

Budget and Fiscal Policies

1. Operating revenues must fully cover operating expenditures, including debt service.
2. Ending fund balance (or working capital in the enterprise funds) must meet minimum policy levels. For the general and enterprise funds, this level has been established at 20% of operating expenditures.

Under this policy, it is allowable for total expenditures to exceed revenues in a given year; however, in this situation, beginning fund balance can only be used to fund capital improvement plan projects, or other “one-time,” non-recurring expenditures.

FINANCIAL REPORTING AND BUDGET ADMINISTRATION

- A. **Annual Reporting.** The City will prepare annual financial statements as follows:
 1. In accordance with Charter requirements, the City will contract for an annual audit by a qualified independent certified public accountant. The City will strive for an unqualified auditors’ opinion.
 2. The City will use generally accepted accounting principles in preparing its annual financial statements, and will strive to meet the requirements of the GFOA’s Award for Excellence in Financial Reporting program.
 3. The City will issue audited financial statements within 180 days after year-end.
- B. **Interim Reporting.** The City will prepare and issue timely interim reports on the City’s fiscal status to the Council and staff. This includes: on-line access to the City’s financial management system by City staff; monthly reports to program managers; more formal quarterly reports to the Council and Department Heads; mid-year budget reviews; and interim annual reports.
- C. **Budget Administration.** As set forth in the City Charter, the Council may amend or supplement the budget at any time after its

adoption by majority vote of the Council members. The CAO has the authority to make administrative adjustments to the budget as long as those changes will not have a significant policy impact nor affect budgeted year-end fund balances.

GENERAL REVENUE MANAGEMENT

- A. **Diversified and Stable Base.** The City will seek to maintain a diversified and stable revenue base to protect it from short-term fluctuations in any one revenue source.
- B. **Long-Range Focus.** To emphasize and facilitate long-range financial planning, the City will maintain current projections of revenues for the succeeding five years.
- C. **Current Revenues for Current Uses.** The City will make all current expenditures with current revenues, avoiding procedures that balance current budgets by postponing needed expenditures, accruing future revenues, or rolling over short-term debt.
- D. **Interfund Transfers and Loans.** In order to achieve important public policy goals, the City has established various special revenue, capital project, debt service and enterprise funds to account for revenues whose use should be restricted to certain activities. Accordingly, each fund exists as a separate financing entity from other funds, with its own revenue sources, expenditures and fund equity.

Any transfers between funds for operating purposes are clearly set forth in the Financial Plan, and can only be made by the Director of Finance & Information Technology in accordance with the adopted budget. These operating transfers, under which financial resources are transferred from one fund to another, are distinctly different from interfund borrowings, which are usually made for temporary cash flow reasons, and are not intended to result in a transfer of financial resources by the end of the fiscal year.

In summary, interfund transfers result in a change in fund equity; interfund borrowings do not, as the intent is to repay in the loan in the near term.

From time-to-time, interfund borrowings may be appropriate; however, these are subject to the following criteria in ensuring that the fiduciary purpose of the fund is met:

1. The Director of Finance & Information Technology is authorized to approve temporary interfund borrowings for cash flow purposes whenever the cash shortfall is expected to be resolved within 45 days. The most common use of interfund borrowing under this circumstance is for grant programs like the Community Development Block Grant, where costs are incurred before drawdowns are initiated and received. However, receipt of funds is typically received shortly after the request for funds has been made.
2. Any other interfund borrowings for cash flow or other purposes require case-by-case approval by the Council.
3. Any transfers between funds where reimbursement is not expected within one fiscal year shall not be recorded as interfund borrowings; they shall be recorded as interfund operating transfers that affect equity by moving financial resources from one fund to another.

USER FEE COST RECOVERY GOALS

A. Ongoing Review

Fees will be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis to ensure that they keep pace with changes in the cost-of-living as well as changes in methods or levels of service delivery.

In implementing this goal, a comprehensive analysis of City costs and fees should be made at least every five years. In the interim, fees will be adjusted by annual changes in the Consumer Price Index. Fees may be adjusted during this

interim period based on supplemental analysis whenever there have been significant changes in the method, level or cost of service delivery.

B. User Fee Cost Recovery Levels

In setting user fees and cost recovery levels, the following factors will be considered:

1. ***Community-Wide Versus Special Benefit.*** The level of user fee cost recovery should consider the *community-wide* versus *special service* nature of the program or activity. The use of general-purpose revenues is appropriate for community-wide services, while user fees are appropriate for services that are of special benefit to easily identified individuals or groups.
2. ***Service Recipient Versus Service Driver.*** After considering community-wide versus special benefit of the service, the concept of *service recipient* versus *service driver* should also be considered. For example, it could be argued that the applicant is not the beneficiary of the City's development review efforts: the community is the primary beneficiary. However, the applicant is the *driver* of development review costs, and as such, cost recovery from the applicant is appropriate.
3. ***Effect of Pricing on the Demand for Services.*** The level of cost recovery and related pricing of services can significantly affect the demand and subsequent level of services provided. At full cost recovery, this has the specific advantage of ensuring that the City is providing services for which there is genuinely a market that is not overly-stimulated by artificially low prices. Conversely, high levels of cost recovery will negatively impact the delivery of services to lower income groups. This negative feature is especially pronounced, and works against public policy, if the services are specifically targeted to low income groups.
4. ***Feasibility of Collection and Recovery.*** Although it may be determined that a high level of cost recovery may be appropriate

for specific services, it may be impractical or too costly to establish a system to identify and charge the user. Accordingly, the feasibility of assessing and collecting charges should also be considered in developing user fees, especially if significant program costs are intended to be financed from that source.

C. Factors Favoring Low Cost Recovery Levels

Very low cost recovery levels are appropriate under the following circumstances:

1. There is *no* intended relationship between the amount paid and the benefit received. Almost all "social service" programs fall into this category as it is *expected* that one group will subsidize another.
2. Collecting fees is not cost-effective or will significantly impact the efficient delivery of the service.
3. There is *no* intent to limit the use of (or entitlement to) the service. Again, most "social service" programs fit into this category as well as many public safety (police and fire) emergency response services. Historically, access to neighborhood and community parks would also fit into this category.
4. The service is non-recurring, generally delivered on a "peak demand" or emergency basis, cannot reasonably be planned for on an individual basis, and is not readily available from a private sector source. Many public safety services also fall into this category.
5. Collecting fees would discourage compliance with regulatory requirements and adherence is primarily self-identified, and as such, failure to comply would not be readily detected by the City. Many small-scale licenses and permits might fall into this category.

D. Factors Favoring High Cost Recovery Levels

The use of service charges as a major source of funding service levels is especially appropriate under the following circumstances:

1. The service is similar to services provided through the private sector.
2. Other private or public sector alternatives could or do exist for the delivery of the service.
3. For equity or demand management purposes, it is intended that there be a direct relationship between the amount paid and the level and cost of the service received.
4. The use of the service is specifically discouraged. Police responses to disturbances or false alarms might fall into this category.
5. The service is regulatory in nature and voluntary compliance is not expected to be the primary method of detecting failure to meet regulatory requirements. Building permit, plan checks and subdivision review fees for large projects would fall into this category.

E. General Concepts Regarding the Use of Service Charges

The following general concepts will be used in developing and implementing service charges:

1. Revenues should not exceed the reasonable cost of providing the service.
2. Cost recovery goals should be based on the total cost of delivering the service, including direct costs, departmental administration costs, and organization-wide support costs such as accounting, personnel, data processing, vehicle maintenance and insurance.
3. The method of assessing and collecting fees should be as simple as possible in order to reduce the administrative cost of collection.

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4. Rate structures should be sensitive to the "market" for similar services as well as to smaller, infrequent users of the service.
5. A unified approach should be used in determining cost recovery levels for various programs based on the factors discussed above.

F. Low Cost-Recovery Services

Based on the criteria discussed above, the following types of services should have very low cost recovery goals. In selected circumstances, there may be specific activities within the broad scope of services provided that should have user charges associated with them. However, the primary source of funding for the operation as a whole should be general-purpose revenues, not user fees.

1. Delivering public safety emergency response services such as police patrol services and fire suppression.
2. Maintaining and developing public facilities that are provided on a uniform, community-wide basis such as streets, parks and general-purpose buildings.
3. Providing social service programs and economic development activities.

G. Recreation Programs

The following cost recovery policies apply to the City's recreation programs:

1. Cost recovery for activities directed to adults should be relatively high.
2. Cost recovery for activities directed to youth and seniors should be relatively low. In those circumstances where services are similar to those provided in the private sector, cost recovery levels should be higher.

Although ability to pay may not be a concern for all youth and senior participants, these are desired program activities, and the

cost of determining need may be greater than the cost of providing a uniform service fee structure to all participants. Further, there is a community-wide benefit in encouraging high-levels of participation in youth and senior recreation activities regardless of financial status.

3. Cost recovery goals for recreation activities are set as follows:

High-Range Cost Recovery Activities (60% to 100%)

- a. Classes (Adult and Youth)
- b. Day care services
- c. Adult athletics (volleyball, basketball, softball, lap swim)
- d. Facility rentals (Jack House, other indoor facilities except the City/County Library)

Mid-Range Cost Recovery Activities (30% to 60%)

- e. City/County Library room rentals
- f. Special events (triathlon, other City-sponsored special events)
- g. Youth track
- h. Minor league baseball
- i. Youth basketball
- j. Swim lessons
- k. Outdoor facility and equipment rentals

Low-Range Cost Recovery Activities (0 to 30%)

- l. Public swim
 - m. Special swim classes
 - n. Community garden
 - o. Youth STAR
 - p. Teen services
 - q. Senior services
4. For cost recovery activities of less than 100%, there should be a differential in rates between residents and non-residents. However, the Director of Parks and Recreation is authorized to reduce or eliminate non-resident fee differentials when it can be demonstrated that:

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- a. The fee is reducing attendance.
 - b. And there are no appreciable expenditure savings from the reduced attendance.
5. Charges will be assessed for use of rooms, pools, gymnasiums, ball fields, special-use areas, and recreation equipment for activities not sponsored or co-sponsored by the City. Such charges will generally conform to the fee guidelines described above. However, the Director of Parks and Recreation is authorized to charge fees that are closer to full cost recovery for facilities that are heavily used at peak times and include a majority of non-resident users.
 6. A vendor charge of at least 10 percent of gross income will be assessed from individuals or organizations using City facilities for moneymaking activities.
 7. Director of Parks and Recreation is authorized to offer reduced fees such as introductory rates, family discounts and coupon discounts on a pilot basis (not to exceed 18 months) to promote new recreation programs or resurrect existing ones.
 8. The Parks and Recreation Department will consider waiving fees only when the City Administrative Officer determines in writing that an undue hardship exists.
- c. Engineering (public improvement plan checks, inspections, subdivision requirements, encroachments).
 - d. Fire plan check.
2. Cost recovery for these services should generally be very high. In most instances, the City's cost recovery goal should be 100%.
 3. However, in charging high cost recovery levels, the City needs to clearly establish and articulate standards for its performance in reviewing developer applications to ensure that there is "value for cost."

I. Comparability With Other Communities

In setting user fees, the City will consider fees charged by other agencies in accordance with the following criteria:

1. Surveying the comparability of the City's fees to other communities provides useful background information in setting fees for several reasons:
 - a. They reflect the "market" for these fees and can assist in assessing the reasonableness of San Luis Obispo's fees.
 - b. If prudently analyzed, they can serve as a benchmark for how cost-effectively San Luis Obispo provides its services.
2. However, fee surveys should never be the sole or primary criteria in setting City fees as there are many factors that affect how and why other communities have set their fees at their levels. For example:
 - a. What level of cost recovery is their fee intended to achieve compared with our cost recovery objectives?
 - b. What costs have been considered in computing the fees?
 - c. When was the last time that their fees were comprehensively evaluated?

H. Development Review Programs

The following cost recovery policies apply to the development review programs:

1. Services provided under this category include:
 - a. Planning (planned development permits, tentative tract and parcel maps, rezonings, general plan amendments, variances, use permits).
 - b. Building and safety (building permits, structural plan checks, inspections).

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- d. What level of service do they provide compared with our service or performance standards?
 - e. Is their rate structure significantly different than ours and what is it intended to achieve?
3. These can be very difficult questions to address in fairly evaluating fees among different communities. As such, the comparability of our fees to other communities should be one factor among many that is considered in setting City fees.

ENTERPRISE FUND FEES AND RATES

- A. **Water, Sewer and Parking.** The City will set fees and rates at levels which fully cover the total direct and indirect costs—including operations, capital outlay and debt service—of the following enterprise programs: water, sewer and parking.
- B. **Golf.** Golf program fees and rates should fully cover direct operating costs. Because of the nine-hole nature of the golf course with its focus on youth and seniors, subsidies from the General Fund to cover indirect costs and capital improvements may be considered by the Council as part of the Financial Plan process, along with the need to possibly subsidize direct operating costs as well.
- C. **Transit.** Based on targets set under the Transportation Development Act, the City will strive to cover at least twenty percent of transit operating costs with fare revenues.
- D. **Ongoing Rate Review.** The City will review and adjust enterprise fees and rate structures as required to ensure that they remain appropriate and equitable.
- E. **Franchise and In-Lieu Fees.** In accordance with long-standing practices, the City will treat the water and sewer funds in the same manner as if they were privately owned and operated. In addition to setting rates at levels necessary to fully cover the cost of providing water and

sewer service, this means assessing reasonable franchise and property tax in-lieu fees.

1. At 3.5%, water and sewer franchise fees are based on the mid-point of the statewide standard for public utilities like electricity and gas (2% of gross revenues from operations) and cable television (5% of gross revenues). As with other utilities, the purpose of the franchise fee is reasonable compensation the use of the City's street right-of-way. The appropriateness of charging the water and sewer funds a reasonable franchise fee for the use of City streets is further supported by the results of recent studies in Arizona, California, Ohio and Vermont which concluded that the leading cause for street resurfacing and reconstruction is street cuts and trenching for utilities.
2. For the water fund, property tax in-lieu fees are established under the same methodology used in assessing property tax in-lieu fees to the Housing Authority under our 1976 agreement with them. Under this approach, water fund property tax in-lieu charges are about \$30,000 annually, and grow by 2% per year as allowed under Proposition 13.

REVENUE DISTRIBUTION

The Council recognizes that generally accepted accounting principles for state and local governments discourage the “earmarking” of General Fund revenues, and accordingly, the practice of designating General Fund revenues for specific programs should be minimized in the City's management of its fiscal affairs. Approval of the following revenue distribution policies does not prevent the Council from directing General Fund resources to other functions and programs as necessary.

- A. **Property Taxes.** With the passage of Proposition 13 on June 6, 1978, California cities no longer can set their own property tax rates. In addition to limiting annual increases in market value, placing a ceiling on voter-approved indebtedness, and redefining assessed

valuations, Proposition 13 established a maximum county-wide levy for general revenue purposes of 1% of market value. Under subsequent state legislation, which adopted formulas for the distribution of this countywide levy, the City now receives a percentage of total property tax revenues collected countywide as determined by the County Auditor-Controller.

Until November of 1996, the City had provisions in its Charter that were in conflict with Proposition 13 relating to the setting of property tax revenues between various funds. For several years following the passage of Proposition 13, the City made property tax allocations between funds on a policy basis that were generally in proportion to those in place before Proposition 13. Because these were general-purpose revenues, this practice was discontinued in 1992-93. With the adoption of a series of technical revisions to the City Charter in November of 1996, this conflict no longer exists.

- B. **Gasoline Tax Subventions.** All gasoline tax revenues (which are restricted by the State for street-related purposes) will be used for maintenance activities. Since the City's total expenditures for gas tax eligible programs and projects are much greater than this revenue source, operating transfers will be made from the gas tax fund to the General Fund for this purpose. This approach significantly reduces the accounting efforts required in meeting State reporting requirements.
- C. **Transportation Development Act (TDA) Revenues.** All TDA revenues will be allocated to alternative transportation programs, including regional and municipal transit systems, bikeway improvements, and other programs or projects designed to reduce automobile usage. Because TDA revenues will not be allocated for street purposes, it is expected that alternative transportation programs (in conjunction with other state or federal grants for this purpose) will be self-supporting from TDA revenues.
- D. **Parking Fines.** All parking fine revenues will be allocated to the parking fund.

INVESTMENTS

- A. **Responsibility.** Investments and cash management is the responsibility of the City Treasurer or designee.
- B. **Investment Objective.** The City's primary investment objective is to achieve a reasonable rate of return while minimizing the potential for capital losses arising from market changes or issuer default. Accordingly, the following factors will be considered in priority order in determining individual investment placements:
 - 1. Safety
 - 2. Liquidity
 - 3. Yield
- C. **Tax and Revenue Anticipation Notes: Not for Investment Purposes.** There is an appropriate role for tax and revenue anticipation notes (TRANS) in meeting legitimate short-term cash needs within the fiscal year. However, many agencies issue TRANS as a routine business practice, not solely for cash flow purposes, but to capitalize on the favorable difference between the interest cost of issuing TRANS as a tax-preferred security and the interest yields on them if re-invested at full market rates.

As part of its cash flow management and investment strategy, the City will only issue TRANS or other forms of short-term debt if necessary to meet demonstrated cash flow needs; TRANS or any other form of short-term debt financing will not be issued for investment purposes. As long as the City maintains its current policy of maintaining fund/working capital balances that are 20% of operating expenditures, it is unlikely that the City would need to issue TRANS for cash flow purposes except in very unusual circumstances.
- D. **Selecting Maturity Dates.** The City will strive to keep all idle cash balances fully invested through daily projections of cash flow requirements. To avoid forced liquidations and losses of investment earnings, cash flow and future requirements will be the primary consideration when selecting maturities.