



FINANCIAL POLICIES

This document is excerpted from the City of Sarasota's Adopted Financial Plan Introductory Section, and is part of the annual document that is adopted by the City Commission prior to October 1 of every year.

Operating Budget Policies

- The City will comply with all Federal, State or local legal requirements pertaining to the operating budget, including the adoption of a balanced budget. A balanced budget is achieved when the amounts available from taxation and other sources, including amounts carried over from prior fiscal years, equals the total appropriations for expenditures and reserves.
- The City will employ a structured budget preparation and formulation process that will be used by all entities receiving funding from the City. The process employed will ensure adequate citizen input and participation.
- The City will employ a structured expenditure and revenue forecasting system to allow for effective financial planning. Multi-year projections will be utilized in developing the operating budget.
- Essential services will receive first priority for funding. The City will attempt to maintain current service levels for all essential services.
- The City will identify low priority services for reduction or elimination, if necessary, before essential services.
- The City will consider the establishment of user fees as an alternative to service reductions or elimination.
- In all actions to balance the budget, the City will attempt to avoid layoffs of permanent employees. If possible, personnel reductions will be scheduled to come primarily from attrition.
- The City will pay for all current expenditures with current revenues. Long-term debt will not be used for funding current expenditures.
- The City will avoid budgetary procedures that balance current expenditures at the expense of meeting future years' expenses, such as postponing necessary expenditures, accruing future years' revenues or rolling over short-term debt.
- The budget will provide for adequate maintenance and repair of capital plant and equipment and for their orderly replacement.

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- The City will establish an equipment replacement fund and will charge the user fund annually for replacement of the equipment. The amount of the charge will provide funds for the projected future cost of replacing the equipment.
- The budget will provide sufficient funding to cover annual debt retirement costs.
- The City will consider technological and capital investment programs which are cost effective and which will reduce operating costs as high funding priorities.
- The City will maintain a budgetary control system to ensure adherence to the budget and will use a budget/encumbrance control system to ensure proper budgetary control.
- The City administration will prepare regular reports comparing actual revenues and expenditures to budgeted amounts.
- Where possible, the City will integrate service levels and performance measures within the budget.
- At least annually a public auction will be held of surplus and obsolete property.
- The goal of all enterprise fund operations is to be self-supporting and to pay administrative and other appropriate service charges to the General Fund for administrative support.
- The total number of employment positions (FTE's) approved in the annual operating budget may not be exceeded without prior approval of the City Commission.
- The City will coordinate the CIP budget and the operating budget in terms of operating costs associated with CIP items.
- The City will annually seek the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award offered by the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA).

Fund Balance and Reserve Policies

- The City will establish an unassigned fund balance in the General Fund for emergency purposes and/or liquidity purposes of 2 to 3 months of general fund expenditures to indicate that it is in sound financial condition.
- A revenue stabilization fund will be established to minimize the impact of varying economic conditions on the City's budget.
- The City will establish insurance reserves for self-insurance liabilities. Such reserves will be reviewed annually for adequacy.
- Unassigned fund balance will only be used for expenditures that are either non-recurring in nature or that have a benefit period longer than one operating period. City Commission approval is necessary for this type of expenditure.
- All fund balances for budgeted funds will be presented in the annual budget.

Revenue Policies

- The City will take active measures to encourage economic development, thereby developing a diversified and stable revenue system to shelter it from short-run fluctuations in any one revenue source.
- The City will establish user charges and fees at a level closely related to the full cost of providing the services (i.e. direct, indirect and capital costs), taking into consideration similar charges/fees being levied by other organizations.
- The City will recalculate the full cost of activities supported by user fees to identify the impact of inflation and other cost increases, and will revise user fees upon approval of the Commission.
- The targeting of specific revenues for special programs or projects is discouraged, as it promotes fiscal inflexibility. However, intergovernmental grant assistance will be targeted as much as possible toward capital improvements.
- The City will aggressively seek Federal and State grants, and evaluate future local fiscal impacts.

Debt Policies

- The City will issue bonds only for capital improvements including infrastructure and equipment with a life in excess of four years.
- Whenever possible, the City will use special assessment, revenue, or self-supporting bonds instead of general obligation bonds.
- The City will limit general obligation bonds to no greater than ten (10) percent of the non-exempt assessed valuation of the real property of the City.
- The term of any bonds shall not exceed the useful life of the expenditure being financed.
- The City will not issue notes or bonds to subsidize or finance current operations.
- The City will publish and distribute an official statement for each bond issue.
- If cost effective, the City will purchase private bond insurance at the time of issuance.
- General obligation debt will not be used to finance the activities of enterprise funds whether of a capital or operating nature.
- The City will defease existing bond issues if the resulting savings is significant.
- The City will maintain an adequate debt service fund regarding each bond issue.
- The City will seek to maintain high bond ratings in order that borrowing costs are minimized and access to credit is preserved.

Cash Management / Investment Policies

- The City will deposit all cash receipts within twenty-four hours of receipt.
- The City will collect revenues aggressively, including past due bills of any type and will utilize an outside collection agency to accomplish this.
- The City will maintain a prudent cash management and investment program in order to meet daily cash requirements, increase funds available for investment, and earn maximum rates of return on invested funds commensurate with appropriate security.
- The City will follow its adopted investment/portfolio policy when handling public funds.
- The Financial Administration Department/ Investment Manager will present a quarterly report on investments to the City's Investment Committee.
- Where permitted by law, the City will pool cash from each eligible fund for investment purposes.

Accounting, Auditing & Financial Reporting Policies

- An independent audit will be performed annually, including the issuance of a management letter.
- The City administration will promptly evaluate the audit management letter recommendations, determine the proper actions in response to these recommendations and complete, within established time frames, all actions that correct or otherwise resolve the matters included in the management letter.
- The City will produce financial reports in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP).
- The City Commission will be provided monthly with budget reports comparing actual versus budgeted revenue and expense activity.
- The City will annually seek the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting award offered by the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA).
- The City will maintain the highest level of accounting practices consistent with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) promulgated by the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB).

Capital Improvement Plan Policies

- The City will adopt the first year of a multi-year plan for capital improvements, update it annually and make every attempt to complete all capital improvements in accordance with the plan.
- The City will coordinate the development of the CIP budget with the development of the operating budget to ensure future operating expenditures and revenues associated with new capital improvement will be projected and incorporated into the current and future operating budgets.

Capital Improvement Plan Policies cont.

- The City will determine the least costly financing method available for all new capital improvement projects.
- All projects in the Comprehensive Improvement Element (CIE) of the City's Comprehensive Plan will be included in the Capital Improvement Plan.
- The Capital Improvement Plan Committee will review and evaluate each proposed and ongoing project, based on criteria established by the City Commission, prior to any project being included in the CIP.
- The City will maintain its physical assets at a level adequate to protect the City's capital investment and minimize future maintenance and replacement costs.