

# GAZETTE

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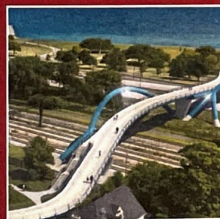
### INSIDE



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**Printers Row Park name is now official;** something locals have affectionately called it for years.  
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**City announces new overpass for the 43rd Street bridge.**  
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### OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

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*Gazette Chicago* report sheds light on who we are in each of our ten neighborhoods.  
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**President Joe Biden restores DACA.** Find out what this means for DREAMERS and what they need to do next.  
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**Kenyon College honors lifelong contributions of alumnus,** Near West Side's William E. Lowry.  
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## Various levels of government working to distribute coronavirus vaccines locally

By Bonnie Jean Adams

The State of Illinois and City of Chicago have set a goal to vaccinate all adult Chicagoans for coronavirus (COVID-19) in 2021 at no cost to individuals. The City hopes to make coronavirus vaccines available to all Chicagoans by the end of May, according to Allison Arwady, MD, MPH, commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH).

Within the first full week of vaccinations, Illinois had administered the most COVID-19 vaccine doses compared to any other state nationwide. Uncertainty over

future supply, however, makes distribution difficult to plan.

According to Arwady, "There may be a wait before this new normal really feels normal, but with this beginning of vaccination in Chicago, we are no longer fully waiting as a city. We are on this path, we are moving forward."

The Federal government during the Trump administration aimed to hold back doses equal to the amount it shipped out to ensure having enough of a supply for the necessary two-dose regimen that studies show is required for the vaccine to be 90% effective. A new "super strain" of the COVID-19

virus, which studies show is 50% more contagious than the original strain, has been discovered in the United States, however, and public health experts have urged State and Federal authorities to step up the pace of vaccination.

President Joe Biden supports releasing available vaccine immediately, with the goal of administering 100 million shots in the first 100 days of his administration, which began on Jan. 20. This strategy would allow more people access to a first dose, although concern about second dose availability remains due to the slow

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## Traffic challenges remain during Byrne construction

By Madeline Makoul

As work on the Jane Byrne Interchange moves forward, limited lanes and ongoing construction continue to affect motorists. The longstanding project started in 2013, and government officials expect it to wrap up in 2022.

Led by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), the project has kept the interchange, where the Kennedy, Dan

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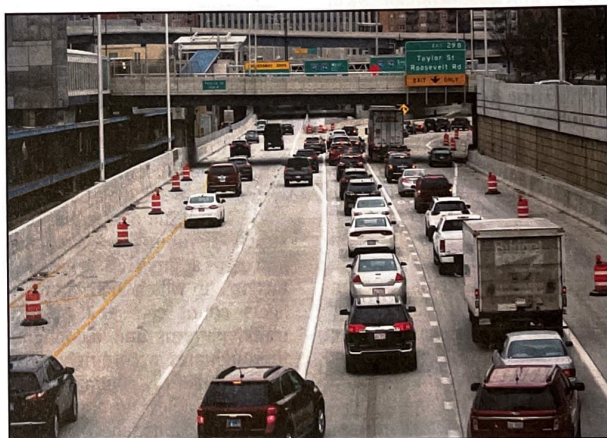


Photo by Christopher Valentino

**As the Jane Byrne Interchange project continues, motorists are frustrated that eastbound traffic from the Eisenhower Expressway into the Kennedy and Dan Ryan remains highly congested.**

## Community organizes to save Mercy Hospital

By Monica M. Walk

Community activism is succeeding so far in preventing Chicago's oldest chartered hospital from quietly closing its doors during the ongoing pandemic.

Several December protest vigils brought health care workers and local residents together in their cars and on foot near Mercy Hospital & Medical Center's 2525

S. Michigan Ave. location, creating awareness of the South Side's healthcare plight far beyond the neighborhood.

Coupled with a calling campaign, the effort prompted Illinois Governor JB Pritzker and other elected officials and lawmakers to acknowledge the hospital's importance and the need to maintain it to serve its mainly Black and Latino patients.

Advocates for keeping the hospital open are pushing for a new owner, although current Mercy Hospital owner Trinity Health continues to focus on closing the hospital and pivoting to an outpatient services model.

However, on Jan. 26, the Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board (IHFSRW) voted to deny the approval for Trinity's

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# Community and officials organize to save Mercy Hospital

Continued from page 1  
outpatient facility plan.

"I thank the community, community groups, and the nurses, physicians, and staff at Mercy; they are the reason this place is open," said State Representative Lamont J. Robinson Jr. (D-5th), a leading advocate for keeping the hospital open. Robinson has criticized the closure's timing and asked Governor Pritzker to support a moratorium on any hospital closing in Illinois until the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis passes.

"The credit is to the community, or the hospital would close," Robinson said. "It's important we understand the community led the effort, and thank them. They asked the governor to get involved. I believe the governor heard the cries of the community and that is why he stepped in and engaged. He heard their cries in the midst of the pandemic; COVID is not over and has lasting effects. We need to continue to have quality health-care, especially in Black and Brown communities that have had the highest numbers of COVID cases and deaths."

"Gov. Pritzker believes health-care is a right, not a privilege," said Jordan Abudayyeh, Pritzker's press secretary. "As the governor has said throughout this pandemic, we must work to address

the inequities in our healthcare system that have left Black and Brown communities especially susceptible to the worst outcomes of this virus."

The Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO) and the Lugenia Burns Hope Center are considered leaders in the community organizing efforts to preserve Mercy Hospital. Both are partners in the Chicago Health Equity Coalition (CHEC), which brings together numerous groups to support keeping Mercy Hospital open.

Robinson was among State representatives and Chicago City Council members participating in a CHEC-sponsored Save Mercy virtual town hall via Zoom on Jan. 19. Robinson hopes Mercy Hospital will remain open under new ownership.

## Possible buyer

"A buyer is engaged with—it is a hospital in our community working with the governor's office and mine," Robinson said. "A consulting group is going through the books and the physical plant of the hospital to see the investment needed to keep open and be successful. Trinity is still on the same road to closure. It's important to push hard and fast to keep the hospital open but do these things to be sure it's successful."

According to Carol Schneider, president of Mercy Hospital & Medical Center, "The decision to discontinue services at Mercy Hospital was not an easy one. But patients on the South Side have unmet needs within the current system. The transformation from an inpatient model to one with greater access to outpatient services will better address the disparate outcomes in health from which our community suffers today."

A Mercy/Trinity spokesperson participated in a public hearing in mid-January about opening the new Mercy Care Center. The IHFSRW turned down the



Mercy Hospital staff brought the fight to keep the facility open to LaSalle Street to make more Chicagoans aware of the hospital's plight.

care center idea on Jan. 26. Mercy may decide to go before the same board separately to revisit its Certificate of Need application to close the hospital.

On Dec. 15, 2020, the review board had denied unanimously the application to close.

The governor has communicated to Trinity "the State's position that the company urgently rethink the decision to close Mercy Hospital," Abudayyeh said. "The State stands ready and willing to work with them to avoid closure."

At the IHFSRW meeting the week of Jan. 18, "the administration publicly voiced our objections to the planned closure," she added. "The governor also made clear that based on the State's analysis of Trinity's most recent cost reports, the State's \$150 million rate increase is offsetting a significant share of Mercy's reported losses—giving more reason and flexibility to delay this closure and work with Illinois lawmakers to pass a hospital transformation bill."

"Trinity Health plans to appeal the decision and close Mercy Hospital with or without the board's approval," KOCO said in a statement. "We must continue to encourage Gov. Pritzker and Illinois elected officials to intervene to

save Mercy Hospital and the lives of Black and Brown community members served by the hospital.

"Call Gov. Pritzker at (312) 814-2121 and urge him to use his leadership to keep Mercy Hospital open and save lives in the midst of this pandemic and beyond, declare a moratorium on hospital closures, and facilitate a sale between Trinity Health and a buyer committed to keeping Mercy open," the KOCO statement continued. "This is not transformation! This is a disinvestment and an elimination of vital health services!"

"The administration has also directed Trinity Health to review all viable offers to purchase the hospital so it can continue to serve the community by operating as a hospital," Abudayyeh said.

"I commend the Illinois Health Facilities and Services Review Board for decisively voting against allowing Mercy Hospital & Medical Center to proceed with its plans to close," said Congressman Bobby Rush (D-1st). "While it is rare for the review board to deny a hospital's request to close, to do otherwise—particularly during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic—would have been disastrous. We must now work on a solution that ensures long-term



State Representative Lamont J. Robinson Jr. (D-5th) is a leading advocate for keeping Mercy Hospital open.

## REAL ESTATE AUCTION – FEB 18, 2021

### MOTOR ROW – COMMERCIAL BUILDING

2240 S. MICHIGAN AVE. CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

2-story brick approximately 6,670 sq. ft building with 7 retail/office tenants on a 33 x 173 lot. Currently fully leased with all leases up for renewal within the next 12 months, making the building ideal for investor or user. 5 indoor parking spaces.

Previously Priced to: \$1,695,000 – Suggested Opening Bid: \$525,000

On-site Inspections: 1 to 3 pm Feb 11 and by appointment



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## ARTISTS:

### Apply to the SPARK Grant!

The SPARK Grant is open to emerging or mid-career visual artists in the city of Chicago. The \$2,000 award provides financial support and can be used in any manner the recipient deems necessary to further their artistic goals. The grant is administered by the Chicago Artists Coalition and is generously supported by the Joyce Foundation and an anonymous donor.

**WHO CAN APPLY?** Chicago-based artists who meet any of these requirements:

- Identify as ALAANA (African diaspora, LatinX, Asian, Arab, Native/Indigenous to the Americas)
- Have a disability
- Be self-taught or non-formally trained
- Have an acute financial need

Deadline: February 16, 2021. To apply:

<https://chicagoartistscoalition.org/resources/cac-grants/spark-grant>



access to health care for patients and the financial stability of hospitals on the South Side."

*Gazette Chicago* previously reported Mercy's planned closing was due in part to the Illinois Legislature's electing not to fund the South Side Coalition's South Side Transformation Plan as part of the Hospital Transformation Program. Robinson noted this earlier plan for Mercy to merge with three other hospitals lacked sufficient detail to ensure people in the Bronzeville neighborhood where Mercy is located would continue to have a full-service hospital and said the State had invited Trinity to return with a detailed plan. Trinity did not return with a specific commitment and instead canceled the merger and announced the hospital's closing.

### BOH opposition

The City of Chicago Board of Health (BOH) issued a statement in August 2020 voicing "concern about the proposed closure of Mercy Hospital in causing a health care desert impacting persons on the South and Southwest Side of Chicago." The BOH statement called on the governor, mayor, and Illinois Health Facilities Board to halt closure until a long-term action plan for community health was determined and in place. Meeting minutes from the Oct. 21, 2020, BOH meeting note the City

of Chicago has no direct role in the Mercy situation, "as the State of Illinois is the lead governmental body with oversight of Mercy Hospital."

Officials consider Mercy a safety net hospital, which provides healthcare services to people regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. Mercy has one of Chicago's busiest emergency rooms, and deleting emergency room services via hospital closure would mean serious health repercussions for area residents.

"Safety nets are under attack," Robinson said. "They need Federal assistance, Federal partners," adding he anticipated ongoing work in this area. "The State is moving in the right direction, with this political shift, to provide healthcare not only on the South Side of Chicago but across the entire State."

"The fight is not over," said KOCO in its statement.

In October, the Pritzker administration released more than \$140 million in federal dollars for safety net hospitals, long-term care facilities, and Federally Qualifies Health Centers.

Also in 2000, the Pritzker administration renewed the Hospital Assessment Program, bringing an additional \$250 million in Federal dollars to the state, with \$4.4 million to Mercy.

Trinity purchased Mercy Hospital, with 402 licensed beds, in 2012.



Photo courtesy Lugenia Burns Hope

*The community continues to organize to keep Mercy Hospital open, as its closure would create a healthcare desert on the Southeast Side.*

Founded in 1852, the hospital traces its roots to a rooming house near Rush Street and the Chicago River, converted to healthcare by the Sisters of Mercy. It is Chicago's oldest hospital and its first chartered teaching hospital.

Several early moves included a then-country location that allowed the hospital to survive the Chicago Fire of 1871 and provide a haven for burn victims. A building plan in the 1950s called for relocation to the suburbs with the Stritch School of Medicine, but Mercy chose to stay close to city residents in need of care. The City of Chicago supported building the current location on South

Michigan Avenue in 1968, making Mercy an accessible South Side neighborhood hospital.

Mercy has affiliations with some of the major academic programs and centers in Chicago.

For the Lugenia Burns Hope organization, log on to [www.facebook.com/LBHopeCenter](https://www.facebook.com/LBHopeCenter). For KOCO, log on to [www.facebook.com/KOCOConnect](https://www.facebook.com/KOCOConnect).

Mercy Hospital & Medical Center can be reached at (312) 567-2000 or [www.mercy-chicago.org](https://www.mercy-chicago.org). For the governor's office, call (312) 814-2121. To contact Robinson, call (773) 924-4614. For Congressman Rush's office, call (773) 779-2400.