

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

*Friday, March 18, 2016
Hilton Orrington/Evanston
Evanston, Illinois
by
Mayor Elizabeth Tisdahl*

For me, it was a gift to see ourselves as others see us.

Anna Galland invited me to an early Thanksgiving dinner with Syrian refugees. The invitation came from the daughter of friends of mine. Jan Schakowsky was coming. It sounded like a wonderful event with free food so I accepted. Several Syrian families came. They had lived in Evanston before moving to Chicago for cheaper rent, proximity to services and to a larger refugee community. They are people with grace, courage, hope and humor. I like them very much and am in awe of them.

A high school freshman spoke to me without an interpreter. She said she liked Chicago's and Evanston's schools, but the Evanston schools were the best. Her mother said that the Chute teachers gave the children rides when the parents could not.

Here's what they said about all of us. "The people in Evanston are so friendly, nicer than anywhere else." That's a great state of the city.

This is also a story of children moving back to Evanston to raise their families. Anna and her family moved to Evanston putting grandparents near their children and grandchildren. A city is doing well when that happens.

Then there's MoveOn.org. I thought I was going to have dinner with Syrian refugees and my friend Ellen's daughter, but there were also TV cameras all over the house. Anna is the executive director of MoveOn.org which is very important. I know a little about what it does. My children told me not to admit that I don't know much about what MoveOn.org does so I am not admitting that, but I absolutely know it's very important and it's in Evanston which is where it should be. There are other ways to view our city.

Bo Bradford's funeral was Friday, January 29. A 20 year old young man, a Curt's Café graduate, who was about to start a full-time job that city outreach workers helped him obtain, was the victim of gunfire on a quiet street where his mother lives in Evanston. Reverend Cherry spoke eloquently at the services about not retaliating and stopping the violence. Alderman Braithwaite and I delivered the same message. The adults applauded. The young people were polite and quiet. That afternoon, shots were fired near Family Focus. Alderman Holmes and I knew what we needed to do, ask Paul Goren to stop all buses from delivering children to the Fleetwood Jourdain Community Center and to Family Focus. I felt horrible as I realized why I knew what to do. Shots had been fired in that area at that time once before. Shots did not use to be fired at community centers. Shots were not fired at 3 in the afternoon. Shooters did not want to hit their little sister, nephew, cousin or friend's child by mistake. Now they don't care. We need to acknowledge a serious problem in Evanston and we need to work together to solve it.

Pastor Cherry is right that African American young men are killing one another, to quote him "...we are doing it to ourselves. It's our problem." I don't like to disagree with Pastor Cherry... But we are one city, 8 square miles full of our homes, our community centers, our schools, our recreation programs and our

residents who must solve our problems in our city. It's everyone's problem. Bo's mother's grief has tentacles that reach throughout the state of our city. Her grief must touch us all.

What are we doing? We have incredibly talented outreach workers, an ever expanding Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program and funds to help families relocate to save the lives of their heavily gang involved teens. We have 2 Ys, Y.O.U, YJC, Curt's Café, we are rich in services for youth but we need to be smarter. To that end the Director of Public Health, Evonda Thomas-Smith asked the Center for Disease Control to send us 3 interns to study violence in Evanston as a public health problem. If we can change people's behavior in terms of healthier diets, smoking cessation and safe sex, we can change violent behavior. The CDC just turned us down. So our Director of Public Health already has a Northwestern University intern assigned to the case. We will apply to the CDC again. Many people have done wonderful work on this issue but we are not getting the results that we need quickly enough. We have to do more. We will do more with or without help from the federal government.

Another view of the state of our city comes from our seniors and their work. Evanston is on its way to becoming a more age friendly city!

The City of Evanston is part of global, national and regional movements of communities that are striving to create urban environments that foster healthy and active aging and the well-being of older people.

Residents, former residents and professionals employed in Evanston are working hard on this initiative. Evanston has an Age Friendly Evanston Task Force. Task Force members and their individual committees are analyzing the physical environment in the community and studying what affects our mental and social well-being.

This analysis has been conducted through simple fundamental conversations, surveys, focus groups with residents, and roundtable discussions with professionals. The feedback indicates Evanston is a good place to live; people want to stay here and age gracefully. It is our hope that this plan will help them do just that.

The Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program jobs each have a story or multiple stories to tell. This is my favorite.

A young man came into my office to ask for a raise. He started working for the city in 2009 in the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program. He did very well at the city and at E.T.H.S. in spite of being periodically homeless. He's been working part time at the city for the last 6 years. He's now a graduate of ETHS and of Northwestern University. I said "What are you doing in my office talking about a dollar an hour raise. You need a career plan" He said he's applied to Yale and Michigan's law schools. That sounded like a career plan to me. Congratulations Morty and Eric. This story says volumes about what good things you are doing and by the way the young man got his raise.

Best practices tell us that providing 1000 summer jobs will reduce violence. There is a tipping point where the number of students who are working, earning money, creating resumes and thinking about careers changes the culture on the street. Currently we have 650 jobs and 685 students applying for jobs. That's a change from 168 jobs in 2009 and 500 applications. We can have an extra 600 jobs at Great America, jobs teens like, because Metra has promised reduced rates that will leave our young

people with enough money left over after paying for transportation to make working at Great America worthwhile. If you know anyone on the Metra Board, please say Thanks.

If you know a young person who is looking for a job or a young person who ought to be looking for a job, please tell them to contact Porschia Davis at the City of Evanston. This is historic. We have more jobs than applicants.

From sessions at the U.S. Mayor's Conference on policing and prevention and from reading "Combatting Youth Violence in American Cities" it is clear that we have most of the partnerships and programs that are recommended. Crime is down 5%. This translates into 104 fewer victims. Worthy of specific mention: Aggravated battery is down 17.2%. Robbery is down 5.6%. Burglary is down 6.3%. Kim Foxx, the Democratic nominee for State Attorney promised me that she will prosecute homicides in Evanston. That will help a lot.

The Evanston Police Department retained the services of native Evanstonian and noted diversity expert, Dr. Gilo Kwesi Logan, to provide long-term training to all members of EPD. The goal is to optimize interactions between officers and those they encounter of different races and cultures. On February 23, Dr. Logan led a community-wide diversity dialogue at the Levy Center. This public input is a valuable component to the development of the program's course content. We do not have a perfect police force but we do have an excellent police force and we are always trying to do better.

Our September 2015 Violence Reduction Strategy includes assigning two members from the Neighborhood Enforcement Team and Tactical Unit to work at recovering firearms. In addition there is an ongoing gun buyback program. We are trying to get the guns off the streets.

Mayor Emmanuel advised checking our laws to find out when we could release a video of an officer involved shooting. We have not, I found out, thank you Mayor Emmanuel, released the video of the bank shooting that is 2 years old. The State of Illinois, Cook County and the States Attorney have not completed their investigations. Ours is done. I trust our legal department will find a way to allow for more timely release of videos should the need arise.

There's good news, Northwestern University donated \$25,000 to renovate the recording studio at Gibbs Morrison. That's terrific, but that's not the best part. What's best is that NU's only request was that the studio be named after Alderman Delores Holmes.

Remember 6 years ago the city gave a welcome to Evanston party for Morty and Mimi Schapiro at what was then Boo Coo. We wanted to show off some of the wonderful diversity in Evanston. 6 years later you know us so well, Morty, that you have picked the best name out of 75,000 names, the very best name to put on the recording studio. Toward the end of this speech I called you the world's best university president. Now I feel I have to top that. At least for today you are the universe's best university president because you named it after Delores.

Evanston has clear challenges and we will meet them. Picture this, I had to walk into a packed Council Chamber, take the microphone away from the Committee Chairman, stop all discussion of the issues the audience came to discuss. I remember thinking I wonder how this is going to go over. I interrupted to introduce everyone to Ray "Boo Boy" Knox, a 40 year resident of Evanston who had played in the Negro League as a catcher for the Chicago American Giants. The audience whose meeting had been interrupted put all their issues aside, abandoned hope for a short meeting and leapt to their feet to give

Ray a long standing ovation. I gave him the Key to the City. We have great people in Evanston. Mr. Knox and everyone in that audience are excellent examples. It means something to be from Evanston. There are shared values that unite us and that is why we have been able to meet past challenges and will meet future ones.

Once a year I go to ETHS to spend 3 hours talking with 100s of students about growing up in the City of Evanston, what works well and not so well for them. This year one of the questions they asked was about the State of Illinois' inability to pass a budget and the State's ever increasing debt's impact on all of us. You have a well-informed, bright student body, Eric. That's a pretty good question one that everyone is asking. I wish I knew the answer.

For cities the problem is the unpredictability of revenues. The State of Illinois is obligated under law to adopt a budget for the next fiscal year each May 31. The City of Evanston adopted a budget in November for the 2016 fiscal year without knowing what impacts an eventual State budget would have on our budget. The City continues to be cautious in its spending and has included in its 2016 budget \$1.5 million to cover any reductions in revenue from the State. We really have no idea if this is enough, but it is a start. At some point, the State of Illinois will have to address the billions of dollars expenses exceed revenues in its operating budget and the billions of dollars in pension deficits it faces. When the State finally does this, the City of Evanston's budget will be at risk as the State had better not, but they might shift revenues from cities to the State. The loss of confidence in government may be the most serious and damaging result of this stalemate. When we lose faith in democracy, we have lost a great deal.

My answer to people who have lost faith in their government is to tell them about Walter, the crossing guard. Think about it. You do not see the mayor, the alderman or our state representatives every day. Crossing guards are a face of government. We see them every day. Just try moving a crossing guard if you want to find out whether or not government does necessary and important work.

Here's Walter's story. Alderman Rainey's email and mine exploded with "Where's Walter? What have you done? This is a major issue and you had better fix it." I did not know who Walter was or what I had done, but I found out. Apparently Walter has parents' cellphone numbers on speed dial and will wait with children whose parents are late to pick them up. He directs traffic clearly, safely and it would be foolhardy to fail to follow his directions. He has an important job. I haven't saved any lives today. Walter probably saved 3 or 4 this morning. What had we done? Transferred Walter because he was being harassed by a parent. We got the message and returned him to his post as quickly as possible. Walter is government at its best and local government is still functioning regardless of what happens at the state and federal level. Democracy still works Walter and his supporters prove it's working in Evanston. Democracy needs an activist and sometimes enraged citizenry. We have that.

Reducing our emissions and fighting climate change will continue to be a goal for the Evanston community, the City staff and the City Council. Evanston is just one of a handful of communities around the globe that are working on its third climate action plan. None of this progress would be possible without community leaders like Northwestern and its commitment to purchase 50% of its electricity from green power or Citizens' Greener Evanston's work to make home energy audits accessible to more and more community members.

Thanks in large part to the City's contract to purchase 100% green power for small businesses and residents Evanston is making great progress towards reducing emissions by 20%.

The World Wildlife Fund and the International Council for Local Government Initiatives selected Evanston as the U.S. Earth Hour Capital out of all other participating cities in the nation. I went to Seoul S. Korea to accept the awards. This is like winning the Super Bowl.

Economic Development in Evanston is happening everywhere. Based on the City's licensing data, 67 new businesses opened during 2015. In 2014 the number was 43. This year's newcomers include Valli Produce and Evanston's third Whole Foods, filling both of Evanston's former Dominick's locations, boosting sales tax revenue, and generating hundreds of new jobs for Evanston residents. Indoor play space and drive-thru coffee outpost Little Beans Café opened in a long-vacant retail building and has quickly become a local favorite. Payment processing firm Accuity also relocated its headquarters and all 250 employees to Downtown Evanston from Skokie, while consultants ZS Associates announced plans to stay in Evanston and expand. Also in Downtown, PharmaCann opened the first and only medical marijuana dispensary in Evanston.

2016 holds lots of promise. Northlight wants to return to Evanston to the Downtown and we are working to figure out how that will happen.

Howard Street Theatre Project attracted the attention of Strawdog from Chicago's Lakeview neighborhood and Ross Barney Architects was the selected architect to work on the initial phase of this project.

Several of the large construction projects begun in 2015, such as the Hyatt House, Main + Chicago, and the downtown building that will house LuLu's and Taco Diablo, are slated for delivery in 2016. As those projects finish, new projects are already in the pipeline, including a new mixed-use development in Downtown Evanston at 1571 Maple. Evanston Plaza shopping center is revitalizing with Valli Produce's new owners leading the way. They have attracted Play it Again Sports, Dollar Tree and the expansion of Dance Center Evanston. The owners promise more announcements soon.

The news on police and fire pensions is mixed. We thought the police pensions were funded at 51.5% for 2014 and fire was funded at 49.1%, a significant increase from 2008. We changed actuaries and the resulting changes in mortality tables meant police are only funded at 47.9% and fire is at 44.8%. The Council has consistently put more money into the funds than the actuary required. Did I mention that we have a great Council? We do. We are not so lucky with actuaries. Every time I think we are making substantial progress on pensions, we are not. We are making incremental progress.

Our general obligation debt was \$193,000,000 in 2003. Now it is \$152,000,000. Funding Robert Crown will cost an extra \$10,000,000. We can and we will fund Crown but our debt will remain on a downward trajectory. We are going in the right direction slowly. The good news is debt levels are going down. The bad news is they are too high.

You can be proud to be from Evanston. Our residents welcome Syrians, hold rallies for Muslims and had our first Latino Summit. Our commitment to celebrate diversity brings us together as does a belief that we can create the community we want to have.

We have one of the world's greatest universities hiring more and more of our residents, helping with the pro Muslims rally, helping to educate our children in District 65 and 202. We have the world's greatest university president, definitely the world's greatest.

We have a police department that reflects the diversity of the community, but that's not good enough, not in Evanston. They are actively involved in diversity training. We did not get the CDC interns so we have a NU intern addressing violence as a public health problem. That's Evanston – We are resilient which is an attribute of increasing importance to cities. We will use that resiliency to continue our commitment to care for one another in our community, that is a longstanding commitment and what really matters. Evanston is an exciting place and the best is yet to come.