

Town of Falmouth

Fiscal Policy

Board of Selectmen Voted to Approve

September 12, 2016

I. Introduction

The Town of Falmouth recognizes the challenges involved with managing and operating a first-class, full service municipality within the confines of the legally restricted revenue raising authority provided to cities and towns in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. With growing expenditure pressure for labor costs, fringe benefits, insurance and infrastructure maintenance a systematic and concerted effort is required for all financial decisions in order to be successful in providing sustainable service levels under the restrictions created by proposition 2 ½. The Town of Falmouth has recognized these challenges and over the long term understands that consistent short and long term financial planning, conservative budgeting techniques, and professional management can result in high quality service levels that contribute strongly to the quality of life in our community while maintaining affordable property taxes.

These financial policies serve to memorialize the critical financial considerations that govern financial decision making at the local level; and contribute to stabilizing our tax levy, controlling expenditures and protecting sufficient levels of fund balances to guarantee internal financial stability regardless of economic uncertainty.

II. Goals

- a. Support Business and Community Development to sustain a vibrant local economy
- b. Promote Long Term Financial Stability of Town Operations through sound financial planning and practices
- c. Sustain and improve the Town's high AA+ bond rating
- d. Minimize financial risk
- e. Submit and maintain a Comprehensive Annual Financial Report

III. Revenue Policy

- a. On or before the first day of October each year, the Town Manager shall request and receive from all financial officers the estimated revenues for the next fiscal year (Charter sec. 8-3a).
- b. Finance officials will consult with state officials to get a timely report on state receipts in order to estimate local aid for the next fiscal year.
- c. Revenue forecasts for local receipts and state aid shall be conservative and revenue deficits will be avoided at all costs.
- d. Annually, fees will be re-examined and possible new revenue sources will be recommended for adoption by the Board of Selectmen in order to maximize revenue potential.
- e. Town officials will explore new grant opportunities and scrutinize such opportunities in order to maximize their potential. Future costs will be examined and a

recommendation made if the grant will be financially feasible and in the best interest of Town services.

- f. Town officials will review a comparison of estimated revenues against actuals in order to determine if adjustments need to be made.
- g. Actual revenues will be monitored monthly to determine if they are on pace with forecasts or if Management needs to act on any shortfall.
- h. User charges and fees will be set to recover not more than 100% of the total direct and indirect costs associated with their respective programs.

IV. Operating budget policy

- a. On or before the first day of November of each year, the Board of Selectmen, after consulting with the Town Manager, shall issue a policy statement relating to the budget for the next fiscal year. The statement shall establish the outer limits of possible budget growth for the Town (Charter sec. 8-3c).
 - i. The operating budget shall be submitted using conservative revenue projections to sufficiently cover projected appropriations.
 - ii. The Town will avoid relying on one-time revenues to fund on-going operations.
- b. All department heads and multimember bodies shall submit budget requests to the Finance Director on or prior to the first day of December each year taking into consideration the Board of Selectmen's budget policy and Town Manager's directives. The budget request submitted by the School Committee shall be submitted in sufficient time, and in sufficient detail, to enable the Town Manager to assess the probable impact of the School Department's budget upon the local town budget (Charter sec. 8-3D).
- c. On or prior to the first day of January of each year, the Town Manager shall submit to the Board of Selectmen a comprehensive budget for all town functions for the ensuing fiscal year and an accompanying budget message (Charter sec. 8-3e).
- d. The budget message shall explain the budget both in fiscal terms and in terms of what specific projects are contemplated in the year ahead.
 - i. Outline the proposed financial policies of the Town for the ensuing fiscal year.
 - ii. Describe the important features of the budget.
 - iii. Indicate any major changes from the current year in financial policies, revenues and expenditures, together with reasons for such changes.
 - iv. Summarize the Town's debt position
 - v. Include such other material as the Town Manager may deem appropriate. (Charter sec. 8-3f)
- e. The budget shall indicate proposed expenditures for current operations during the ensuing fiscal year, detailed by departments, offices, multimember bodies and specific purposes.
- f. The Board of Selectmen shall within 15 days of January 1st adopt the budget with or without recommendations, and submit it to the Finance committee on or before the 16th day of January of each year. The Board of Selectmen shall also transmit the budget request of the School Committee to the Finance committee (Charter sec. 8-4a).

V. Appropriation/Expenditure policy

- a. Appropriations are approved through Town Meeting in April and November.
- b. Budgeted appropriations will be monitored against expenses weekly by the accounting office and monthly by department heads to ensure such expenditures do not exceed the authorized budget.

- c. Expenses will be monitored to ensure proper procurement procedures have been met and an approved contract is on file.
- d. Invoices will be submitted in a timely fashion and authorized by the appropriate signatory authority
- e. Capital Project appropriations will be closed at the end of the fiscal year if there has been no activity in the past three years and if the project has been completed.

VI. Reserve Fund Balance Policy

Maintaining adequate reserves presents a strong picture of financial performance which increases the confidence of investors, credit rating agencies and the banking industry which potentially contributes to a higher bond rating and access to capital..

- a. The Town shall provide a reserve fund appropriation within each annual budget to be managed by the Finance Committee and the amount will not be less than \$325,000
- b. At a minimum, the Town shall strive to maintain a range of 5-15% of operating budget expenditures in the undesignated fund balance and general stabilization fund.
- c. The Town will strive to maintain a range of 15-25% of operating budget expenditures categorized as unassigned fund balance to include but not limited to:
 - i. Undesignated fund balance
 - ii. General Stabilization Account
 - iii. Capital stabilization account
 - iv. Water Stabilization Account
 - v. Special Education Stabilization Account
- d. The Town will not rely on reserves to sustain operating deficits or operations. The use of such reserves will be limited to assisting the Town with short term or unanticipated, emerging financial stress.

VII. Capital Improvement and Stabilization Fund Policy

Capital planning and budgeting is central to economic development, transportation, communication, delivery of essential services, environmental management and maintaining the quality of life of our citizens. Much of what is accomplished by local government depends on a sound long-term investment in infrastructure and equipment. In that regard, the Town recognizes conditions that necessitate capital intervention and include:

- *Imminent threat to the health and safety of citizens/property*
- *Preservation of operations*
- *Legal requirement of Federal or State agencies*
- *Improvement of infrastructure*
- *Improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery*

The Town endeavors to conduct the following to satisfy these objectives:

- a. The Town Manager shall prepare a five-year capital improvement plan which shall include a clear summary of its contents; a list of capital improvements proposed to be undertaken during the next five (5) fiscal years, together with supporting data; cost estimates, methods of financing and recommended time schedules; and the estimated annual cost of operating and maintaining the facilities or equipment to be constructed or acquired. (Charter sec. 8-6a) Recognizing the strong need to plan and prioritize capital spending in order to maintain the fiscal stability of the Town, it shall be the policy

of the Town that all proposed capital improvements recommended for funding shall have been included in the Capital Improvement Program. Except for emergency situations, any such requests or Town Meeting articles submitted for capital expenditures that have not been submitted through the Capital Improvement Programming process should be referred at the appropriate time of year to the Town Manager for consideration; all projects must be submitted in a timely manner in the capital request form, including justifying backup information, as may be required by the Town Manager as instructions for submitting projects.

- b. Funding for the capital plan will be in accordance with the recommendations from the Capital Improvement Task Force, appointed by the Board of Selectmen to review the Town's Capital improvement Policies follows:
 - i. \$25,000-\$1,000,000 - available funds
 - ii. Greater than \$1,000,000 - borrowing, capital exclusion or available funds
- c. The Finance Committee (the Committee) shall publish, in one (1) or more newspapers of general circulation in the Town, the general summary of the capital improvements plan and a notice stating:
 - i. The time and places where copies of the capital improvements plan are available for inspection
The date, time and place, not less than (7) days following such publication, when the Committee shall conduct a public hearing on said plan. The public hearing should be conducted at least thirty (30) days prior to Town Meeting at which the capital budget is acted upon (Charter sec. 8-7a,b).
- d. Capital Stabilization Fund-The Capital Stabilization Fund was created to address the Town's aging infrastructure needs and to dedicate a revenue source to address those needs.
- e. At a minimum, the Town will continue to dedicate 75% of the meals tax revenue to the Capital Stabilization Fund. The Town will maintain a balance of 2-5% of the operating budget in the fund.
- f. The Capital Stabilization Fund will also be used as a funding source for the Town's capital improvement plan.
- g. The capital stabilization fund may be used in lieu of borrowing to minimize the Town's borrowing and interest costs..

VIII. Debt Policy

Debt is an effective way to finance capital improvements. Properly managed debt helps to preserve the Town's credit rating and is an effective approach to managing the Town's long term capital assets that maintain or improve its quality of life.

- a. Long term debt and debt exclusions will be issued for purposes authorized by M.G.L. Chapter 44 sections 7 and 8.
- b. Excluded debt and debt exclusions will be issued in a manner that stabilizes the tax levy over a number of years. The Finance Director will maintain a financing plan that calculates the current and future debt capacity.
- c. The Town will attempt to vote all significant debt ballot questions (over \$1,000,000) exempt from the limits of proposition of 2 ½.
- d. General fund debt service, exclusive of debt funded from dedicated revenue sources, shall not exceed 5% of expenditures.

- e. The Town will continually pursue opportunities to acquire capital by means other than conventional borrowing; such as grants, and low-or-zero interest loans from State or Federal agencies.
- f. The Town will maintain good communications with bond rating agencies, the Town's financial advisor and bond counsel and work closely with them to ensure that all legal requirements are met and that the lowest possible interest rate can be obtained. This includes preparation of the Official Statement.