

Selected Financial Policies

Through a series of Resolutions and Ordinances, the City has adopted several financial policies that are designed to protect the City's financial interests and provide a framework and guidelines for the City's financial practices. For additional information about these policies, please refer to the City of Seattle website: http://www.seattle.gov/financedepartment/financial_policies.htm.

Budgetary Basis

- The City budgets on a modified accrual basis. Property taxes, sales taxes, business and occupation taxes, and other taxpayer-assessed revenues due for the current year are considered measurable and available as revenues, even though a portion of the taxes may be collected in the subsequent year. Licenses, fines, penalties, and miscellaneous revenues are recorded as revenues when they are received in cash since this is when they can be accurately measured. Investment earnings are accrued as earned.
- Expenditures are considered a liability when they are incurred. Interest on long-term debt, judgments and claims, workers' compensation, and compensated absences are considered a liability when they are paid.

Appropriations and Execution

- The budget generally makes appropriations for operating expenses at the budget control level within departments, unless the expenditure is from one of the General Fund reserve accounts, or is for a specific project or activity budgeted in the General Fund category called Finance General. These projects and activities are budgeted individually.
- Capital projects programmed in the CIP are appropriated in the budget at the program or project level. Grant-funded activities are controlled as prescribed by law and federal or state regulations.
- Within the legally adopted budget authorizations, more detailed allocations, as approved by CBO, are recorded in the City's accounting system, called PeopleSoft, at the lowest levels of each department's organizational structure and in detailed expenditure accounts. Throughout the budget year, CBO monitors revenue and spending performance against the budget to protect the financial stability of the City.
- In accordance with Washington state law, any unexpended appropriations for operating or ordinary maintenance expenditures automatically lapse at the close of the fiscal year, except for any appropriation continued by ordinance. Unexpended appropriations for capital outlays remaining at the close of the fiscal year are carried forward to the following year, except for any appropriation abandoned by ordinance.

Budget Transfers

The Budget Director may approve, without ordinance, appropriation transfers within a department or agency of up to 10%, and with no more than \$500,000 of the appropriation authority for the particular budget control level or, where appropriate, line item, being increased. In addition, no transfers can reduce the appropriation authority of a budget control level by more than 25%.

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Debt Policies

- The City of Seattle seeks to maintain the highest possible credit ratings for all categories of short- and long-term General Obligation debt that can be achieved without compromising delivery of basic City services and achievement of adopted City policy objectives.
- The City will reserve \$100 million of legal limited tax (councilmanic) general obligation debt capacity, or 12% of the total legal limit, whichever is larger, for emergencies. The 12% reserve is now significantly greater than \$100 million.
- Except in emergencies, net debt service paid from the General Fund will not exceed 9% of the total General Fund budget. In the long run, the City will seek to keep net debt service at 7% or less of the General Fund budget.

General Fund - Fund Balance and Reserve Policies

- State law allows the City to maintain an emergency reserve at a maximum statutory-authorized level of 37.5 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value in the city. The City's previous practice had been to fully fund the emergency reserve to this maximum limit. However, over the 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. In 2017 the City modified the existing financial policies for the Emergency Subfund (ESF) to establish a minimum balance of \$60 million, and to adjust that level each year with the rate of inflation. This implies that the ESF 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.
- Annual contributions of 0.50% of forecasted tax revenues are automatically made to the Revenue Stabilization Fund (commonly referred to as the "Rainy Day Fund" or RSF).¹ In addition, 50% of any unanticipated excess General Fund fund balance at year's end is automatically contributed to the Revenue Stabilization Fund. These automatic contributions are temporarily suspended when the forecasted nominal tax growth rate is negative or when the total value of the RSF exceeds 5% of total tax revenues. In addition to the automatic contributions, the City may also make contributions to the RSF via ordinance. Expenditures from the RSF require the approval of a majority of the members of the Seattle City Council and must be informed by the evaluation of out-year financial projections.

Other Citywide Policies

- As part of the Mayor's budget proposal, the Executive develops a revenue estimate that is based on the best available economic data and forecasts.
- The City intends to adopt rates, fees, and cost allocation charges no more often than biennially. The rate, fee, or allocation charge structures may include changes to take effect at specified dates during or beyond the biennium. Other changes may still be needed in the case of emergencies or other unanticipated events.

¹ The 0.50% contribution is lowered to 0.25% of forecasted tax revenues for any year immediately following the suspension of contributions as a result of negative nominal tax revenue growth.

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- In general, the City will strive to pay for general government current operating expenditures with current revenues, but may use fund balance or other resources to meet these expenditures. Revenues and expenditures will be monitored throughout the year.
- In compliance with State law, no City fund whose purpose is restricted by state or local law shall be used for purposes outside of these restrictions.
- Working capital for the General Fund and operating funds should be maintained at sufficient levels so that timing lags between revenues and expenditures are normally covered without any fund incurring negative cash balances for greater than 90 days. Exceptions to this policy are permitted with prior approval by the City Council.