

City of El Cerrito  
Comprehensive Financial Policy

Approved December 6, 2016  
Resolution: - 2016-XX

**PURPOSE:**

To establish a comprehensive set of financial policies for the City that will serve as a guideline for operational and strategic decision making related to financial matters.

**POLICY:**

The following financial policies are intended to establish a comprehensive set of guidelines for use by the City Council and staff on decision-making that has a fiscal impact. The goal is to maintain the City's financial stability in order to be able to continually adapt to local, regional and national economic changes. Such policies will allow the City to maintain and enhance a sound fiscal condition.

This financial policy will be reviewed annually by the Financial Advisory Board and any proposed substantive revisions will be submitted to the City Council for approval. The City's comprehensive financial policies will be utilized when preparing the Annual Operating Budget and shall be in conformance with all state and federal laws, generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) and standards of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) and the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA).

**1. OVERVIEW & LONG-TERM FINANCIAL PLANNING**

- 1.1. A Five-Year Year Financial Plan will be prepared at a minimum for the General Fund, and Integrated Waste Management Funds. The City's Five-Year Financial Plan is the long-term picture of the City's finances and will be updated annually as part of the annual budget process.
- 1.2. The City shall seek a balance in the overall revenue structure between more stable revenue sources (e.g. Property Tax and Utility Taxes) and economically sensitive revenue sources (e.g., Sales Tax).
- 1.3. The City shall develop and maintain methods for the evaluation of future development and major fiscal impacts on the City budget.

- 1.4. The City shall develop and implement a financial plan to address its funding needs for issues like deferred maintenance and unfunded liabilities.
- 1.5. The City shall address issues related to cash flow requirements and any short term borrowing requirements on a timely basis.
- 1.6. The City shall require any annexation agreements to have a long-term beneficial financial impact on the City.

**2. BUDGET POLICIES**

- 2.1. The City Manager shall prepare a proposed annual budget to be reviewed by the Financial Advisory Board and presented to the City Council within all statutorily prescribed deadlines. The City Council will adopt the budget at a public hearing by June 30 of each year.
- 2.2. A Budget will be adopted by Resolution of the City Council annually, which will contain the budget amendment process, budget amendment authority, and spending authorities.

All departments are responsible for meeting the City's financial policy goals and ensuring the City's long-term financial health. Budget control is maintained at the fund level. The City Manager is authorized to transfer budgeted amounts within departments and within funds. In addition, amendments that are made to authorize spending of increased or new special purpose revenues may be approved by the City Manager. Budget modifications between funds or increases or decreases to a fund's overall budget must be approved by the City Council.

- 2.3. It is the City's policy to adopt a balanced General Fund budget where operating revenue is equal to, or exceeds, operating expenditures. In the event a balanced budget is not adopted, due to a deliberate reduction of

accumulated fund balance or if the cause of the imbalance is expected to last for no more than one year, as with the case of a one time settlement or large purchase, the planned use of reserves to balance the budget is permitted as long as the reserve is consistent with the amounts described in Section 3., General Fund Balance Reserve Policy.

- 2.4. The operating budget shall serve as the annual financial plan for the City. It shall serve as the City's management plan for implementing goals and objectives of the City Council, City Manager and departments and will define service levels.
- 2.5. During the annual budget development process, the existing budget shall be examined to assure removal or reduction of any services or programs that should be eliminated or reduced in cost.
- 2.6. The annual review process shall include an assessment to determine if funds are available to operate and maintain proposed capital facilities and other public improvements.
- 2.7. Any year-end operating surpluses will revert to unappropriated balances for use in maintaining reserve levels set by policy and will be available for capital projects and/or one-time expenditures upon approval of the City Council/.
- 2.8. Where practical, the City's annual budget will include performance measures of workload, efficiency, and effectiveness.
- 2.9. Revenues:
  - 2.9.1. The City will estimate annual revenues using an objective, analytical process; specific assumptions will be documented and maintained. Budgeted revenues will be estimated conservatively using accepted standards and estimates provided by the state, other governmental agencies, and/or reliable economic forecasters when available.
  - 2.9.2. Specific revenue sources will not be dedicated for specific purposes, unless required by law or Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). All non-tax increment, non-restricted revenues will be deposited in the General

Fund and appropriated through the budget process. On-going revenues will fund on-going expenditures.

2.9.3. A diversified and stable revenue system will be maintained to the extent possible to protect programs from short-term fluctuations in any single revenue source.

2.10. Appropriations:

2.10.1. The City shall, to the extent possible, pay for current year expenditures with current year revenues. Where authorized activities or equipment remain incomplete and/or unpurchased, revenues and/or fund balance may be carried forward at the City Manager's direction to the next fiscal year to support such an activity/purchase.

2.10.2. The City shall avoid budgetary procedures which rely on financial strategies that defer payment of current operating expenses to future years.

2.10.3. Department Heads are responsible for ensuring that department expenditures stay within the department's budgeted appropriation.

2.10.4. A City Council Resolution is necessary to increase any total fund appropriation where no corresponding revenue offset exists that is restricted for that purpose.

2.10.5. The City Manager may adjust appropriations among departments within a fund.

### 3. GENERAL FUND RESERVE POLICY

3.1. The purpose of the reserve policy is to set aside funds to insure against events that would adversely affect the financial condition of the City and jeopardize the continuation of necessary public services. The reserve is designed to provide adequate cash flow, protect bond ratings, and offset economic downturns and revenue shortfalls. The reserve is also available to provide for one-time funding in the event of an emergency situation such as a natural disaster or unanticipated liability.

3.2. It is a goal of the City to achieve a general fund annual operating reserve of 15%, with a minimum of 10%, of projected General Fund operating expenditures in each fiscal year. As part

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of the annual budget process, the City Council shall consider a Five-Year Plan that attempts to maintain the minimum reserve balance of 15%. The City Council may adopt a deficit budget to deal with the uses discussed in Section 3.5 so long as the projected reserve does not go below 10% in any year of the Five-Year Plan. Should the General Fund reserve fall below 10%, each budget year the City will adopt a plan to restore the reserve percentage to 10% within five years and 15% within 10 years.

- 3.3. It is a goal of the City to achieve and maintain a minimum cash balance equal to 15 days of authorized operating expenses in order to meet anticipated City obligations without reliance on borrowed funds. Should the cash balance fall below the minimum due to unanticipated circumstances, the minimum cash balance should be restored as soon as practical.
- 3.4. The portion of the reserve below 10% should be utilized only for a financial emergency (as determined by the City Council), natural disaster or significant unanticipated liability. If this portion of the reserve is utilized for such an event, the Ten-Year Plan presented with the Annual Operating Budget must be developed so that the 10% base threshold is replenished within five years.
- 3.5. The unreserved fund balance in an Internal Service Fund may be transferred to the General Fund only for a fiscal emergency or for one-time uses such as natural disasters or unforeseen liabilities.
- 3.6. The reserves between the 10% and 15% level are designed to be used by the City to deal with revenue fluctuations that arise as a result of changes in the economy and provide opportunities to maintain services and programs where funding may be difficult. Also, a portion of any operating reserve in excess of 10% of annual revenues resulting from the previous fiscal year's operations could be committed to capital improvement

projects or used to retire existing debt, fund future liabilities or potential legislative actions, establish or replenish equipment replacement funds, and/or establish or replenish deferred maintenance funds as long as the amount is considered in the adopted Ten-Year Plan to achieve a balance of 15% within ten years.

- 3.7. One-time revenues will not be used to fund ongoing City programs. Any one-time revenue receipt during the fiscal year should be recognized and recorded in a "non-recurring revenue source" category. One-time revenue windfalls include: sales of City-owned real estate, CalPERS rebates, lump sum (net present value) savings from debt restructuring, litigation settlement, unexpected revenues, and other similar sources of revenue as designated by the City Council.
- 3.8. The operating reserve should be itemized as cash or cash equivalents and be separately stated on the financial statements.

**4. FINANCIAL REPORTING POLICIES**

- 4.1. Accounting Standards:
  - 4.1.1. The City's accounting and financial reporting systems shall be maintained in conformance with all state and federal laws, generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) and standards of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) and the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA). The City will make every attempt to implement all changes to governmental accounting practices at the earliest practicable time.

Annual Audit:

- 4.1.2. An annual audit will be performed by an independent public accounting firm with an audit opinion to be included with the City's published Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR). The CAFR will be submitted annually to the Government Finance

Officers Association for peer review with the goal of continuing receipt of the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting.

4.1.3. The independent firm will be selected through a competitive bidding process at least once every five years. The contract may be for an initial period of three years with two additional one-year options at the City Council's discretion. The current firm may be allowed to participate in the bid process. The need for rotation of the audit staff or audit firm will be considered in the bid process. The Finance Director will review the qualifications of prospective firms and make a recommendation to the City Council. The audit contract will be awarded by the City Council.

## 5. OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES

5.1. The City shall endeavor to avoid committing to new spending for operating or capital improvement purposes until an analysis of all current and future cost implications relating to those programs and projects is completed.

5.2. All departments will participate in the responsibility of meeting policy goals and ensuring long-term financial health. Future service plans and program initiatives will be developed to reflect current policy directives, projected resources and future service requirements.

5.3. Departmental requests for increases in staffing will be thoroughly analyzed; only those that meet adopted program initiatives and policy directives will be considered. To the extent feasible, personnel cost reductions will be achieved through attrition.

5.4. User Fees and Charges and Development Impact Fees:

5.4.1. Where direct services to users can be measured, as set forth in the Master Fee Schedule, the City should use appropriate fees, charges or assessments rather than general tax funds. All user fees and charges will be examined or adjusted annually to determine the direct and indirect cost of service. User fees and charges for services shall be established at a level

related to the cost of providing such service except where the City Council has determined there is a public benefit to subsidize the service with tax based revenue. The acceptable recovery rate and any associated changes to user fees and charges will be approved by the City Council following public review.

5.4.2. The City may identify the costs associated with new development as a basis for establishing development impact fees but the long-term benefit of the development to the City should be considered in establishing such fees.

### 5.5. Grant Management:

5.5.1. The City shall actively pursue federal, state and other grant opportunities when deemed appropriate. Before accepting any grant, the City shall thoroughly consider the implications in terms of ongoing obligations that will be required in connection with acceptance of said grant and present that report for approval by the City Council.

5.5.2. The term of Grant funded positions for programs should be clearly identified and presented to the City Council for approval. It is mandatory to disclose if General Fund revenues will be needed to fund a position during or after the Grant or program expires.

5.5.3. Grant funding will be considered to leverage City funds. Inconsistent and/or fluctuating grants should not be used to fund ongoing programs. Programs financed with grant monies will be budgeted in separate cost centers, and the service program will be adjusted to reflect the level of available funding. In the event of reduced grant funding, City resources may be substituted only after all program priorities and alternatives are considered.

5.5.4. The cost of all externally mandated services for which funding is available shall be fully evaluated, including overhead, to allow for complete reimbursement of expenses.

### 5.6. Revenue Collection Policy:

5.6.1. The City will pursue revenue collection and auditing to assure that monies due the City are received in a timely manner.

5.6.2. The City will seek reimbursement from the appropriate agency for State and

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Federal mandated costs whenever possible.

5.6.3. The City will centralize accounts receivable/collection activities so that all receivables are handled consistently.

5.6.4. Accounts receivable management and diligent oversight of collections from all revenue sources are imperative. Sound financial management principles include the establishment of an allowance for doubtful accounts. Efforts shall be made to pursue the timely collection of delinquent accounts. When such accounts are deemed uncollectible, they will be written-off from the financial statements in accordance with established policies.

**6. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES**

6.1. Staff shall keep City Council apprised of financial opportunities available and shall develop appropriate recommendations.

6.2. All requests for City Council action shall include an analysis of the immediate and future fiscal impact of such action. No appropriation for new or expanded programs or staffing levels shall be approved without identifying the amount and source of available funds.

6.3. All externally mandated services for which funding is available shall be charged to allow for complete reimbursement of expenses including overhead.

6.4. Cash Management Investment:

6.4.1. Cash and investment programs will be maintained in accordance with California Government Code Section 53600 et seq. and the City's adopted investment policy and will ensure that proper controls and safeguards are maintained. Pursuant to the Investment Policy, the Financial Advisory Board, at least annually will review, and the City Council will affirm, a detailed investment policy.

6.4.2. Reports on the investment portfolio and cash position will be developed and presented to the Financial Advisory Board and the City Council in

conformity with the California Government Code.

6.4.3. Funds will be managed in a prudent and diligent manner with emphasis on safety of principal, liquidity, and yield, in that order.

6.4.4. The quarterly report shall include a statement in compliance with government code 53646.

**7. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT POLICIES**

7.1. A Ten-year Capital Improvement Plan will be developed and updated annually, including anticipated funding sources. Capital improvement projects are defined as infrastructure or equipment purchases or construction which result in a capitalized asset and have a useful (depreciable) life of two years or more.

7.2. Each Capital Improvement Project will identify, where applicable, current operating maintenance costs and funding streams available to repair and/or replace deteriorating infrastructure and to avoid significant unfunded liabilities.

7.3. The City will develop and implement a post-implementation evaluation of its infrastructures condition on a specified periodic basis, estimating the remaining useful life, and projecting replacement costs.

7.4. The City shall actively pursue outside funding sources for all Capital Improvement Projects. Outside funding sources, such as grants, shall be used to finance only those Capital Improvement Projects that are consistent with the Ten-year Capital Improvement Plan and/or local governmental priorities, and whose operating and maintenance costs will be included in future operating budget forecasts.

7.5. Capital improvement lifecycle costs will be coordinated with the development of the Operating Budget. Future operating, maintenance and replacement costs associated with new capital improvements will be forecasted, matched to available revenue sources,

and included in the Operating Budget. Capital project contract awards will include a fiscal impact statement disclosing the expected operating impact of the project and when such cost is expected to occur.

- 7.6. The City must carefully seek and analyze the appropriate type of financing instrument appropriate for financing capital projects. Several options may be available – general obligation debt, fee-supported debt, fund reserves, tax increment, etc. All debt financing mechanisms shall be carefully considered and analyzed for fiscal benefit and cost effectiveness. Long-term borrowing shall be restricted to projects too large to be financed from current revenues (pay-as-you-go). Where possible, special assessment, revenue or other self-supporting bonds shall be used in lieu of general obligation bonds.

## 8. DEBT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

New (Replaces Section 8 of the previous Comprehensive Financial Policies)

8.1 These Debt Management Policies are intended to comply with Government Code Section 8855(i), and shall govern all debt undertaken by the City. The City hereby recognizes that a fiscally prudent debt policy is required in order to:

- Maintain the City's sound financial position.
- Ensure the City has the flexibility to respond to changes in future service priorities, revenue levels, and operating expenses.
- Protect the City's credit-worthiness.
- Ensure that all debt is structured in order to protect both current and future taxpayers, ratepayers and constituents of the City.
- Ensure that the City's debt is consistent with the City's planning goals and objectives and capital improvement program or budget, as applicable.

8.2 Purposes for Which Debt May Be Issued

(i) Long-Term Debt. Long-term debt may be issued to finance the construction, acquisition, and rehabilitation of capital improvements and facilities, equipment and land to be owned and operated by the City.

(a) Long-term debt financings are appropriate when the following conditions exist:

- When the project to be financed is necessary to provide basic services.
- When the project to be financed will provide benefit to constituents over multiple years.
- When total debt does not constitute an unreasonable burden to the City and its taxpayers and ratepayers.
- When the debt is used to refinance outstanding debt in order to produce debt service savings or to realize the benefits of a debt restructuring.

(b) Long-term debt financings are not appropriate for current operating expenses and routine maintenance expenses.

(c) The City may use long-term debt financings subject to the following conditions:

- The project to be financed must be approved by the City Council.
- The weighted average maturity of the debt (or the portion of the debt allocated to the project) will not exceed the average useful life of the project.
- The City estimates that sufficient revenues will be available to service the debt through its maturity.
- The City determines that the issuance of the debt will comply with the applicable state and federal law.

(ii) Short-term debt. Short-term debt may be issued to provide financing for the City's operational cash flows in order to maintain a steady and even cash flow balance. Short-term debt may also be used to finance short-lived capital projects; for example, the City may undertake lease-purchase financing for equipment.

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(iii) Financings on Behalf of Other Entities. The City may also find it beneficial to issue debt on behalf of other governmental agencies or private third parties in order to further the public purposes of the City. In such cases, the City shall take reasonable steps to confirm the financial feasibility of the project to be financed and the financial solvency of any borrower and that the issuance of such debt is consistent with the policies set forth herein.

### 8.3 Types of Debt

The following types of debt are allowable under these Debt Management Policies:

- General obligation bonds
- Bond or grant anticipation notes
- Tax and revenue anticipation notes
- lease revenue bonds, certificates of participation and lease-purchase transactions
- Other revenue bonds (including sales tax revenue bonds) and certificates of participation
- Pension obligation bonds
- Land-secured financings, such as special tax revenue bonds issued under the Mello-Roos Community Facilities Act of 1982, as amended, and limited obligation bonds issued under applicable assessment statutes
- Tax increment financing to the extent permitted under state law
- Conduit financings, such as financings for affordable rental housing and qualified 501c3 organizations

The City may from time to time find that other forms of debt would be beneficial to further its public purposes and the City Council may approve such debt by amending these Debt Management Policies.

Debt shall be issued as fixed rate debt unless the City makes a specific determination as to why a variable rate issue would be beneficial to the City in a specific circumstance.

### 8.4 Relationship of Debt to Capital Improvement Program and Budget

New debt issues, and refinancing of existing debt, must be analyzed for compatibility within the City's Ten-Year Capital Improvement Plan. The City shall strive to fund the upkeep and maintenance of its infrastructure and facilities due to normal wear and tear through the expenditure of available operating revenues. The City shall seek to avoid the use of debt to fund infrastructure and facilities improvements that are the result of normal wear and tear. The City shall seek to issue debt in a timely manner to avoid having to make unplanned expenditures for capital improvements or equipment from its general fund.

### 8.5 Policy Goals Related to Planning Goals and Objectives

The City is committed to long-term financial planning, maintaining appropriate reserves levels and employing prudent practices in governance, management and budget administration. The City intends to issue debt for the purposes stated in these Debt Management Policies and to implement policy decisions incorporated in the City's Five-Year Financial Plan and its annual operating budget.

It is a policy goal of the City to protect taxpayers, ratepayers and constituents by utilizing conservative financing methods and techniques so as to obtain the highest practical credit ratings (if applicable) and the lowest practical borrowing costs.

The City will comply with applicable state and federal law as it pertains to the maximum term of debt and the procedures for levying and imposing any related taxes, assessments, rates and charges.

When refinancing debt, it shall be the policy goal of the City to realize, whenever possible, and subject to any overriding non-financial policy considerations, (i) minimum net present value debt service savings equal to or greater than 5% of the refunded principal amount, and (ii) present value debt service savings equal to or greater than 100% of any escrow fund negative arbitrage.

#### 8.6 Internal Control Procedures

When issuing debt, in addition to complying with the terms of these Debt Management Policies, the City shall comply with any other applicable policies regarding initial bond disclosure, continuing disclosure, post-issuance compliance, and investment of bond proceeds.

The City will periodically review the requirements of and will remain in compliance with the following:

- The City's Disclosure Policies and Procedures,
- Any federal tax compliance requirements, including without limitation arbitrage and rebate compliance, related to any prior bond issues, and
- The City's investment policies as they relate to the investment of bond proceeds.

Whenever reasonably possible, and for the purpose of ensuring that proceeds of debt will be used for their intended purpose, proceeds of debt will be held by a third-party trustee and the City will submit written requisitions for such proceeds. The City will submit a requisition signed by the Finance Director only after obtaining the signature of the City Manager.

#### 8.7 Debt Limits

The outstanding principal amount of debt described in Section B will not exceed two percent (2%) of the total assessed value of property in the City, and debt service and lease payments incurred for financing purposes that are payable from the City's general fund will not exceed 5% of operational appropriations.

### 9. EQUIPMENT REPLACEMENT FUND

- 9.1 The City may maintain a dedicated fund to provide for replacement of vehicles and certain equipment. Unreserved fund balance will be available for transfer to the General Fund only in the event of a fiscal emergency as described in Section 3.4.

### 10. ENTERPRISE FUNDS

10.1 All Enterprise Funds user fees will be examined annually to ensure that they recover all direct and indirect costs of service, provide for capital improvements and maintenance, and maintain adequate reserves.

10.2 Rate increases shall be approved by the City Council following formal noticing and a public hearing. Rate adjustments will be based on the projected expenditures in the Five-Year Financial plan.