To: City Council, Citizens of Twentynine Palms  
From: Mayor Glenn Freshour  
Date: 01132004  
Subject: State of the City

I am here tonight to share with you the many things that we as a city have accomplished during the past year and the exciting opportunities and challenges we will encounter in the months ahead.

Since our incorporation in 1987, we have experienced many successes. As a result, our community remains a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family. Now at the age of 16, our city is leaving its adolescence and is forming a vision of its future, determining what it wants to be when it grows up. Our General Plan envisions 29 Palms as a beautiful, livable and prosperous community in the future. The City’s new Strategic Plan is the map that will show us the way to make that a reality.

The Council’s Strategic Plan means that the Council and City are now proactive, not reactive. Our goals and priorities are identified, and our City resources work cooperatively towards those goals. Twentynine Palms is now thinking strategically for the long term.

We face significant challenges in the coming year, but I am pleased to report that the City is well positioned to meet them, and that our residents will continue to enjoy the high quality of life, low crime, quietude and tranquility that are the hallmarks of our community. The city is healthy, organizationally strong and fiscally secure.

This last year has not been without challenges. We suffered major flooding in July and August with the loss of 3 lives. Additionally, the state continues to raid our City budget, taking one of every 6 dollars the City had for local uses. These major events have tested our personal and professional limits. We have passed that test.

One strategic issue of the Council is our community’s image. At the direction of the city council, our Community Development Department launched a proactive Code Enforcement program focusing on the City’s major corridors. Beautification is underway and will continue along Highway 62, National Monument Drive,
Adobe and Amboy roads. Eyesore nuisances will be abated and buildings not in compliance will be demolished or restored. The Development Code Update will be completed and will be user friendly and understandable. Permit streamlining is in place and we have received compliments on the swiftness, efficiency and courtesy of our staff. Single-family building permits have doubled, the first multi-family development in a decade has taken out a permit, and an application for the first subdivision since 1991 has been submitted for approval.

The Finance Department wrote and the Council adopted the City’s updated Emergency Operations Plan. The Finance Department also received its fourth award for excellence from the United States Government Finance Officers Association. When the City’s revenues were reduced by 17%, the Finance Department spent hours preparing numerous scenarios to continue operations while providing us with a balanced budget.

The Community Services Department served more than 3000 children and 300 adults last year in recreation programs and instruction. The new skate park is thriving, and improvements to the public pool have been installed. Theatre 29 is becoming an independent mature organization. And although the City was forced to eliminate the preschool, it has been transformed into a very successful non-profit operation by a group of very dedicated citizens.

Our City, at 55 square miles, is the size of San Francisco. Our Public Works Department is charged with maintaining all local streets. We paved 37 roads last year, made our parks look greener than ever, and responded to the summer thunderstorms and flooding by keeping streets open and clear. Our small department accomplished all this with hard work and no outside assistance.

Our police department, provided through contract with the County Sheriff, conducted highly successful sweeps for parole and probation violations. They also operated several traffic safety and DUI checkpoints. The crime rate in our community remains very low and our officers work hard to keep it that way. Thank them when you see them.

Our City staff is tasked with a new professionalism that will not lose touch with our small town community values. The Administration Department worked with the Council to develop a Strategic Vision and Plans for the City. We have retained a new lobbyist, who immediately assisted in obtaining more than Five million federal dollars for Flood Control and Roadway improvement projects. We are working in concert with other local agencies on other issues requiring coordination and collaboration. We hosted a very successful Veteran’s Day celebration in Luckie Park, and, in support of the Chamber of Commerce’s lead, hosted one of the most memorable Pioneer Days in the City’s history. The administration department negotiated and put together an excellent franchise agreement for Solid Waste disposal that will provide residents with better service
at a lower cost. The City also has a new website up and running that provides information about our City to residents, businesses, and visitors.

The City supported and worked with the Marine Corps and Chamber of Commerce to ensure the success of Operation Enduring Family so that our young Marines and Sailors could answer the call of duty in Iraq knowing that their loved ones, spouses and children, were cared for at home. This is a caring community of which we can all be proud.

For the last several years, our City, like the rest of the nation, has suffered under a declining economy. The national recession, falling tourist dollars, and the deployment of troops all impacted Twentynine Palms. Now it appears that the economy is rebounding, and we will experience an upturn in tourism and in purchases and sales of goods and services. This equates to more jobs available for our citizens. However, we continue to live in a state that is unable to control its spending, and uses its authority to take our city’s money. We are preparing contingency plans for the rest of this year and next year in the event that the state does not behave responsibly. Under Council direction, The City Manager has instituted a spending freeze on all but essential goods and services. You have clearly and consistently told us you don’t want new taxes. Therefore the budget reduction package we will prepare for next year will address the revenue loss caused by the state’s ineptitude, and our local desire to avoid additional taxes.

I think it is clear to all of us that as taxes shrink, we must grow the economy in order to have the revenues to continue providing the services our residents have now, and should expect in the future. In 2004, we will be creating a more comprehensive, Citywide economic strategy intended to retain and recruit business for the City’s commercial, service commercial and light industrial base. At the same time we will find ways to encourage successes for the City’s downtown small business. We want to be known as a ‘good city to do business in.’ The City will be working with the Chamber of Commerce and Twentynine Palms Realtors in marketing and recruiting new industries, jobs, stores and services. The City and the Chamber are also collaborating on developing a Convention and Business Bureau that will promote the community, Joshua Tree National Park, Mojave Preserve and the California outback for tourism, resort-retirement living, and recreational enjoyment.

In the future, as in the past, we will continue to emphasize public safety as an underpinning of our community. I think we all understand and believe that a community cannot be prosperous unless it is also safe. We will keep our small town atmosphere and low crime rate while we expand our economy and visitation. We will keep our streets passable and safe. Shortly we will install an illuminated crosswalk on Twentynine Palms Highway at Tamarisk to improve pedestrian safety in our downtown. We will pave Two Mile Road from Sunrise to Lear; we will get CALTrans to widen Highway 62 on the west side of our
community, and with Federal Grant dollars we will improve flood control in the Donnell Channel, and reconstruct Adobe Road all the way to the Marine Base.

Additionally, we will continue our efforts to provide our youth and citizens with good recreational opportunities. The swimming pool will be reconditioned, new lighting will be installed at the Luckie Park pool and at the softball fields, sidewalks will go in at Knott’s Sky Park, and parking will be developed at Theater 29 and in the downtown area.

When we set goals last year, some thought their completion was very unlikely. We had a new City Council. Instead, we have been successful beyond expectations. The Council has pulled together. Our management team and the staff have accomplished incredible tasks. Our Planning Commission is a fine, dedicated and cohesive unit and are doing excellent work on the Development Code Update as well as implementing Council policy and advising the Council on the formulation of policy.

On behalf of the council and city staff I want to say thank you to the community. We thank the many volunteers in the Chamber of Commerce, Citizens on Patrol, Soroptomists, Lions, Kiwanis, Rotary and members of the service organizations, veterans groups, high school clean up volunteers, historical society, youth and recreation volunteers, boosters, Senior Citizens, Action Council, and others who give of their time to improve life in our City.

Job creation should and does come mainly from private initiative, but sometimes the City drives the projects. I am proud of these efforts where the City has led or supported economic development. Economic development, neighborhood redevelopment, housing, crime, and education -- all of these have an impact on whether people want to come to our City for a visit or to live. Ultimately it effects whether they choose to stay or leave our city. The Council calls our goal ‘prosperity’... prosperity combines economic development and quality of life issues. It is inclusive. Our prosperity is dependent on both. We are developing programs to encourage and support the economy and are focusing on the beautification of Twentynine Palms. This is a special place. It shall remain so.

The Council, working in conjunction with the staff and management team will be continue to work on long-term plans and projects to strengthen our financial condition for 2004-2005 and the future. This will mean taking a hard look at the way we currently do business. Some of the changes that will be proposed may be significant.

Fortunately, Twentynine Palms is blessed with a talented staff, supportive citizenry, and a group of dedicated City Council members. Working together, it is certain that we will emerge stronger, more efficient, and even better aligned to serve the present and future needs and desires of our community. Twentynine
Palms has a bright future. I thank you all in advance for your service to our City in the coming years. It is an honor to serve you.

Thank you.

Mayor Glenn Freshour