Statement by Mayor Stephen Hagerty
Tuesday, March 17
Evanston City Council Meeting

Good evening and welcome to the Tuesday, March 17th Evanston City Council meeting. In case you forgot, today is St. Patrick’s Day, so a special shout-out to all of our Irish friends this evening. I also want to thank everyone who has chosen to step up and run for office today to serve their City, State, or Federal government. We are seeing first hand the importance of leadership in uncertain times.

Our country and community have changed significantly since we last met on March 9th. I called this Special Meeting in part because of the rapid, uncertain, and eerie changes that we are all experiencing. I haven’t felt this degree of unease since the fateful day of September 11th, 2001.

Two weeks after September 11th, I was in NYC serving as a federal government liaison to the FDNY, NYPD, and NYC Office of Emergency Management. I saw firsthand the empty streets, the shuttered businesses, and the expressionless looks and unease on people’s faces. I saw entire industries – like the Theater district, restaurants, bars, and airlines – shuttered. I also saw a City pull together. It wasn’t easy. It wasn’t fast. It wasn’t pleasant. But it was gratifying. Months from now, I know we’ll look back upon this dark period and feel a sense of pride that we set aside our differences, our bickering, mocking ways – as a country and community – and banded together to save lives and care for others.
It won’t be easy. It won’t be quick. It won’t be without a lot of pain and struggle. But, like the terrible, tragic day of 9/11, we will come out of this a stronger community; for that I am certain.

Now, onto the updates since our last City Council meeting:

- There have been five confirmed cases of COVID-19 among Evanston residents.
- Our Health and Human Services Department is monitoring those who were in direct contact with these cases. These individuals are to self-isolate and report to the City’s Health and Human Services Department on a daily basis.
- We have additional residents self-isolating who have come into contact with non-Evanston confirmed cases.
- I declared a local state of emergency on Sunday. This declaration will enhance our City’s ability to respond to this pandemic.
- We opened our Emergency Coordination Center, which you’ll also hear referred to as the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), on Sunday, March 15th – the first accredited EOC in our Region to do so. The activation of this Center will allow for greater coordination and management of our COVID-19 response.
- On Sunday, Governor Pritzker announced the closure of all bars and restaurants statewide through March 30 – though restaurants in the State and in Evanston can remain open for delivery, drive-through and pick-up orders.

To respond to this virus and the rapid health and economic challenges ahead of us, I have established a Mayor’s COVID-19 Task Force. This Task Force will be chaired by me and is comprised of key members of the education, government, business, faith, nonprofit, health, and
senior communities. To support this task force will be Community Working Groups in the areas of Senior Living Facilities, Non-Profits, the Business Community, and the Faith Community. This government-organized effort is a whole community response effort, which means we must all work in an organized fashion, along with our State and Federal partners, to support our community’s response and recovery effort. I will do my best to try and help organize our community response. All I ask is that you have patience and trust this model of incident management and long-term recovery.

Right now, my priorities in responding to this virus are as follows:

1. Slowing down the pace of the virus through preventive measures, such as social distancing and washing hands.
2. Ensuring that hospitals and emergency responders are equipped with the necessary supplies.
3. Protecting our homeless and low-income communities, and making sure they’re taking the steps necessary to stay healthy and prevent the spread of this disease, including self-isolating.
4. Helping those most impacted by this major economic disruption. We know that this will take a toll on everyone, but not everyone equally.
5. Increasing blood donations. Organizations like the Red Cross and Vitalant are in urgent need of donors at this time.

We know that the number of cases in Evanston and Illinois is only a tiny fraction of our population, but we also know that if all of us don’t take the immediate, necessary steps to address this issue that these numbers can quickly increase exponentially. It’s occurring in other countries and will occur here unless we all take decisive action and
strictly follow the guidelines of the CDC and IL Department of Public Health.

That’s why tonight, I’m asking all residents to do their part to help “flatten the curve” to reduce the strain on our healthcare system, and to protect those most at risk, especially our senior population and those with underlying health conditions. I urge all residents to take the following actions:

- If you are going to be in the presence of other people, practice social distancing. This means 6 feet apart. If you’re not sure what six feet is, we’re modeling it tonight. We are also modeling “essential” tonight as many of our Aldermen have responsibly chosen to call into this meeting rather than risk exposing themselves to others in our community. Thank you, Aldermen.
- If you are sick, stay home.
- Wash your hands frequently – at least for 20 seconds
- Cover your coughs and sneezes
- Clean and disinfect frequently-touched surfaces

This is not, nor will it be, a pleasant experience for any of us. For some of us in this community who get COVID-19 it will be an awful experience should the disease cause severe complications. So for all you healthy young people out there who think, “I’m young, I’m healthy, I don’t need to worry.” Statistically, that’s true. But I want you to think about your grandparents, parents, guardians, beloved aunt or uncle, neighbor, or anyone over the age of 60; those most at risk, along with others whose immune or respiratory system is compromised.

I ask all of you, in the strongest terms possible, to please comply with the directives of CDC and IDPH; continue to organize, lend a hand and
help one another; and understand that our community leaders and organizations will be pressed to make difficult decisions. As Governor Pritzker said on a conference call today, our decisions lie between a bad decision and a less bad decision. I know we are all trying to make less bad decisions.

The City will be keeping residents updated with frequent communications. I encourage everyone to visit cityofevanston.org/covid19 for the latest updates, resources and FAQs. We will update daily the number of confirmed cases on this webpage. We will not be issuing separate press releases as these cases continue to rise in our community.

This Thursday morning, March 19th, at 11 a.m., the City will host a Live Q&A session with myself and Ike Ogbo, our Health and Human Services Director. You can watch on Channel 16 or the City of Evanston’s Facebook page. The video will also be made available on the City’s COVID-19 page.

Our response to this virus will test us in many ways. It will test our resolve. It will test our patience. It will test our resources. It will test our finances. It will test our community. But I’m confident that we’ll get through this together, and that we’ll emerge as a stronger community on the other side. Please be safe. Be smart. Be prepared. And be well.