City of Columbus Financial Policies

This set of financial policies was developed to ensure that the city's financial resources are managed in a responsible manner and that decisions are made in a disciplined way. Unless otherwise stated, these policies are reviewed and updated as needed, and the city is in compliance with these policies.

For purposes of this document, the term "expenditure" includes expenses as well as inter-fund transfers and encumbrances. "Revenues" include the proceeds of any and all taxes or other sources of funds received by the city, but do not include balances in funds at the beginning of the year.

A. Balanced Budget

1. It is the policy of the city that the budget for each of its funds always be balanced in that the appropriations from each fund for the fiscal year not exceed the resources available to that fund for the year, including estimated revenues and any balance in the fund at the beginning of the year. This policy assures that the city does not spend beyond its means, and derives from the requirements in Sections 26 and 27 of the City Charter that the Mayor's estimate of the cost of operating the city be used as the basis for appropriation ordinances.
2. While in any given year all or a portion of the beginning balance in a fund may be appropriated for expenditure, the longer-term goal is that operating expenditures not exceed operating revenues on an annualized basis such that structural balance is maintained within each fund. Consistent with this longer-term goal, the better practice is to appropriate portions of the beginning balance only to the extent they support non-recurring expenditures, replace temporary declines in revenue, or are reasonably anticipated to be offset by increased revenue not yet officially recognized in a revenue estimate.
3. The portion of the beginning year balance in a fund which equals the amount by which expenditures exceeded revenues during the year preceding the budget year should be appropriated only to the extent contemplated by the policy defining the appropriate use of the economic stabilization fund.
4. The portion of the beginning year balance in the general operating fund which exceeds ten percent of the expenditures from such fund during the year proceeding the budget year should be transferred to either the anticipated expenditures fund or the economic stabilization fund.

B. Economic Stabilization Fund

1. The economic stabilization fund (ESF) was created by Ordinance 860-88 in 1988 and is sometimes referred to as the "rainy day fund." It was intended to ensure against reductions

in “basic city services during times of economic recession or unexpected revenue loss by the city” which are supported by the general operating fund.

2. Consistent with the need to protect city finances during extended economic downturns or times of extreme emergency created by unexpected events, the term “basic city services” should be construed conservatively to refer only to the direct provision of core city services such as police and fire protection, protection of public health, and refuse removal. Such services which are supported by the general operating fund may be maintained in part with this fund when revenues have been temporarily lowered, whether from economic recession or otherwise, provided that there is a reasonable expectation that services cannot otherwise be maintained at acceptable levels and that increased revenues during the year or years following the budget year will allow replacement of any moneys used from this fund at an annual rate equal to at least one percent of general fund expenditures in the budget year.
3. This fund may also be used to support basic city services funded by the general operating fund in the absence of a temporary lowering of revenues where unanticipated events of a most unusual nature have occasioned a need for non-recurring emergency expenditures, provided there is a reasonable expectation that increased revenues during the year or years following the budget year will allow replacement of any moneys used from this fund at an annual rate equal to at least one percent of general fund expenditures in the budget year.
4. Prior to the use of this fund for the purposes described above, the Mayor shall provide Council with a written analysis describing how the proposed use of moneys from this fund is consistent with these policies and proposing any revenue enhancements necessary to allow replacement of funds so used.
5. It shall be the policy of the city to maintain moneys in this fund equal to no less than five percent of expenditures from the general operating fund during the preceding year. If moneys expended under paragraphs 2 or 3 of this section cause the balance of this fund to fall below five percent, the policy of the city shall be to replace funds so expended as soon as practicable at an annual rate equal to at least one percent of general fund expenditures in the year in which moneys were expended under paragraphs 2 or 3. Consistent with Ordinance 1590-94 and any successors, this fund shall be the recipient of an appropriate share of investment income. Any portion of the balance in this fund which exceeds seven percent of expenditures from the general operating fund during the preceding year may be transferred to the anticipated expenditure fund.

C. Anticipated Expenditure Fund

1. The anticipated expenditure fund was established in 1994 to receive deposits sufficient to provide for funding from the general operating fund for the 27th pay period which occurs approximately every twelve years. It was then expanded to receive deposits earmarked for specific future expenditures that would otherwise be funded from the general operating fund and whose cost is unknown.
2. This fund should have deposited to it, at a minimum each year from the general operating fund, those moneys necessary, on an annualized basis, to fund the 27th pay period in the years in which it occurs. It may receive additional deposits to the extent not needed for current general fund operating expenses or to the extent not needed in the economic stabilization fund.
3. To the extent not being accrued for the 27th pay period, moneys in this fund may support non-recurring expenditures from the general operating fund. Any moneys in this fund being accrued for the 27th pay period, as determined by the Department of Finance and

Management, may be used to support general fund operating expenses only under the circumstances provided for use of the economic stabilization fund, including those related to replacement of moneys so used.

D. Financial Accountability

1. It is the policy of the city that all departments and offices should manage operations such that expenditures for a given year will not exceed the original appropriations except to the extent supplemental appropriations authorize increased expenditures. Fourth quarter transfers of one department's unused general fund appropriation authority to a department or office otherwise exceeding its expenditure authority are normally a reflection of a failure to comply with this policy except in the case of reasonably unforeseen events or cost increases. Supplemental appropriations must be supported by additional revenues, the existence of which must be verified by the Department of Finance and Management or the City Auditor, as appropriate. In cases where additional general fund revenue is certified by the City Auditor, subsequent to the passage of the initial general fund appropriation ordinance, there is no assurance that said revenue will be appropriated, and supplemental appropriation of said revenue is discouraged except for unusual circumstances.
2. The Department of Finance and Management shall review quarterly actual and projected expenditures for all departments and offices and report to the Mayor and Council thereon. Any departments or offices projected to exceed their appropriation authority for the year shall work with the Department of Finance and Management to reduce expenditures. This may include the deferral of hiring and major expenses for goods and services.
3. Responsible stewardship of public funds requires that expenditures be clearly justified as serving a public purpose. An effort to expend all appropriation authority in the fourth quarter simply in order to avoid a lapse of appropriated funds does not serve a public purpose.
4. Departments and offices are expected to be expending public funds in order to serve the outcomes they have identified for their programs. It is the policy of the city to measure achievement of outcomes through quantifiable performance indicators. A sample of those performance indicators is included in the respective departmental sections of this document.



E. Investment of City Funds

1. Requirements regarding the deposit of public money and the investment of funds in the city treasury are set forth in the Columbus City Codes, Chapters 321 and 325. Various articles establish a three-person depository commission, made up of the City Auditor, City Treasurer, and the Director of Finance and Management, charged with compliance and the creation of guidelines. The commission embodies a checks and balances process in that each represents a separately elected official of city government. Pursuant to the above code sections, the following policies exist.
2. The city will not invest in any form of derivatives, except STAR Ohio (an investment pool managed by the State Treasurer's Office that allows governments within the state to pool their funds for investment purposes).
3. The city is prohibited from entering into reverse repurchase agreements and does not leverage its investment portfolio in any manner.
4. Only eligible investments with final maturities not greater than five years from the time of purchase are permitted, unless the security is an assessment bond or note issued by the City of Columbus and the purchase is approved by the Treasury Investment Board.
5. The city purchases investments only through member banks of the Federal Reserve System or broker dealers licensed by the State of Ohio and registered with the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA).
6. Investments permitted by Chapter 325 of the Columbus City Code are limited to the following:
    a. Bonds, notes, or other obligations of the United States government or its agencies for which the faith of the United States is pledged for the payment of principal and interest.
    b. Bonds, notes, debentures, or other obligations issued by any of the federal government-sponsored enterprises listed below:
        - Federal Farm Credit System
        - Federal Home Loan Bank
        - Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation
        - Federal National Mortgage Association
    c. The Ohio State Treasurer's Asset Reserve Funds (STAR Ohio) pursuant to Ohio Revised Code 135.45.
    d. Bonds or other obligations of the City of Columbus, Ohio.
    e. Obligations of the State of Ohio or any municipal corporation, village, township, or other political subdivision of the State of Ohio, as to which there is no default of principal or interest and which have been approved as to their validity by nationally recognized bond counsel.
    f. Certificates of deposit in eligible institutions applying for moneys as provided in Chapter 321 of the Columbus City Codes.
    g. Repurchase agreements that are collateralized with legally authorized securities as defined in Chapter 325.010 of Columbus City Code and held in third-party safekeeping designated by the City Treasurer and in the name of the City of Columbus.
    h. Others as provided for in Ohio Revised Code 135.14 for interim deposits.

F. Income Tax and Special Income Tax Fund

1. Initiated in 1947 and implemented in 1948, pursuant to Ohio law (ORC Chapter 5747), Columbus City Code Section 361.19 authorizes the levying of a two and one half percent income tax on Columbus workers and businesses. Increases in the income tax above one percent are subject to voter approval, pursuant to state law and the Columbus City Charter.
2. The city deposits three quarters of income tax revenue to the general fund and one quarter to the special income tax fund (SIT) pursuant to Columbus City Code Section 362.013. The SIT is used to finance capital improvements, generally of a non-enterprise nature.
3. The above distribution of income tax proceeds should be maintained. National rating agencies consistently cite this long-standing policy as a major factor earning the city its high credit designation.

G. Allocation of Investment Earnings

1. The City Treasurer pools all available city funds (excepting cash held by bond trustees, escrow agents, and certain debt service, trust, and agency funds), in order to maximize investment efficiency.
2. As a charter city, the determination of the distribution of investment income among funds is established by city ordinance and by various grant requirements.
3. Various city ordinances identify those funds that shall receive investment income. A complete list is kept by the City Auditor.

H. Pro Rata Assessment for General Fund Support

1. The Attorney General of the State of Ohio has ruled that the cost of administrative services provided by general fund agencies for independent fund agencies may be pro rated to the independent fund agencies on an equitable basis.
2. The charge, commonly referred to as “pro rata,” represents an approximation of the cost incurred for certain services performed by administrative agencies of the general fund for enterprise, special revenue, grant, and internal service divisions, and for which no specific charge is assessed. Services include, but are not limited to, debt administration and budget preparation, legal counsel, financial reporting, procurement assistance, and building maintenance.
3. Generally accepted accounting practices as contained in Government Auditing Standards, issued by the Comptroller General of the United States, require reasonable justification for the assessed amount.
4. The most recent cost evaluation study performed by the Department of Finance and Management and confirmed by the City Auditor resulted in a pro rata rate of 4.5 percent of revenues to be charged to appropriate funds.
5. The most recent city ordinance assesses an administrative service charge upon funds other than the general fund, equal to 4.5 percent of revenues, the proceeds of which are deposited in the general fund.
6. A triennial review and update of the pro rata calculation shall be conducted by the Department of Finance and Management.

I. Fees and Charge-Setting

1. Fee-setting authority for non-enterprise divisions rests among several different entities, including the City Council, the Board of Health, the Recreation and Parks Commission, the Ohio Legislature, and various other elected and appointed officials.
2. An annual fee review should be conducted by the Department of Finance and Management. Within this review, consideration should be given to the community-wide versus special service nature of the program or activity, the extent to which the service is specifically targeted to low income individuals or groups, and the intended relationship between the amount paid and the benefit received.
3. This review should list the major fees and charges along with the following:
    a. Current fee or charge rates
    b. Date of the most recent increase
    c. Market rates and charges levied by other public and private entities for similar services
    d. The action needed to change the fee
4. The Director of Finance and Management will recommend fee and charge increases based upon the above review to the Office of the Mayor.
5. With Mayoral approval, the proposed changes shall be presented to the appropriate fee-setting authority for approval.
6. The goal of the rate setting process for the water and sewer enterprise funds shall be to avoid steep increases in rates, while at the same time fully meeting the needs of the system. Ten-year pro forma operating statements for these funds shall be utilized to assist the divisions in achieving this goal.

J. Revenue Diversification

1. The city will strive to maintain a diversified and stable revenue base as protection from short-term fluctuations in any one revenue source and to ensure its ability to provide ongoing service.
2. Restricted revenue shall only be used for the purposes legally permissible and in a fiscally responsible manner. Programs and services funded by restricted revenue will be clearly designated as such.
3. A balance will be sought in the revenue structure between the proportions of elastic and inelastic revenues. New sources of revenue will be sought to achieve the desirable balance.
4. Each time a new revenue source or a change in the rate of an existing source is considered, the effect of this change on the balance of elastic and inelastic revenue will be thoroughly examined by the Department of Finance and Management.
5. The treatment and deposit of one-time or unexpected revenues will be decided upon on a case by case basis.

K. Debt Issuance and Management

1. The Ohio Revised Code Section 133.05 provides that the total net debt (as defined by the ORC) of a municipal corporation, whether or not approved by the electors, shall not exceed 10.5 percent of the total value of all property in the municipal corporation as listed and assessed for taxation. In addition, the unvoted net debt of municipal corporations cannot

exceed 5.5 percent of the total taxation value of property. The statutory limitations on debt are measured by the ratio of net debt to tax valuation and expressed in terms of a percentage.

2. The city will not incur debt to finance current operations.
3. The city may issue debt for a qualifying capital project if the cost of the asset is at least $5,000 and the useful life of the asset, as determined by the City Auditor, is at least five years.
4. Debt will not be issued for periods exceeding the useful life of the project or asset.
5. Periodic reviews of outstanding debt will be undertaken to determine refunding opportunities.
6. Refunding will be considered if and when there is a positive net economic benefit or the refunding is essential to modernize covenants to improve operations and management.

L. Coverage Ratios for Special Income Tax Fund (SIT)

1. Within the limitations upon debt issuance imposed by law, the SIT fund's available capacity for new debt and its ability to service existing debt are limited by a coverage factor, which is a ratio of total resources in the SIT to projected expenditures required for debt retirement. This factor provides a minimum level at which the SIT fund balance should be maintained for contingency purposes. The coverage ratio is a self-imposed discipline, one based on sound fiscal management practice and works to preserve capacity to address any unforeseen emergency. Coverage levels are goals, not absolute minimum levels of acceptance.

M. Revenue Bond Reserve Ratios

1. Whenever the city issues revenue debt, the bond indenture – an ordained document governing debt administration – often details some level of reserve imposed on the city to insure debt retirement on behalf of the bondholders.
2. The level is established on a case by case basis, and compliance is annually reported in the budget document and the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report of the City Auditor.

N. Operating Reserves for Funds Other Than the General Fund

1. The annual reserve balance in the insurance trust fund should be equal to, at a minimum, the sum of one month’s worth of health, dental, vision, prescription, disability, and life insurance costs. In calculating the monthly claims costs for purposes of determining the appropriate reserve amount, a rolling average of claims experience for the previous 12 consecutive months shall be used.
2. The State of Ohio Bureau of Workers’ Compensation (BWC) determines the city’s workers’ compensation rate. Starting January 1, 2016, payments will be made prospectively which requires the amount due to be paid before coverage is provided. Starting in 2017, monthly payments to the bureau are required. The city’s policy is to set the internal rate at a level sufficient to fund the anticipated payments in the following year. If adjustments are made either to the city’s premium rate or to the amount due to the bureau in cases of rebates or credits, the premium rate may be adjusted accordingly.
3. The timing of collections as provided for in the policy above may be altered under the following circumstances, provided that there is a reasonable expectation that services

cannot otherwise be maintained at acceptable levels and that increased revenues during the year or years following the budget year will allow replacement of any moneys gained from any such timing change:

a. When revenues have been temporarily lowered, whether from economic recession or otherwise

b. Where unanticipated events of a most unusual nature have occasioned a need for non-recurring emergency expenditures

Prior to changing the timing of workers' compensation collection for the purposes described above, the Mayor shall provide Council with a written analysis describing how the proposed use of these moneys is consistent with these policies and proposing any revenue enhancements necessary to allow replacement of funds so used.

O. Long-Range Financial Planning

1. A general fund pro forma operating statement is produced for each budget year and updated periodically during the year. The pro forma is published in the budget document. The pro forma projects the city's future general fund financial outlook for a ten-year period.
2. Pro forma projections are based on a series of assumptions, including projected inflation rates, personnel costs for both uniformed and non-uniformed personnel, health insurance costs, revenue growth rates, and other division-specific assumptions. Because state law requires each year to end in balance, the plan assumes that deficits projected at the beginning of each year will be addressed so that no negative fund balance is carried over into the next year.
3. To augment the pro forma, various iterations should be prepared, using alternative economic, planning, and policy assumptions. Key assumptions and choices related to achievement of goals should be identified and made available to decision makers for their review in making choices and decisions related to budget issues. The likely financial outcomes of particular courses of action or factors should then be estimated.

