

## FINANCIAL RESERVES

### PURPOSE

To help the Town stabilize finances and maintain operations during difficult economic periods, this policy establishes prudent practices for appropriating to and expending reserve funds. With well-planned sustainability, West Newbury can use its reserves to finance emergencies and other unforeseen needs, to hold money for specific future purposes, or in limited instances, to serve as revenue sources for the annual budget. Reserve balances and policies can also positively impact the Town's credit rating and consequently its long-term cost to fund major projects.

### APPLICABILITY

This policy pertains to short- and long-range budget decision making duties of the Board of Selectmen, Town Manager, Finance Committee, and Water Commission. It also applies to the related job duties of the Town Accountant and Board of Assessors.

### POLICY

The Town is committed to building and maintaining its reserves so as to have budgetary flexibility for unexpected events and significant disruptions in revenue-expenditure patterns and to provide a source of available funds for future capital expenditures. The Town will strive to maintain overall general fund reserves in the level of [10 to 15] percent of the annual operating budget. Adherence to this policy will help the Town withstand periods of decreased revenues and control spending during periods of increased revenues. There are multiple types of reserves, including free cash, stabilization funds, retained earnings, and overlay surplus.

#### A. Free Cash

The Division of Local Services (DLS) defines free cash as "the remaining, unrestricted funds from operations of the previous fiscal year, including unexpended free cash from the previous year." DLS must certify free cash before the Town can appropriate it.

To generate free cash, the Town Manager will propose budgets with conservative revenue projections, and department heads will carefully manage their appropriations to produce excess income and budget turn backs. As much as practicable, the Town will limit free cash appropriations to the spring annual and special town meetings for the purpose of funding one-time expenditures (such as capital projects, snow and ice deficits, or emergencies).

The Town shall set a goal of maintaining its year-end unappropriated free cash balance in the range of five percent of the annual general fund budget. The Town will appropriate any excess above this target range to build reserves or offset unfunded liabilities.

#### B. Stabilization Funds

A stabilization fund is a reserve account allowed by state law to set aside monies to be available for future spending purposes, including emergencies or capital expenditures, although it may be appropriated for any lawful purpose. The Town has established five stabilizations as detailed below. All of them are accounted for and reported as trust funds, regardless of authorized use.

**General Stabilization:** The Town will endeavor to maintain a minimum balance of five percent of the current general fund operating budget in its general stabilization fund. Withdrawals from general stabilization should only be used to mitigate emergencies or other unanticipated events that cannot be supported by current general fund appropriations. When possible, any withdrawal of funds should be limited to the amount available above the five percent minimum reserve target level. If any necessary withdrawal drives the balance below the minimum level, the withdrawal should be limited to one-third of the general stabilization fund balance. Further, the Town Manager and Town Accountant will develop a detailed plan to replenish the fund to the minimum level within the next two fiscal years.

**Special Purpose Stabilization Funds:** The Town currently has [four] special purpose stabilization funds. Three are detailed below and the fourth in the next section, C. Retained Earnings.

Capital Improvement Stabilization Fund: The Town will appropriate annually to this fund so that over time it achieves a target balance sufficient to cover the Town's cash outlay for capital. The fund's target balance should be 15 percent – or 100% funding of the CIP based on a rolling five-year average – of the Town's annual operating budget.

School Building Stabilization Fund: At a minimum, the Town will annually appropriate the amount of the current year's retired debt to this fund until such time that the target balance is sufficient to cover capital cash outlays for the school building and mitigate future debt service.

Retirement Stabilization Fund: The Town should annually appropriate or transfer from available funds a target of 10 percent of the annual Essex Regional Retirement System pension assessment to this fund to offset future pension liabilities.

### C. Retained Earnings

The Water Department's finances are managed under an enterprise fund, separately from the general fund, which allows the Town to effectively identify the utility's true delivery costs—direct, indirect, and capital—and set user fees at a level sufficient to recover them. Under this accounting, the Town may reserve the water operation's generated surplus (referred to as retained earnings) rather than closing the amount to the general fund at year-end.

For the water enterprise fund, the Town will maintain a minimum reserve amount of [20] percent of the operation's total budget to be used for rate stabilization. Retained earnings in excess of the [20] percent target will be reserved in the water stabilization fund to prepare for capital and major infrastructure improvements. To maintain the target reserve level for the enterprise fund requires the Water Commissioners to periodically review, and when necessary, adjust user rates.

Note: If Town Meeting ever votes to change the purpose of the water stabilization fund or to revoke it, any fund balance acquired through water enterprise revenues must be retained in the enterprise fund.

#### D. Overlay Surplus

The overlay is a reserve the Town uses to offset uncollected property taxes and other unrealized revenue resulting from property tax abatements and exemptions.

Prior to the conclusion of each fiscal year, the Board of Assessors will submit to the Town Manager and Town Accountant an update of the overlay reserve with data that includes, but is not limited to, the gross balance, potential abatement liabilities, and any transfers to surplus. If the balance exceeds the amount of potential liabilities, the Board of Selectmen may request the Board of Assessors vote to declare those balances surplus and available for use in the Town's capital improvement plan or any other one-time expense.

#### **REFERENCES**

[M.G.L. c. 40, § 5B](#)

[M.G.L. c. 59, § 25](#)

[M.G.L. c. 44, § 53F½](#)

West Newbury Capital Planning policy

DLS Best Practices: [Free Cash](#) and [Special Purpose Stabilization Funds](#)

DLS Departmental Procedure Manual: [Enterprise Funds](#)

DLS Informational Guideline Releases 17-20: [Stabilization Funds](#) and 17-23: [Overlay and Overlay Surplus](#)

Government Finance Officers Association Best Practices: [Fund Balance Guidelines for the General Fund](#) and [Working Capital Targets for Enterprise Funds](#)

#### **EFFECTIVE DATE**

This policy was adopted on December 3, 2018.