

Financial Policy Guidelines

For:



Town of Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Adopted: _____

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FISCAL POLICY GUIDELINES

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OBJECTIVES

This fiscal policy is a statement of the guidelines and goals that will influence and guide the financial management practice. A fiscal policy that is adopted, adhered to, and regularly reviewed is recognized as the cornerstone of sound financial management. Effective fiscal policy:

- Contributes significantly to the Town’s ability to insulate itself from fiscal crisis;
- Enhances short-term and long-term financial credit ability by helping to achieve the highest credit and bond ratings possible;
- Promotes long-term financial stability by establishing clear and consistent guidelines;
- Directs attention to the total financial picture of the Town rather than single issue areas;
- Promotes the view of linking long-run financial planning with day to day operations;
- Provides the Council, community and management a framework for measuring the fiscal impact of government services against established fiscal parameters and guidelines.

To these ends, the following fiscal policy statements are presented.

DEBT POLICIES

General

1. The Town will confine long-term borrowing to capital improvements or projects that cannot be financed from current revenues except where approved justification is provided.
2. The Town will utilize a balanced approach to capital funding utilizing debt financing, draws on capital reserves and/or fund balances in excess of policy targets, and current-year pay-as-you-go appropriations.
3. When the Town finances capital improvements or other projects by issuing bonds or entering into capital leases, it will repay the debt within a period not to exceed the expected useful life of the project. Target debt ratios will be annually calculated and included in the review of financial trends.
4. Where feasible, the Town will explore the usage of special assessment, revenue, or other self-supporting bonds instead of general obligation bonds.
5. Where feasible, the Town will limit the amount of debt issued each calendar year to remain Bank Qualified eligible per Internal Revenue Service (IRS) guidelines (currently \$10,000,000).

Tax Supported Debt

1. Net Debt as a percentage of total assessed value of taxable property should not exceed 1.5%. Net Debt is defined as any and all debt that is tax supported.
2. The ratio of debt service expenditures as a percent of total governmental fund expenditures should not exceed 15% with an aggregate ten-year principal payout ratio target of 65% or better.

FUND BALANCE RESERVE POLICIES

1. Unassigned Fund Balances will mean funds that remain available for appropriation by the Council after all commitments for future expenditures, required reserves defined by State statutes, and previous designations have been calculated. The Town will define these remaining amounts as “available fund balances.”
2. The Town will strive to maintain a targeted Unassigned Fund Balance, as defined by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board, at the close of each fiscal year equal to 22% of General Fund Expenditures. Unassigned Fund Balance in excess of 22% of General Fund Expenditures may be appropriated from time to time for pay-as-you-go capital and other one-time uses.
3. In the event that funds are available over and beyond the targeted amount, those funds may be transferred to the Capital Reserve Fund at the Council discretion.
4. The Town Council may, from time-to-time, utilize fund balances that will reduce Unassigned Fund Balance below the 22% target for the purposes of a declared fiscal emergency or other such purpose as to protect or enhance the long-term fiscal security of the Town. In such circumstances, the Council will adopt a plan to restore the Unassigned Fund Balance to the target level within 24 months. If restoration cannot be accomplished within such time period without severe hardship to the Town, then the Council will establish a different but appropriate time period.

CASH MANAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT POLICIES & STRATEGIES

1. It is the intent of the Town that public funds will be invested to the extent possible to reduce the need for property tax revenues. Funds will be invested with the chief objectives of safety of principal, liquidity, and yield, in that order. All deposits and investments of Town funds will be in accordance with N.C.G.S. 159.
2. The Town will use a Central Depository to maximize the availability and mobility of cash for all funds that can be legally and practically combined.
3. Cash Flows will be forecasted and investments will be made to mature when funds are projected to be needed to meet cash flow requirements.
4. Liquidity: No less than 20% of funds available for investment will be maintained in liquid investments at any point in time.
5. Maturity: All investments will mature in no more than 36 months from their purchase date.
6. Custody: All investments will be purchased “payment versus delivery” and if certificated will be held by the Finance Officer in the name of the Town. All non-certificated investment will be held in book-entry form in the name of the Town with the Town’s third party Custodian (Safekeeping Agent).
7. Authorized Investments: The Town may deposit Town funds into: Any Council approved Official Depository, if such funds are secured in accordance with N.C.G.S. 159-31. The Town may invest Town funds in: the North Carolina Capital Management Trust, U.S. Treasuries, U.S. Agency Securities specifically authorized in G.S. 159 and rated no lower than “AAA”, and Commercial Paper meeting the requirements of N.C.G.S. 159 plus having a national bond rating.
8. Diversification: No more than 5% of the Town’s investment funds may be invested in a specific company’s commercial paper and no more than 20% of the Town’s investment funds may be invested in commercial paper. No more than 25% of the Town’s investments may be invested in any one U.S. Agency’s Securities.
9. Allocation: Investment income will be allocated to each participating fund or account based on a fair and equitable formula determined by the Finance Director.

OTHER POST-EMPLOYMENT BENEFIT PRE-FUNDING POLICIES & STRATEGIES

1. By ordinance of the Town Council, the Town administers the Healthcare Benefits Plan (HCB Plan), a single-employer defined benefit plan that is used to provide postemployment benefits for all retirees of the Town who were hired before July 1, 2010, participate in the North Carolina Local Government Employees' Retirement System, and have at least five years of creditable service with the Town.
2. Retirees who qualify for coverage receive the same benefits as active employees, wherein the Town pays all or a portion of the costs of coverage for the benefits based on years of service.
3. Actuarial Valuation: The total other post-employment benefit (OPEB) liability is determined by an actuary on an annual basis. The actuary bases this calculation on several actuarial assumptions: inflation rate, salary increases, investment rate of return and healthcare cost trend rates.
4. Pay-Go Contributions: The Town is required to pay annually the projected pay-as-you-go financing requirements for the retiree healthcare benefits.
5. Pre-Funding Contributions: The Town may contribute an additional amount to prefund benefits contributed to the trust annually as determined by the Council.
6. Benefits of Pre-Funding: Multiple outside entities use the actuary information that resides in the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report to assess the creditworthiness and financial soundness of the Town. The amount of pay-go and pre-funding contributions helps reduce the total OPEB liability.
7. The Town will contribute annually to the OPEB trust to help fund the Annually Required Contribution and work towards reducing the overall OPEB liability. In the event that funds are available over the General Fund 22% targeted fund balance amount, the Council may choose to contribute a portion of this amount to the OPEB trust.