

City Fiscal Reserve Funds

The State of Washington permits the City to maintain two financial reserves to draw upon in the event of certain unanticipated expenditure or revenue pressures.

Emergency Fund

Under the authority of RCW 35.32A.060, the City maintains the Emergency Fund (EMF) of the General Fund. The EMF is the principal reserve for the City to draw upon when certain unanticipated expenses occur during the fiscal year. Eligible expenses include costs related to storms or other natural disasters. State law limits the amount of money the City can set aside in this reserve to 37.5 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value of property within the city.

The City's practice had been to fully fund the emergency reserve to this maximum limit. However, over that past several years assessed values have undergone significant growth and are expected to continue at a rate that far outpaces the projected City's revenue growth rate. While perhaps good news from an economic standpoint, these increasing assessed values do not translate into a proportional increase in City property tax revenues. In that context, and in recognition of the need for resources to be directed toward related social services in response to the homelessness crisis, in 2017 the City modified the existing financial policies for the EMF to establish a minimum balance of \$60 million, and to adjust that level each year with the rate of inflation. This implies that the EMF would continue to grow, but at somewhat lower rate than under the previous policy. This policy change strikes a balance between ensuring that resources will be available to address unanticipated expenditures and making resources available to address current needs. For the 2020 Proposed Budget, the City adds \$1.9 million to the reserve balance bringing the total to \$66.9 million for 2020.

Revenue Stabilization Fund

Under the authority of RCW 35.21.070, the City maintains a second financial reserve called the Revenue Stabilization Fund (RSA), also known as the Rainy Day Fund. The RSA provides resources for the City to draw upon to maintain City services in the event of a sudden, unanticipated shortfall in revenue due to economic downturns or other factors. City code limits the amount set aside in this reserve to five percent of General Fund tax receipts. [Ordinance 123743](#) requires the City to deposit an amount equivalent to 0.5% of General Fund tax revenues into the RSA, with some limited exceptions. In addition, City policy requires the deposit of 50% of any unplanned year-end fund balance in the General Fund into the RSA. The RSA has a fund balance cap equal to five percent of total annual General Fund tax revenue.

The City adopted significant RSA funding enhancements in 2011 via Ordinance 123743. These changes enabled the City to rebuild the Rainy-Day Fund reserves that had been spent down in 2009 and 2010 in the midst of the Great Recession. The new policies facilitated the rebuilding of this reserve fund from a low of \$10.5 million in 2010 to \$57.7 million by 2019. For the 2020 Proposed Budget, the City adds \$3.0 million to the reserve balance bringing the total to \$60.8 million for 2020.