

*State of the City Address delivered by Mayor Joseph M. Maestas, September 30, 2009
Transcribed by Sally Baxter*

Mayor Maestas introduced himself and welcomed the evening's guests.

Over three years ago, when I was first elected Mayor of our great city, I made a promise to you, the citizens I proudly serve, that I would bring openness and transparency to your city government.

My commitment has been to seek ways to inform you of the actions of my administration as they are happening - and over time - to inform you of the direction your city government is taking.

Tonight I will summarize the vision established three years ago when I was first elected Mayor and the progress made towards achieving that vision, and I will update you on the progress made on the goals my administration set last year,

- I will report on the fiscal health of our city budget.
- I will summarize key achievements that have been made by your Governing Body and City staff.
- I will highlight some of the notable milestones that occurred in our City.
- And I will update you on initiatives underway and challenges facing our City in the year ahead.

Before I begin, I would like to thank our city employees who do so much behind the scenes to meet the needs of our citizens, and without whose hard work none of our accomplishments would be possible. I would also like to thank the members of the City Council, for their passion in meeting the needs of their constituents in their respective districts, and the time they devote to meeting those needs.

Let me introduce your City Council members:

And executive staff:

Please take a moment to acknowledge these hard working public servants.

Mayor Maestas introduced the City Councilors and Senior Staff.

To begin tonight's address, I would like to review the vision established by this administration. The citizens of Española elected new government representatives because changes were needed – the citizens demanded a new level of fiscal responsibility and ethical reform from their governing body and their government officials. To answer this need for change, we looked inward to reorganize, implementing new policies and procedures, new philosophies, and a new, higher level of accountability, customer service, and professionalism.

In 2006, the City Council and I reorganized the structure of the administration and brought in a new executive team, bringing in new philosophies and new ideals. This new

outlook was reflected in the generation of policies and procedures to improve the efficiency of your government in order to improve services and fiscal responsibility.

A fundamental focus was established on priority issues, which included financial management, public safety, utility management, setting higher standards for ethical conduct, and election reform. In my current term, these have been accomplished.

- Necessary housecleaning was done in the finance department, and budgeting and spending were brought under control with conservative financial management.
- A professional Public Safety Department was formed, and funding was approved for it to be fully staffed. The Public Safety fleet, which includes police and fire vehicles, has been replaced nearly in its entirety, and a new Wireless telecommunications system brought the city's police department technology years forward. Staffing levels continue to be increased in our Fire Department to improve emergency services to citizens.
- Utility rates have been appropriately increased to provide water in the quality and quantity necessary for citizens. The Utility Ordinance has been revised to provide better customer service and incentives for citizens to connect to city services.

In 2007, your elected officials showed their commitment to adhering to the practices of good government by passing an ordinance mandating the adherence to high ethical standards by the Governing Body. In 2009, the Council took the commitment to another level by creating a Code of Conduct, a code by which they agree to conduct business as elected officials in an ethical manner.

These initial priorities continue to remain in our focus.

In my State of the City last year, I shared challenges and goals for the coming year. Those included the continued focus on improving City finances, reducing liability exposure and insurance costs; continued improvement of public safety and reducing crime, providing utility services to all citizens; and widening, dedicating and improving local streets. It also included reforming the public housing authority.

I am proud to say that in the past year, we have made great strides to find solutions to these particular challenges.

The city's financial condition continues to improve, despite a downturn in revenue. Though the economy has had a major downturn and only now shows signs of improvement, the city's spending has remained responsible and overall fiscal health has substantially improved through conservative budgeting, increased efficiency, and more stringent internal policies.

We have felt the impact of the national economic downturn here at home. Our gross receipts tax revenues have reduced, and two of our auto dealerships have closed. As your

Mayor, the loss of these dealerships hit me hard because I know what a terrible financial, and emotional, impact this had on all of us, particularly the employees and their families.

In these economic times, it is important for us in the City Government to watch the “Bottom Line” in our City’s budget. Last year I pledged your Governing Body and City staff would work towards keeping spending down without sacrificing City services.

This has been accomplished. We developed a comprehensive risk management program to reduce our exposure to liability and reduce insurance costs.

The city’s legal risk has substantially declined, and most significantly, our insurance rates have decreased by **eighty-one thousand dollars** (\$81,000.⁰⁰) this fiscal year – a 20% reduction.

While revenues did decrease, the priorities of dedicating those precious funds were well balanced. We dedicated new revenues to those areas that have the most significant impact on the citizens we serve – public safety; youth and recreation; streets; and public facilities.

Additionally, as part of our rate structure for utility services that was recently revised, the Governing Body approved the payment of old debt and the decision not to enter into a new higher interest debt, saving **almost one million dollars** (\$1,000,000.00) over the life of these loans. It also allowed the utility rates to remain affordable to you. The restructuring of debt and utility rates means that the health of our enterprise utility funds is very good.

We again presented a conservative and realistic budget to the State Department of Finance and Administration. We have established a sound funding plan to install utilities to expand our service area to our citizens, and improve city streets, all without further increasing taxes or reducing city services. We have reduced the cost of some items in the budget as a measure of our learned efficiency.

These accomplishments were vital as part of maintaining the fiscal health of your City budget.

I am also committed to continuing to bring stimulus money into the City of Española.

In response to the goals set by myself and the other members of the Governing Body, we have continued to apply for stimulus funding for projects that will save the City money, projects that will help us continue to improve infrastructure, and projects that will improve public safety.

Two of the applications the City has submitted, if awarded, will make improvements to City facilities to improve the energy efficiency of the facilities to save money in operating costs. These include using geothermal energy to heat the facilities, and installing energy efficient lights.

Not only do these projects propose to reduce operating costs, but they will also make a positive impact on our environment. These projects are “green.” They are good for our environment.

Green initiatives are important. We have, in partnership with the New Mexico Department of Transportation, initiated a plan to retrofit all traffic signal with LEDs (Light Emitting Diodes). We are also seeking energy efficient alternatives to our streetlights and city buildings to reduce the city’s electric energy costs, which today average **seventy-five thousand dollars** (\$75,000.⁰⁰) per month.

In one of the largest regional government collaborations northern New Mexico has ever seen, the City of Española has partnered with Rio Arriba County, Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative, Northern Rio Arriba Electric Cooperative, Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo, and Santa Clara Pueblo to submit a joint Broadband Initiatives Program application to the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service. The total application-funding amount is approximately **thirty-one million dollars** (\$31,000,000.⁰⁰).

Rio Arriba County is submitting the application on behalf of the partnership. If awarded, this will have a far-reaching and long-lasting, positive impact for Española’s citizens. High speed broadband will help our local economy compensate for our geographic isolation, and better connect it to the mainstream economy

- Allowing us to grow our existing businesses,
- Attract prospective businesses, and
- Create more high-paying, sustainable jobs.

Another application for stimulus money that the City submitted is funding is an application submitted on behalf of our Fire Department that would allow us to refurbish the City’s Fire Station across from City Hall on Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial Parkway.

This past year’s accomplishments reaffirmed the commitment to continual improvement of public safety and reducing crime. Public Safety has been, and remains, one of the key concerns of my administration.

In three years, the city has replaced 100% of its aging police vehicles, fully authorized funding for 29 officer positions, recruited and trained new officers, and sought grant funds to provide for additional officers, Public Safety Aides, and state of art equipment to outfit them.

A new wireless communication system has been installed and implemented, extending our coverage area for police access and furnishing laptops in police and fire vehicles so our public safety personnel have the equipment and information they need to respond effectively to emergency situations.

We completed a facilities remodel for the Public Safety Building, which included constructing new holding cells, an evidence facility, and office space. We continue

seeking ways to lower the costs of detaining and transporting prisoners. By entering into new agreements and negotiating fees with county correctional facilities, we reduced our transport budget by nearly half in Fiscal Year '09, saving the City **two hundred, thirty-seven thousand dollars** (\$237,000.⁰⁰).

This year the City of Española Police Department received two grants, which together totaled nearly a **half a million dollars** (\$500,000.⁰⁰) and created five new jobs for the Police force.

One of the grants was the “**Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance**” grant. Edward Byrne was a New York City Police Officer who was killed in the line of duty by a jailed drug kingpin. This grant, named in his honor, provides funds that can be used by local governments to create safer communities.

The City received nearly **three hundred thousand dollars** (\$300,000.⁰⁰) and used the money to hire two Police Officers, two Public Safety Aides, and to buy four new vehicles.

The grant is paying the salaries of the new personnel for a year, and the City has committed to continuing these positions for at least a year after the grant finding expires.

The Public Safety Aides are handling calls such as vehicle escort requests, and traffic control to allow Police Officers more time to focus on community policing and to respond to serious crimes.

The Police Department also received a “**Community Oriented Policing Services**” grant, known as a COPS grant, worth almost **one hundred seventy-five thousand dollars** (\$175,000.⁰⁰). This grant is being used to purchase new equipment for the Department and to pay the salary and benefits of a new Police Officer for three years, with the City committing to continue the position for a minimum of one year after the grant funding expires.

These grants allowed us to augment our police force with additional Officers, Public Safety Aides, equipment, and new vehicles. We put more Officers out on the streets to fight crime.

To change driver behavior and improve traffic safety, the Governing Body passed an ordinance banning cell phone use, texting, and other distracting behaviors while driving. Councilor Dennis Tim Salazar led the way as former chair of the Public Safety Committee, along with new Chair, Councilor Cecilia Lujan.

The Fire Department also continues to be a source of pride for the City of Española. Our Firefighters have been trained in advanced firefighter courses including swift water rescue, pediatric emergencies, vehicle extraction, and drug overdoses. The number of emergency calls our fire department responded to increased by 22% this year compared

to last year. We received an additional **sixty-seven thousand dollars** (\$67,000.⁰⁰) from State Fire Funds to help us sustain these increased services.

We added one new firefighter position this year. We will also be adding two more permanent firefighter positions in the coming year for a total of three new, permanent positions.

We take public safety very seriously in Española.

Congratulations to Espanola's Police and Fire Departments. Well done!

One initiative and goal that spans not only my time as Mayor, but my tenure as a Councilor, was providing utility service to all residents and businesses inside the City of Española.

I am extremely pleased to say that a plan has been approved which outlines the services needed and includes cost estimates for the projects. **Eight point six million dollars** (\$8,600,000.⁰⁰) have been allocated for the first three phases of this utility infrastructure project.

This is a significant achievement that has been long overdue.

This project is the installation of water and sewer lines throughout the city, over 22 miles of line, which will allow residents to connect to municipal services and discontinue the use of private septic systems, which are contaminating our groundwater. Engineering design proposals for the project will be received, and construction is expected to begin, by the spring of 2010.

While many people have been involved in bringing this project to this point, I want to especially acknowledge the dedication of former Public Works Committee chair Mayor Pro Tem Alice Lucero and current Committee Chair Councilor Alfred Herrera as well as City Manager Veronica Albin, for their efforts to make this project a reality.

An ongoing initiative of this administration is water system upgrades which will allow us to continue building our infrastructure, currently funded by a \$2M Water Trust Board Grant that was awarded to the city in 2003. These upgrades will improve the reliability and capacity of the City's system, and augment the City's ability to provide utilities to our neighbors. For example, the City will be providing quality drinking water to the Cuatro Villas Mutual Domestic Water Users Association, and helping to keep them in compliance with EPA standards. This is the beginning of the city's work toward becoming a regional utility services provider.

In order to accomplish this much larger goal, we are also continuing to upgrade and replace aging components of our water system. This has begun through the creation of an asset management fund. This new, permanent fund will be used to maintain and replace

system components in a responsible and timely manner, and will change the crisis management that has characterized our past practices.

Another upgrade made to our water system was the construction of an arsenic treatment facility. The Federal Government issued an un-funded mandate that called for a reduction in the allowable level of arsenic in drinking water nationwide. The City completed work on a state-of-the-art arsenic treatment plant, funded by Governor Richardson's **one million dollar** (\$1,000,000.⁰⁰) appropriation in 2007. The plant is now online and has brought water from well #1 into arsenic levels compliance.

Last year another goal your City Council and I set was to improve streets throughout the city. We pledged that we would widen some of the narrow streets in our city, and pave and improve dirt streets.

We have already made improvements to Barbee Street, Duran Street, West Hill Street, and **one-million-dollars** (\$1,000,000.⁰⁰) has been approved to continuing accomplishing these goals in the coming year.

Today we finished a project to improve driving conditions by improving drainage on North McCurdy Road, at the intersection of McCurdy Road and Daylily Lane. We also paved the road. The City's Public Works Department did that project, reducing the project cost while meeting the high standards the City Council and I have set.

City Councilor Eddie Maestas deserves recognition for championing this project.

A request for engineering proposals has also been issued to design the reconstruction of North McCurdy Road from Fairview Lane to El Llano Road. This project is funded by Municipal Arterial Project funds, through the Department of Transportation. This project will be in the design phase within the next 60 days.

A construction project that is well underway in the City is the US 84/285 project. The New Mexico Department of Transportation is making improvements that include re-aligning intersections and reducing the grade of the hill as you enter Española, from the south, to improve driving safety.

This extensive project will improve driving safety and is providing an opportunity for us to improve our water infrastructure. As part of the project, water lines are being installed which will allow us to loop the City water system. This will increase water pressure, improve fire suppression capabilities, and help us become a regional water provider.

One of the largest street improvement projects that is **about to** begin construction is the reconstruction of Industrial Park Road. This is a **three point two million dollar** (\$3,200,000.⁰⁰) project that will include building new driving lanes, installing curbs and gutters to help improve drainage in the area, installing new lighting, and adding sidewalks to improve pedestrian safety.

It is especially important to me to improve public safety as part of this project because Industrial Park Road serves the Carlos Vigil Middle School, and adding lighting and sidewalks to the road will improve the pedestrian safety for the city's children.

We have secured funding for this project that includes GRIP II (Governor Richardson's Investment Partnership) funds from the state, and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act money. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is what's generally referred to as "stimulus money".

I will be hosting a ground-breaking ceremony on October 7th at 10:30 am at the project staging area on the west end of Industrial Park Road, near the old ballfields. I hope you will be there.

Other accomplishments included improving housing for our citizens who need assistance by consolidating our public housing programs with Santa Fe Civic Housing and completing extensive housing rehabilitation. Gone forever are the past decades of controversy and mismanagement in our housing program.

We are continuing this commitment to serve city residents by working on an affordable housing plan for the entire City.

We are also continuing our commitment to increase economic development opportunities.

We made progress on revitalizing the downtown area, which includes rehabilitating the Paseo de Oñate Bridge, enhancing the roadways in the downtown Main Street area and contracting for the design of a museum to honor the Chili Line Railroad. We initiated an Environmental Impact Study for the downtown corridor so we can fully accomplish the downtown revitalization in proper context while addressing any social, economic or environmental impacts.

City Councilor Danielle Duran has been instrumental in spearheading the downtown economic development study currently underway.

Your Governing Body and City Staff also promised to continue improving the Plaza area not only to enhance **this**, the largest public gathering place we have in our beautiful city, but also as part of the overall revitalization of the downtown.

Tonight we had the ribbon cutting ceremony for the portales and tienditas. The portales and tienditas add shade and give the Plaza areas a sense of enclosure, and can be used for vendors during events like the fiesta and the Wine and Arts Festival.

Another very important project accomplished here at the Plaza was the establishment of an open-access, wireless Internet. This open-access Internet is up and running, and covers the entire Plaza area. It is important to our quality of life to have a place where we can gather as a community to celebrate events like the fiestas and festivals. It is also

important to have a place where individuals or small groups of people can just relax and enjoy their surroundings.

I want to shift gears for a moment to focus on our quality of life in Española.

Quality of life stems from more than just our beautiful, natural surroundings. It includes our physical and social environments as well.

Improving the quality of life for our citizens has included creating, continuing, and supporting programs for our youths such as Campeon Boxing and programs offered at the Teen Technology Center.

It includes continuing to maintain and upgrade the Plaza.

I told you about free wireless Internet at the Plaza. I also told you about the application for the Broadband initiative.

I want to back up a minute now and talk about some of the things people used as a source of knowledge and entertainment in the days before we all had computers. Those things were called “**books.**”

In last year’s State of the City Address, one of the initiatives your City Government proposed was a General Obligation Bond initiative for a new public library. The existing library was meant to be a temporary library when it was established in the 1970’s. Today we still operate our library in the same location that is undersized, has no windows and no convenient bathroom facilities.

The City of Española currently has no outstanding General Obligation Bonds. We do, however, have a bonding capacity of six million dollars. Although your City government hoped to bring to the voters a bond initiative for a proposed new library this past year, the economic timing wasn’t right so we postponed this initiative until we were confident the economy was showing signs of recovery. We have now moved forward and awarded a contract for the preliminary design of a new public library in the City of Española.

This will allow us to bring the bond initiative for a new public library to the voters, on the March election ballot. I hope that you get involved and weigh in on this initiative and cast your vote. I know I am committed to improving literacy in Española and throughout North Central New Mexico. I hope to see this library become a reality.

Other things that improve our quality of life are those which improve our sense of community. We will continue to improve the Española Fiesta to celebrate our rich heritage. We will continue to improve the services available to our senior citizens. Councilor Helen Kain Salazar and Councilor Eddie Maestas pushed for senior center improvements, which have included renovations, the kitchen expansion, and the creation of a senior fitness and wellness program. We will continue to improve the services we provide in all areas possible.

I also want to tell you about the dedication of our senior center. We were proud to dedicate the senior center in honor of Beatrice V. Q. Martinez, a long time City employee who worked at the center. She passed away recently, but the center continues to honor her name, her memory, and her legacy of service.

As I am telling you about the accomplishments of your city government, I would like to tell you about some of the other key events that occurred in our City in the last year.

A great honor, and a significant milestone for our City was hosting then-Senator, now-President, Barack Obama, who came to Española as part of his campaign tour. I was proud to welcome an estimated 10,000 people who came to Española for that visit. The President spoke of the significance the people of the City of Española, and the Española Valley, hold as members of our regional and national communities.

And he urged us to continue with the progress we have been making to empower ourselves.

And so we have, Mr. President!

Let me tell you about some of the recent achievements and milestones celebrated in the City of Española:

The Española Valley Fiber Arts Center completed renovation of their new facility. The Center offers classes in the fiber arts including weaving, knitting, beadwork and basketry. They sell finished pieces and supplies. They have a multi-faceted potential for expansion as a cluster-based economic business. And they were just awarded a **twenty thousand dollar** (\$20,000.⁰⁰) grant from the New Mexico Arts Commission.

Physicians' Capital Investments broke ground on a new dialysis facility in the City. The new facility will relocate existing services to a state-of-the-art medical care treatment center. The cost of this eight thousand square foot facility is approximately **two point two million dollars** (\$2,200,000.⁰⁰). Completion is expected this winter.

The Rio Arriba Health Commons was completed, consolidating health providers in a new building located on Industrial Park Road. Not only does this improve health services in the community, but it is a step towards further developing our industrial park area in the city.

The Big Rock Casino began construction on a seven-story luxury hotel that will expand their convention and recreation facilities and bring tourist dollars to Española.

And one of the cornerstones of Española's economy, Northern New Mexico College, celebrated its 100th year of serving students in northern New Mexico. Northern also celebrated the grand opening of its Career Technology Education building in Española, which now houses its Automotive Technology, Carpentry and Plumbing programs. And

within the past year, Northern received approval from its accrediting institution for new baccalaureate programs in its Engineering, Nursing and Mathematics curricula.

Northern has benefited the lives of thousands of people, more than can be counted, including its students and all of the lives touched by those people who have received their educations there. Not only is Northern an economic anchor in the city, but I also believe the College represents the city's best chance for a renaissance since the dawn of the railroad.

Congratulations to all of these organizations who are so important to our City's, and our citizens', well-being for achieving these milestones.

With all of the highlights of the past year, there were also some setbacks. Keeping my promise to maintain an open and transparent government, I believe it is important to address an event that occurred this past summer.

In July, water tank number two failed and the City lost nearly a million gallons of water. We were forced to implement **stage four** water restrictions for ten days while a water line was installed to bypass the tank. Repairs to the tank were completed yesterday. We are filling the tank now.

Our Public Works Department is working on a comprehensive maintenance plan for our infrastructure facilities. We focused on the events of the summer to improve how we maintain and inspect our water infrastructure.

Based on the lessons learned, and the overall goal to improve our water system, we are now striving to achieve the goal of reducing water restrictions even further. Since 2002, the city has been in "**Stage 3**" water conservation. This means that the city has only been able to produce 75% of its consumer water demands. Recent plans to implement projects identified nearly 10 years ago will help us to overcome this production shortage and reduce our restrictions to a Stage 2. The first of these projects is the blending of water from wells 4 and 7, which are currently not in use due to nitrate, arsenic and fluoride contamination that exceed newer EPA standards.

This project is funded by a WTB grant and CDBG funds and will be complete in the coming year. By bringing this water into compliance and introducing it back into the system, the city will be able to return to a **Stage 2** conservation status, decreasing restrictions on water use.

The next challenge we will face is the treatment of uranium in two of our production wells. We are studying alternatives to overcome this water quality challenge.

While it is not easy to discuss on problems that occurred, or challenges we face, it is my responsibility to keep you informed. It is important to maintain transparency and openness.

It is also important to do more than just report on what has occurred. It is important to set goals.

Upcoming goals the City Council and I have set for ourselves include building gateways into the City to let visitors know they are entering a unique and special community.

We will continue to expand on our downtown revitalization efforts.

We will keep improving public safety, and continue seeking ways to bring in more funding for our Police and Fire Departments.

We will build a new jail.

We will build a new solid waste transfer station.

We will continue improving streets to improve both traffic flows and pedestrian safety.

We will continue working with our neighboring cities, counties and Tribal Governments to share resources to improve the opportunities available for Española and the surrounding communities.

We will continue finding ways to improve the services we offer, and find services that help the citizens of our City.

In the coming year, I will keep you updated on what is happening with your City Government. I have several new initiatives for keeping you informed that I want to mention.

Tonight, when you came in, on each of the chairs there was a copy of a Townhall Meeting survey form. The City Council and I invite you to attend a series of Townhall Meetings we are scheduling to discuss in depth, in a relaxed environment, the issues that concern you. We will have the first meeting in October. The topic we will be discussing will be public safety.

Before you leave this evening, if you would please take a moment to fill out the survey, we will use the information you provide to make sure we are using the Townhall meetings to address your concerns.

I also want to bring you information about the events at City Hall, and the actions taken by your City Government, as they happen.

This Address is being broadcast live on the radio. The City of Española has contracted with KDCE Radio to broadcast City Council Meetings, public addresses such as this, a weekly "Coffee Break" show, and community announcements. KDCE broadcasts on 950AM and may soon be broadcast on an FM channel.

We also have information available on the Internet. The City has a website at www.cityofespanola (all one word) **dot** org. We are also on Facebook. The facebook page is used to post job openings, information about upcoming events, and agendas for the City's public meetings. We have a new Public Information Officer who provides all of this information to you.

As we look back tonight on the past year, I believe it has been a year of progress, and I am proud of the work your city staff and elected officials have done to achieve so many of the goals we set for ourselves.

I am pleased to be able to report that there are signs we will see our local economy improving, possibly as early as next year, and to report to you that the City budget is fiscally sound and provides the funding needed to improve infrastructure and public safety.

Looking forward to the year ahead, I want you to know that we will continue our efforts to improve the quality of life for our citizens in this beautiful place we live.

And as we look forward, I am proud that together, we as a City, are realizing our potential and recognizing our significance as a vital part of our state, and our nation. The future holds the possibilities for us to see New Mexico's film industry expanding into our city, our College becoming a University, the Rail Runner extending into Española and high-speed broadband ensuring we continue to advance technologically.

On behalf of your City council members, your City staff and myself, thank you for your time this evening.