

General Fund Economic Reserve Policy

Scope: CITYWIDE

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I. PURPOSE

To establish the targeted level of General Fund operating reserves, a basic component of a financially strong city. Adequate reserves help sustain City operations when adverse or unexpected circumstances affect the City, providing resources to minimize service disruption in the event of temporary revenue shortfalls or unpredicted one-time expenditures. This policy establishes the amounts the City will strive to maintain in its Economic Uncertainty Reserve (EUR) and the conditions under which the reserve may be used.

2. BACKGROUND

Financial reserves strengthen the City's financial status and provide valuable resources for unexpected events. Every fund of the City represents a stand-alone financial set of accounts and has its own operating characteristics, financial capabilities, and constraints. The level of reserves needed should be based on the financial and operating characteristics of each fund. In June 2011, the City Council adopted a goal of establishing a General Fund EUR equivalent to 10% of annual General Fund revenues.

According to the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), it is essential that governments maintain adequate levels of fund balance to mitigate current and future risks (e.g., revenue shortfalls and unanticipated expenditures) in order to protect taxpayers and employees from unexpected changes in financial conditions.

GFOA recommends, at a minimum, that general-purpose governments, regardless of size, maintain an unrestricted budgetary fund balance in their General Fund of no less than two months of regular general fund operating revenues or regular general fund operating expenditures (<http://www.gfoa.org/appropriate-level-unrestricted-fund-balance-general-fund>).

This policy establishes 10% of annual General Fund budgeted revenues as the minimum level of funding in the City's General Fund EUR and establishes two months of operating revenues as a target reserve level. The policy also outlines the methods the City will utilize to achieve the target reserve level, defines the conditions under which these funds can be used and describes how the City's expenditure and/or revenue levels will be adjusted to match any new economic realities that are causing the use of fund balance reserves as a financing bridge.

3. POLICY

3.1 Minimum and Target Reserve Levels

The City will maintain an EUR at a minimum of 10% of budgeted General Fund revenues. The City will seek to achieve and maintain a General Fund EUR equal to two months of regular on-going General Fund expenditures, including transfers (i.e. 17% of General Fund expenditures).

The EUR shall be reported as a commitment of fund balance in the General Fund for external financial reporting. Appropriations from the EUR may only be made by a vote of the City Council to meet a critical, unpredictable financial need.

3.2 Methods to Achieve Funding Levels

Funding of the EUR will generally come from excess revenues over expenditures or one-time revenues.

At a minimum, during the budget process, staff shall review the current and five-year projected reserves to ensure that they are appropriate given the economic and financial risk factors the City faces.

3.3 Criteria for Expenditure of Reserve Funds

The EUR is intended to contend with significant short-term issues, inclusive of unexpected revenue shortfalls, higher than anticipated expenditures, or declared emergencies.

It is the intent of the Council to limit use of the EUR to address unanticipated, non-recurring needs. Reserves shall not normally be applied to recurring annual operating expenditures. The EUR may, however, be used strategically to allow time for the City to restructure its operations in a deliberate manner (as might be required in an economic downturn), but such use will only take place in the context of a Council-adopted long-term plan.

3.4 Timeline for Replenishment of the EUR

If the EUR is drawn down below the minimum level, a plan will be developed and implemented to replenish the reserve, generally from future surpluses. Replenishing the EUR will be a priority use of one-time resources. Generally, the City should seek to replenish the EUR to the minimum reserve level within one to three years.