mayor that is modeled after the position in other US cities. The Atlanta City Council would enact legislation to simultaneously create a Department of Nightlife and a Nightlife Advisory Board. The Mayor would be charged with appointing the Director of the Department of Nightlife. The director would then create strategies to improve the public safety and quality of life at night, support the nighttime economy, mediate conflict between nightlife establishments and residents, and liaise between businesses and local government. In terms of the Nightlife Advisory Board, both City Council and the Mayor would appoint an equal number of volunteer members to the board, each from relevant industries. The board would recommend policy solutions to city officials and closely collaborate with the Department of Nightlife.

Outcomes Matrix

The cost, political feasibility, and effectiveness of each policy option are important to consider. The table below visualizes each policy’s projected outcomes across these three evaluative criteria.

	Status Quo	Amsterdam-model	US-model
Cost	Neutral	Moderate	Moderate
Political feasibility	High	Low	Moderate
Effectiveness	Low	High	Moderate

Recommendation

We recommend that Atlanta implement a US-model. Compared to the Amsterdam-model, this option is more feasible in Atlanta’s current political environment. While the cost of instituting a US-model night mayor is moderate, it is projected to be more effective in supporting Atlanta’s nighttime economy than maintaining the status quo. Employing standard daytime strategies to address issues at night, especially crime and public safety, can result in unintended negative consequences.