

City Council-Adopted Budget and Fiscal Policies

(First Adopted in FY 12-13)



BUDGET PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION

A. **Balanced Budget.** The City will maintain a balanced budget. This means that:

1. Operating revenues must fully cover operating expenditures, including debt service.
2. Ending fund balance must meet minimum policy levels or other target levels established by the Council for the fiscal year.

Under this policy, it is allowable for total expenditures to exceed revenues in a given year; however, in this situation, beginning fund balance should only be used to fund capital improvement plan projects or other “one-time,” non-recurring expenditures.

See *Fund Balance and Reserves* policies that follow for description of other circumstances appropriate to the use of beginning fund balance.

B. **Council Goal-Setting, Transparency and Meaningful Community Engagement in the Budget Process.** The Council will set goals for the coming year early in the budget process that provides transparent and clear policy direction in linking goals with resources. The community will be provided with meaningful opportunities to be engaged in the goal-setting and budget process.

C. **Budget Objectives.** Through its Budget, the City will link resources with goals and results by:

1. Identifying community needs for essential services.
2. Organizing the programs required to provide these essential services.
3. Establishing program policies and goals, which define the nature and level of program services required.
4. Identifying activities performed in delivering program services.
5. Proposing objectives for improving the delivery of program services.
6. Identifying and appropriating the resources required to perform program activities and accomplish program objectives.
7. Setting standards to measure and evaluate the:
 - a. Output of program activities.
 - b. Accomplishment of program objectives.
 - c. Expenditure of program appropriations.

D. **Measurable Objectives.** The Budget will establish measurable program objectives and allow reasonable time to accomplish those objectives.

E. **Goal Status Reports.** The status of major program objectives will be formally reported to the Council on an ongoing, periodic basis.

F. **Mid-Year Budget Reviews.** The Council will formally review the City’s fiscal condition, and amend appropriations if necessary, six months after the beginning of each fiscal year.

FUND BALANCE AND RESERVES

A. **General Fund Minimum Fund Balance.** The City will strive to maintain a minimum unassigned fund balance of at least 25% of operating expenditures in the General Fund. This represents 90 days of cash flow and is based on the GFOA's draft methodology for setting reserve levels in adequately providing for:

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1. Economic uncertainties, local disasters and other financial hardships or downturns in the local or national economy.
2. Contingencies for unseen operating or capital needs.
3. Unfunded liabilities such as self-insurance, pensions and retiree health obligations.
4. Institutional changes, such as State budget takeaways and unfunded mandates.
5. Cash flow requirements.

Whenever the City's General Fund reserves fall below this target, the City will strive to restore reserves to this level within five years. As revenues versus expenditures improve, the City will allocate about half to reserve restoration, with the balance available to fund outstanding liabilities, asset replacements, service levels restoration, new operating programs or capital improvement projects.

Circumstances where taking reserves below policy levels would be appropriate include responding to the risks that reserves are intended to mitigate, such as:

- One time uses in meeting cash flow needs; closing a projected short-term revenue-expenditure gap; responding to unexpected expenditure requirements or revenue shortfalls; and making investments in human resources, technology, liability reductions, economic development and revenue base improvements, productivity improvements and other strategies that will strengthen City revenues or reduce future costs.
- Where a forecast show an ongoing structural gap, in providing a strategic bridge to the future.

B. **Facilities, Equipment, Fleet and Infrastructure Replacement.** The City will establish an Asset Replacement Fund and strive to set annually aside funds to provide for the timely replacement of long-lived capital assets such as facilities, equipment, vehicles and infrastructure. The annual contribution to this fund will generally be based on the annual use allowance or depreciation, which is determined based on the estimated life of the asset vehicle or equipment and its original purchase cost. Interest earnings and sales of surplus equipment as well as any related damage and insurance recoveries will be credited to this fund.

C. **Future Capital Project Fund Balance Assignments.** The Council may assign specific fund balance levels for future development of capital projects that it has determined to be in the best long-term interests of the City.

D. **Other Commitments and Assignments.** In addition to the assignments noted above, fund balance levels will be sufficient to meet funding requirements for projects approved in prior years which are carried forward into the new year; debt service reserve requirements; commitments for encumbrances; and other reserves, commitments or assignments required by contractual obligations, state law or generally accepted accounting principles.

GENERAL REVENUE MANAGEMENT

- A. **Current Revenues for Current Uses; One-Time Revenues for One-Time Purposes.** The City will make all current expenditures with current revenues, avoiding procedures that balance current budgets by postponing needed expenditures, accruing future revenues or rolling over short-term debt. The City will avoid using one-time revenues to fund ongoing program costs.
- B. **Revenue Distribution.** The Council recognizes that generally accepted accounting principles for state and local governments discourage the “earmarking” of General Fund revenues, and accordingly, the practice of designating General Fund revenues for specific programs should be minimized in the City’s management of its fiscal affairs. In those cases where it does occur, the basis and methodology for earmarking should be clearly articulated in the City’s Budget and Fiscal Policies.
- C. **Special Tax and Assessment Levies.** The City will seek to lower special tax rates and assessments whenever possible through expenditure reductions and other cost containment strategies. However, the City will not use General Fund resources to subsidize reductions in allowable levies in the General Obligation Bond Fund, Retirement Fund, Assessment Districts or other similar funds.

FINANCIAL REPORTING AND BUDGET ADMINISTRATION

- A. **Annual Reporting.** The City will prepare annual financial statements as follows:
 - 1. In accordance with Charter requirements, the City will contract for an annual audit by a qualified independent certified public accountant. The City will strive for an unqualified auditors’ opinion.
 - 2. The City will use generally accepted accounting principles in preparing its annual financial statements and will strive to meet the requirements of the Award for Excellence in Financial Reporting program of the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA).
 - 3. The City will issue audited financial statements within 180 days after year-end.
- B. **Interim Reporting.** The City will prepare and issue timely interim reports on the City’s fiscal status to the Council and staff. This includes on-line access to the City’s financial management system by City staff; monthly reports to program managers; more formal quarterly reports to the Council and Department Heads; mid-year budget reviews; and interim annual reports.
- C. **Budget Administration.** As set forth in the City Charter, the Council may amend or supplement the budget at any time after its adoption by majority vote of the Council members. The City Manager has the authority to make administrative adjustments to the budget as long as those changes will not have a significant policy impact nor affect budgeted year-end fund balances.

USER FEE COST RECOVERY

A. Ongoing Review

Fees should be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis to ensure that they keep pace with changes in the cost-of-living as well as changes in methods or levels of service delivery. In implementing this goal, a comprehensive analysis of City costs and fees should be made at least every five years. In the interim, fees will be adjusted by annual changes in the Consumer Price Index as well whenever there have been significant changes in the method, level or cost of service delivery.

B. User Fee Cost Recovery Levels

In setting user fees and cost recovery levels, the following factors will be considered:

1. ***Community-Wide Versus Special Benefit.*** The level of user fee cost recovery should consider the *community-wide* versus *special service* nature of the program or activity. The use of general-purpose revenues is appropriate for community-wide services, while user fees are appropriate for services that are of special benefit to easily identified individuals or groups.
2. ***Service Recipient Versus Service Driver.*** After considering community-wide versus special benefit of the service, the concept of *service recipient* versus *service driver* should also be considered. For example, it could be argued that the applicant is not the beneficiary of the City's development review efforts: the community is the primary beneficiary. However, the applicant is the *driver* of development review costs, and as such, cost recovery from the applicant is appropriate.
3. ***Effect of Pricing on the Demand for Services.*** The level of cost recovery and related pricing of services can significantly affect the demand and subsequent level of services provided. At full cost recovery, this has the specific advantage of ensuring that the City is providing services for which there is genuinely a market that is not overly-stimulated by artificially low prices.

Conversely, high levels of cost recovery will negatively impact the delivery of services to lower income groups. This negative feature is especially pronounced, and works against public policy, if the services are specifically targeted to low income groups.

4. ***Feasibility of Collection and Recovery.*** Although it may be determined that a high level of cost recovery may be appropriate for specific services, it may be impractical or too costly to establish a system to identify and charge the user.

C. Factors Favoring Low Cost Recovery Levels

1. There is *no* intended relationship between the amount paid and the benefit received. Almost all "social service" programs fall into this category as it is *expected* that one group will subsidize another.
2. Collecting fees is not cost-effective or will significantly impact the efficient delivery of the service.
3. There is *no* intent to limit the use of (or entitlement to) the service. Again, most "social service" programs fit into this category as well as many public safety (police and fire) emergency response services.

4. Collecting fees would discourage compliance with regulatory requirements and adherence is primarily self-identified, and as such, failure to comply would not be readily detected by the City. Many small-scale licenses and permits might fall into this category.

D. Factors Favoring High Cost Recovery Levels

1. The service is similar to services provided through the private sector.
2. Other private or public sector alternatives could or do exist for the delivery of the service.
3. For equity or demand management purposes, it is intended that there be a direct relationship between the amount paid and the level and cost of the service received.
4. The use of the service is specifically discouraged. Police responses to disturbances or false alarms might fall into this category.
5. The service is regulatory in nature and voluntary compliance is not expected to be the primary method of detecting failure to meet regulatory requirements. Building permit, plan checks, and subdivision review fees for large projects would fall into this category.

E. General Concepts Regarding the Use of Service Charges

1. Revenues should not exceed the reasonable cost of providing the service.
2. Cost recovery goals should be based on the total cost of delivering the service, including direct costs, departmental administration costs and organization-wide support costs.
3. The method of assessing and collecting fees should be as simple as possible in order to reduce the administrative cost of collection.
4. A unified approach should be used in determining cost recovery levels for various programs based on the factors discussed above.

F. Low Cost-Recovery Services

Based on the criteria discussed above, the following types of services should have very low cost recovery goals. In selected circumstances, there may be specific activities within the broad scope of services provided that should have user charges associated with them.

1. Delivering public safety emergency response services such as police patrol services and fire suppression.
2. Maintaining and developing public facilities that are provided on a uniform, community-wide basis such as streets, parks and general-purpose buildings.
3. Providing social service programs and economic development activities.

G. Recreation Programs

1. Cost recovery for activities directed to adults should be relatively high.

2. Cost recovery for activities directed to youth and seniors should be relatively low. In those circumstances where services are similar to those provided in the private sector, cost recovery levels should be higher.
3. For cost recovery activities of less than 100%, there should generally be a differential in rates between residents and non-residents. However, the Community Services Director is authorized to reduce or eliminate non-resident fee differentials when this is reducing attendance and thus cost recovery and there are no appreciable expenditure savings from the reduced attendance.
4. The Community Services Director is authorized to offer reduced fees such as introductory rates, family discounts and coupon discounts on a pilot basis (not to exceed 18 months) to promote new recreation programs or reenergize existing ones .

H. Development Review Programs

Cost recovery for planning, building and safety (building permits, structural plan checks, inspections) and engineering (public improvement plan checks, inspections, subdivision requirements, encroachments) services should be very high: in most instances it should be 100%.

I. Comparability With Other Communities

Surveys of fees charged by other comparable agencies should not be the sole or primary criteria in setting City fees. As outlined below, there are many factors that affect how and why other communities have set their fees at their levels. Accordingly, comparability of Bell's fees to other communities should be one factor among many that is considered in setting City fees.

- a. What level of cost recovery is their fee intended to achieve compared with our cost recovery objectives?
- b. What costs have been considered in computing the fees?
- c. When was the last time that their fees were comprehensively evaluated?
- d. What level of service do they provide compared with our service or performance standards?
- e. Is their rate structure significantly different than ours and what is it intended to achieve?

CONTRACTING FOR SERVICES

A. General Policy Guidelines

1. Contracting with the private sector for the delivery of services provides the City with a significant opportunity for cost containment and productivity enhancements. As such, the City is committed to using private sector resources in delivering municipal services as a key element in its continuing efforts to provide cost-effective programs.
2. Private sector contracting approaches under this policy include construction projects, professional services, outside employment agencies and ongoing operating and maintenance services.
3. In evaluating the costs of private sector contracts compared with in-house performance of the service, indirect, direct, and contract administration costs of the City will be identified and considered.
4. Whenever private sector providers are available and can meet established service levels, they will be seriously considered as viable service delivery alternatives using the evaluation criteria outlined below.
5. For programs and activities currently provided by City employees, conversions to contract services will generally be made through attrition, reassignment or absorption by the contractor.

B. Evaluation Criteria

Within the general policy guidelines stated above, the cost-effectiveness of contract services in meeting established service levels will be determined on a case-by-case basis using the following criteria:

1. Is a sufficient private sector market available to competitively deliver this service and assure a reasonable range of alternative service providers?
2. Can the contract be effectively and efficiently administered?
3. What are the consequences if the contractor fails to perform, and can the contract reasonably be written to compensate the City for any such damages?
4. Can a private sector contractor better respond to expansions, contractions or special requirements of the service?
5. Can the work scope be sufficiently defined to ensure that competing proposals can be fairly and fully evaluated, as well as the contractor's performance after bid award?
6. Does the use of contract services provide us with an opportunity to redefine service levels?
7. Will the contract limit our ability to deliver emergency or other high priority services?
8. Overall, can the City successfully delegate the performance of the service but still retain accountability and responsibility for its delivery?

