

General Fund Balance Policy

Updated for GASB54 Fund Balance Reporting and Governmental Type Definitions

POLICY STATEMENT

A positive fund balance serves three important functions:

1. Eliminates the need for short term borrowing to handle cash flow between the start of the fiscal year and receipt of revenue from taxes;
2. Can be periodically used to lower taxes to smooth out major fluctuations in the property tax rates;
3. Serves as a contingency fund that enables the Town to respond to unanticipated emergencies or opportunities.

Credit rating agencies determine the adequacy of the unreserved fund balance using a complex series of financial evaluations. The size of the fund balance is an important, but not the only consideration in the Town's rating. Other important factors are the reliability of a government's revenue sources, economic conditions, community wealth factors, cash position, debt ratios, management performance, and fiscal decisions made by the legislative body.

A town's ability to accurately plan and develop sufficient fund balance is a common characteristic of highly rated municipalities.

This policy is intended to provide for a fund balance which satisfies the cash flow and contingency needs of the community, supports our positive bond rating with the rating agencies, and at the same time avoid over taxing the citizens through an excessively large fund balance.

GOVERNMENTAL FUND TYPE DEFINITIONS

- **General Fund** – all funds not reported in another fund
- **Special Revenue Funds** – Used to account for and report the proceeds of specific revenue sources that are restricted or committed to expenditures for specific purposes other than debt and capital projects. Restricted or committed revenues are the foundation for a special revenue fund.
- **Capital Project Funds** – Used to account for and report financial resources that are restricted, committed or assigned to expenditures for capital outlays, including the acquisition or construction of capital facilities and other capital assets.
- **Debt Service Funds** – Used to account for and report financial resources that are restricted, committed or assigned to expenditures for principal and interest, including resources being accumulated for principal and interest maturing in future years.
- **Permanent Funds** – Used to account for and report resources that are restricted to the extent that only earnings, and not principal, may be used for purposes that support the reporting government's programs – that is for the benefit of the government or its citizenry. Permanent funds do NOT include private purpose trust funds.

FUND BALANCE DEFINITIONS

- **Fund Balance** is the difference between the Town's current assets (cash, short-term investments, receivables) expected to be available to finance operations in the immediate future and its current liabilities.
- Fund balance is initially characterized as being restricted and unrestricted.

Unrestricted Fund Balance Categories

- **Unassigned fund balance** – Amounts that are available for any purpose as defined in this policy; these amounts are reported only in the general fund. In other governmental funds, if expenditures incurred exceeded the amounts restricted, committed or assigned it may be necessary to report a negative unassigned fund balance.

When an expenditure is incurred for purposes for which committed, assigned, or unassigned amounts are available, the Town considers the fund balance to be spent in the following order: committed, assigned, and then unassigned.

Unrestricted Fund Balance is the Total Fund Balance minus the Nonspendable minus the Restricted

Restricted Fund Balance Categories are amounts constrained to specific purposes by their providers (such as grantors, bondholders, and higher levels of government), through constitutional provisions, or by enabling legislation

- **Committed fund balance**– Amounts constrained to specific purposes by the Town itself, using its highest level of decision-making authority; to be reported as committed, amounts cannot be used for any other purposes unless the government takes the same highest-level action to remove or change the constraint.

The decision making authority for purposes of this policy is the Board of Finance.

- **Assigned fund balance**– Amounts the Town intends to use for a specific purpose; intent can be expressed by the Town or by an official or body to which the Town delegates the authority. Appropriations of existing fund balances to future budgets are considered assigned fund balance. The Town shall not report an assignment that will result in deficit in Unassigned fund balance. Negative fund balances cannot be considered assigned.

The body authorized to assign amounts to a specific purpose for purposes of this policy is the Board of Finance.

When an expenditure is incurred for purposes for which both restricted and unrestricted fund balances are available, the Town considers the restricted fund balance amount to have been spent first until exhausted and then any available unrestricted fund balance.

- **Nonspendable fund balance**– Amounts that cannot be spent because they are (a) not in spendable form (such as inventory, prepaid items, long term portions of notes receivables), or (b) legally or contractually required to be maintained intact (such as the corpus of an endowment fund).

GUIDELINES

The Board of Finance shall propose annual budgets that provide for an unrestricted (unassigned) general fund balance of not less than eight (8) percent nor more than twelve (12) percent of the total operating general fund expenditures.

In the event the unassigned fund balance is greater than twelve (12) percent at the end of any fiscal year, the excess may only be used in one or a combination of the following ways:

1. Transfer such excess to the Debt Service Fund for future debt payments.
2. Transfer such excess to the Capital or Nonrecurring Fund for future capital projects.
3. Use directly to reduce the tax rate in the subsequent year provided that care is taken to avoid a major fluctuation in the tax rate in succeeding years.

As a general rule, unrestricted (unassigned) fund balance in the general fund should represent no less than one month of operating revenues or operating expenditures (whichever is less volatile).

The following circumstances may justify a significantly higher minimum target levels:

- Significant volatility in operating revenues or operating expenditures;
- Potential drain on resources from other funds facing financial difficulties;
- Exposure to natural disasters (e.g. hurricanes);
- Reliance on a single corporate taxpayer or upon a group of corporate taxpayers in the same industry;
- Rapidly growing budgets; or
- Disparities in timing between revenue collections and expenditures.

Annually, the Board of Finance shall monitor and modify the minimum fund balance requirements based on the aforementioned criteria.

The use of unrestricted (unassigned) fund balance will be allowed under the following circumstances:

- Operating emergencies
- Unanticipated budgetary shortfalls

If at the end of a fiscal year, the unrestricted fund balance falls below eight (8) percent the Board of Finance shall prepare and submit a plan for expenditure reductions and or revenue increases. The Board of Finance shall take action necessary to restore the unrestricted fund balance to acceptable levels determined by this policy.

Note: The unrestricted fund balance is now at 7.12% and does not meet the 8% required by the proposed policy. This policy language requires the BoF to develop a plan of action to bring the fund to the required minimum level. This plan could call for meeting the minimum standard within a period of time, say 5 years or so.

This policy is subject to review on a bi-annual basis, on or before the anniversary date of its final approvals. The Board of Finance is responsible to lead the review process and shall collaborate with the Legislative Council and the Board of Selectmen in that action.