

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Friday, March 8, 2019

Hilton Orrington

Evanston, Illinois

by Mayor Stephen Hagerty

Can everyone hear me? Excellent! This is already going better than last year.

Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for being here at the State of the City Luncheon. If you haven't been to the State of the City before, this is the event where I, the Mayor, take credit for all of your hard work. Thank you to the Evanston Chamber of Commerce for inviting me to do that again this year.

I was told my speech was a bit long last year—except my parents who were listening and thought it wasn't long enough. So this year, a City staff member recommended I bring an Amazon Alexa device on stage and have it set a timer for 20 minutes to keep me in check. But I said, "No way am I going to let the government listen in on my speech."

One reason I love this event—besides having a captive audience for 20 minutes—is that it brings together so many people who contribute to the economic and social vitality of our city. Looking around, I see business owners. I see educators. I see elected officials and City staff. I see volunteers. I see people who raise the bar in Evanston. And I see you all together in one room.

That doesn't happen enough – getting doers and builders and creators and helpers in one room. I want to encourage all of you to take the opportunity to say hello to someone new today or to someone you've always wanted to meet. Lay the foundation for future partnerships to move our City forward.

Moving forward—progress—is the theme of this year's luncheon. It's a fitting theme, because today is not only the State of the City, it's also International Women's Day. And, I'm pleased that this year, I'm not competing against a woman, Chelsea Clinton, who last year was in Evanston at the same time I was giving this speech.

As Mayor, I've been fortunate to follow in the footsteps of three women who consecutively made progress in our community. They're featured in the centerpieces on your tables: Mayor Joan Barr—also a Syracuse alum, Mayor Lorraine Morton—a Northwestern alum, and Mayor Elizabeth Tisdahl—I'm not sure what college she went to. Let's acknowledge these three female leaders who led our city for 32 consecutive years with a round of applause.

While Mayor Morton's absence is notable, her spirit and optimism for Evanston fills this room.

Evanston has always been home to incredible women who've made lasting contributions to our community, our country, and our world, including Frances Willard, who fought for women's rights—including the right to vote; world-renowned botanist and conservation advocate Margery Carlson; Mayme Spencer, our first African American alderman; and many others.

Evanston women continue to make history today and I would like to take a moment to acknowledge some of them in this room. Please, hold your applause.

Can we have our state legislators stand? Yes, for the first time in Evanston history, all five are women.

Mayor Tisdahl, will you please stand up?

Can we have our past and present female City Council members stand up? Six of our nine aldermen are women, begging the question: Why don't we call all nine of our City Council members alderwomen?

Can we have our female City department directors, managers and staff stand up?

Can we have our women business owners stand up?

Can we have women that are on the boards of directors and staffs of our community organizations stand up?

Can we have the women representing our education institutions stand up?

Can we have all other women who've contributed to our community stand up?

I can think of no better visual of progress than the leaders standing here today. Let's give them a round of applause. These are inspiring women.

And we could use some inspiration. 2018 was a difficult year. I have the angry emails and Facebook messages to prove it. I'm just glad 300+ people showed up today to celebrate our achievements, reaffirm our commitment to working hard to solve our challenges, and listen to a Mayor recently described by one resident as an "unqualified, clueless, greedy idiot." If you're in this room, I'm not going to ask you to stand up.

But—jokes and insults aside—it was a challenging year. We went through a difficult budget process that required tough decisions and shared sacrifices. If you drove here this morning and paid for street parking, you shared some of that sacrifice. If you didn't pay for parking and you get a ticket, you'll share even more. Don't worry—it's for a good cause.

In the end, we passed a balanced budget that will allow us to continue to provide the services that our residents expect and continue investing in the future of our community.

If you had a chance to look at the Annual Report on your table, you've seen that despite our challenges, we got a lot done in 2018.

Our Fire Department achieved a Class 1 Fire Protection Rating, placing it in the top one percent of all fire departments in the United States.

Evanston became the first city in Illinois to target 100 percent renewable electricity for all properties by 2030 by adopting the Climate Action and Resilience Plan. And who has the state's largest municipal composting program? You guessed it: Evanston. I'd like to acknowledge 7th Ward Alderwoman Eleanor Revelle, who's a leader on our City Council on environmental issues.

Evanston's Lifeguard Service became the only Certified Lifeguard Agency on the Great Lakes. Think about that for a minute: More than 120 cities adjoin the Great Lakes, and only Evanston has a certified Lifeguard Agency.

Perhaps you rode your bike on the new Chicago Avenue / Sheridan Road bike lane. If you did, then you rode on one of "America's 10 Best New Bikeways of 2018," according to People for Bikes.

Speaking of bikes, we partnered with Divvy to add three new bike stations at a substantial discount—thank you, Oak Park—and we launched the Divvy for Everyone program, providing \$5 memberships to income-qualified residents.

New murals and sculptures brightened our facilities, parks and viaducts. One of my favorite new murals is on the wall of the Gibbs-Morrison Cultural Center thanks to the leadership of Alderwoman Robin Rue Simmons, who's making great progress in the 5th Ward. Our museums wowed *and* educated us with art and artifacts, including the Block Museum's amazing "Caravans of Gold" exhibit. Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre was nominated for nine Black Theatre Alliance Awards. We are a city rich in culture.

Evanston has long had one of the area's most vibrant downtowns. Now, with Fountain Square renovations complete, we'll have one of the most active downtown spaces on the North Shore, with outdoor fitness classes, concerts, events, and the final and most important ingredient: water.

Finally, in July, we broke ground on a brand new Robert Crown Community Center and Library, which has been a vision of our community for more than a decade. I want to acknowledge the 1,048 community members who've pledged more than \$12 million so far to make this project a reality. It shows just how important this project is—not just to a handful of people—but to our entire community. Thank you to Friends of Robert Crown and all who've supported this project. I'm proud to have two of the leaders of this effort here today – Pete Giangreco and Daniel Stein.

Our City Council didn't make the decision to build a new Robert Crown lightly. An independent financial analysis—in addition to our finance officer's analysis—was conducted by a credentialed and respected former CFO to make sure our City Council was comfortable taking on additional debt to pay for this project. And it's true that it will require a significant ongoing investment from our City. It may mean reallocating City assets, which we're going to take a look at. But it's an investment that will pay dividends for decades to come for residents and families.

As Daniel Burnham—an Evanston resident—said, "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work."

We're aiming high with the Robert Crown Community Center. When it opens later this year, the Center will provide early childhood education programming, state-of-the-art athletic facilities, *and* a branch library, all under one roof. It will provide the City of Evanston with its first public turf athletic fields. It will replace our City's most run-down community center with its crown jewel. That's progress.

None of these accomplishments were achieved by a single individual—they all required collaboration between people, departments, and institutions. With our City and our State's challenges, partnerships are essential to continue making progress in Evanston.

If you've played basketball at Harbert Park lately—you know that progress is needed there. The court's surface is rough. The lines are non-existent. And I've been unable to make my normally deadly hook shot—the "Hagerty Hook." Maybe you've heard of it. If you haven't, just ask my 4-foot, 6-inch 11-year old, who can tell you just how lethal it is.

Last year, we allocated \$100,000 to renovate the basketball court, using a portion of Northwestern's \$1 million Good Neighbor Fund contribution. The City leveraged that initial funding and secured an additional \$320,000 state grant. Now, not only will we renovate the basketball court, we'll renovate the entire park. That's smart planning.

That renovation wouldn't have been possible without Northwestern's contribution. I want to thank President Schapiro and Northwestern for continuing to support Evanston with another \$1 million contribution in 2019. And Morty, I do like the purple sweater.

In 2019, the Good Neighbor Fund will support many important projects, including paramedic services; workforce development; youth outreach; and library programming. It will also support the development of a Parks & Recreation Master Plan and the early implementation of our Climate Action and Resilience Plan.

Together, these projects comprise \$850,000 of Northwestern's \$1 million contribution. Today, I'm proud to announce that the remaining \$150,000 will be allocated to improvements at Lovelace Park, our City's third most used park. That funding will help replace aging playground equipment, greatly improving the experience for the hundreds of families with young children who use that park regularly.

We've made tremendous progress in expanding the number of water customers we serve. This year, Lincolnwood will become the 10th community to purchase Evanston water. Just before New Year's, we turned on the valve supplying Niles and Morton Grove, which will generate more than half a million dollars a year for our City budget.

In 2018, we delivered more than 15 billion gallons of fresh, clean drinking water—that's "billion" with a "b"—to Evanston and neighboring communities. Let's raise our glasses to Darrell King, Dave Stoneback, and the Water Production Team.

Sam Seiler is an Evanston high school student who's a member of that team as part of our Water Production Operator-In-Training Program. Not only is Sam earning academic credit, he's getting hands-on experience in a rewarding career. I'm honored to have him as a guest at my table today. Let's give Sam a round of applause.

Next Saturday, we'll host the 27th annual MSYEP Job Fair at ETHS. 1,000 summer and year-round jobs will be available. If you know an Evanston teenager who needs a job this summer, make sure they attend. For most of us, our first job is the first time our hard work translates into something we all need—a paycheck. As a bonus, teenagers will also get to meet Aldermen Braithwaite and Fleming, who both work tirelessly on youth and young adult programs.

Rasheed Bakare, an ETHS senior, has participated in our MSYEP program for the last three years as a member of our community maintenance team. I'm proud to have him as a guest at my table today. Welcome, Rasheed. Did I mention he's also an honor roll student and a member of the varsity basketball

team? Yes, the team that won 3rd place in state last year and will play Loyola in the Sectional Finals tonight at Niles North.

We also have three other MSYEP students joining us here today thanks to Fischl Dental and Alim Insurance. They're here with their teacher, Darlene Gordon. Please welcome Jack Rutstein, Rebecca Lustig, and Omarrion Williams.

All young people need opportunities. All of us in this room had opportunities presented to us. This June, as part of our Elevate Evanston initiative, we launched the Mayor's Employer Advisory Council to develop sustainable career pathways for youth seeking alternatives to a four-year college degree. Under the leadership of Neil Gambow, more than 60 employers and organizations are working together with the goal of moving 100 Evanston youth directly into careers with local employers each and every year. That's progress.

And there are many great opportunities here in Evanston. The city's office vacancy rate is under 5 percent—that's less than half the rate of downtown Chicago and significantly less than nearby suburbs. It's so low, in fact, President Trump is thinking of building an office tower here. Just kidding.

Our office vacancy rate is low for a reason: People want to be here. They want to work here. They want to visit here. And they want to live here.

This summer, Canal Shores and Space hosted, with the City's blessing, the Out of Space Concert Series, bringing world-class performers like Mavis Staples, The Indigo Girls, and Dinosaur Jr. to our city. I hope we can replicate a wonderful outdoor concert at Canal Shores again this year.

Northwestern Football went bowling again, defeating Utah in the Holiday Bowl. I'm now two-for-two in my friendly wagers with opposing mayors, winning bourbon and craft beer so far. I expect to have a full liquor cabinet by the time I leave office.

Residential developments are underway on Emerson, Sherman and Oak, which will bring roughly 1,000 new residents to Evanston. Those residents will make our city more vibrant, contribute to our tax base, and support our businesses—including the 45 new ones that opened their doors here last year, including Binny's, Industrious Coworking, and Booked—the North Shore's cutest children's book store. I'm proud to have Chelsea Elward, owner of Booked, as a guest at my table today.

One of our City's newest businesses is on Howard Street. Last year, a few dilapidated City-owned storefronts were transformed into the Howard Street Theater. Building the theater was an investment. It required risk. It required vision. It required Alderman Ann Rainey's leadership. It required finding the right theater company to collaborate with. But we did it. Just walk down Howard Street—at least on the Evanston side—and you'll see the progress. You'll even see new banners. Now we need Chicago to match our efforts. And we're looking forward to working with Chicago's new 49th Ward Alderman Maria Hadden.

Safety in the Howard Street area is one of our new Police Chief's top priorities. Chief Cook, welcome back to Evanston.

Over the last decade, our community has gotten progressively safer. Last year, there were 1,000 fewer major crimes reported than there were a decade ago, a decrease of nearly 40 percent.

Ridge Avenue is safer, too. There's been a 13 percent decrease in vehicle crashes on Ridge thanks to a reduced speed limit, traffic signal changes, and efforts to improve visibility. My thanks to Alderman Don Wilson, the neighbors, and the Evanston Police Department for implementing actions to make Ridge safer—even though it now takes my family 20 minutes to get across town.

Our police department continues to work on fostering community relations and understanding. In October, the EPD held its first-ever Five-O Fitness event, partnering with the Fitness Matrix. I was sore for a week afterward. But it was in the name of progress.

Just as we value public safety, we also value our socioeconomic diversity. People come to Evanston because they want to live among people who are different from them. Much can be gained for our community and our world when people of different incomes, races, and ethnicities live among one another. Most importantly, that experience makes us truly understand that we're no different from one another, despite our race, income, or ethnic background. Growing our supply of affordable housing is key to helping maintain that diversity. Last year, we established an Affordable Housing Plan Steering Committee to help guide our City's efforts. We need to have a housing plan in Evanston as impactful as our Climate Action Plan.

We have made progress. Our inclusionary housing ordinance was amended to encourage on-site affordable units, particularly near transit. We've worked hard to get developers to put those units into the developments themselves by increasing the in-lieu fee up to \$175,000, and making other changes.

Since 2016, \$2.5 million has been generated for our Affordable Housing Fund, and 17 percent of units in Evanston are considered affordable. That's above the 10% state mandate—but our City Council is unwavering in its commitment to meeting the needs of our community, and continuing to make Evanston affordable.

Despite all of this progress, there are issues that I and the Council are concerned about:

- Our City's budget challenges are real, and they're not going away in the near future. We can say the same for our state.
- Our sales tax revenue is stagnant, and has been for some time with the rise of online shopping.
- Building permit revenue is expected to be \$5 million less than it was in 2016 due to a natural slowdown in construction on Northwestern's campus.
- Property taxes are burdening homeowners, landlords and renters—and homeowners will be mailed updated County assessments next week, which may bring unexpected changes.

We can address these challenges, but it will require courage and conviction. We will have to continue to convert an old economy tax system into a tax system for the new economy.

One way we've adapted is by taxing rideshare services. That tax is expected to generate close to \$700,000 this year, providing a new revenue stream in line with the new economy to make up for stagnant or declining revenues in other areas.

We also became the first Illinois community to adopt a graduated Real Estate Transfer Tax, which is anticipated to generate additional revenue in the coming years on large, multi-million-dollar real-estate transactions.

I would also be remiss if I didn't mention the opportunities that exist for our community. These too will require hard work, commitment, and vision, but could be transformative.

- I want a performing arts theater in downtown Evanston. I'm looking at you, Northlight Theatre.
- I want an adaptive, functional re-use of Harley Clarke that creates a special place for residents and visitors alike. But in order to get that, we have to have a more thoughtful and thorough process.
- I want a CTA Purple Line that is eventually modernized along with the Red Line. And to do so, we'll need a big lift from our federal and state partners.
- I want a community that doesn't just talk about equity and empowerment, but practices it in all facets of its decision making.
- I want a community that does more to provide holistic, integrated mental health services to address the mental health crisis in this community, particularly among our young people.

Let me conclude by saying that while there's no shortage of challenges and opportunities facing our city, there's also no shortage of people ready to step up and address them.

In November, 67 percent of Evanston residents went to the polls in the Gubernatorial Election—the highest in more than two decades. Kudos to Clerk Devon Reid for helping to get out the vote. That tells me that Evanston residents are invested in their community and their state. They're invested in democracy. They're ready for progress. And they know that progress can't wait.

Progress can't wait for a new president to take action on climate change.

Progress can't wait for our community centers to crumble to invest in new ones.

Progress can't wait for the next recession to grow our tax base and provide career opportunities for our youth.

Progress can't wait for perfection. Just ask any of the women in this room who've broken barriers and made progress in an imperfect world.

Today, I can say that the state of our city is strong because of the people in this room and in this community. I know that if we continue to work together, collaborate, and form partnerships, we'll continue to meet our challenges. We'll continue to be a leader among cities nationwide. And we'll continue to make progress in this community that we all love.

Thank you for all of the hard work you do each and every day to make progress in Evanston.