

# **APPENDIX A**

## **FINANCIAL POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES**

Originally adopted by Board of Selectmen on November 23, 2009  
Revised November 8, 2010 (Free Cash Policy Added)

# **TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES**

## **I. OVERVIEW**

It is the policy of the Town of Northborough that financial management is conducted with the objectives of providing municipal service in an efficient, effective and consistent manner that aligns with public policy goals as set forth by the Board of Selectmen.

To help ensure the Town's financial stewardship, an established program of managing the Town's finances is essential. To this end, the Board of Selectmen promulgates policies and procedures that are financially prudent and in the Town's best economic interest.

In adherence to this policy, the Town shall pursue the following objectives:

- To set forth operational principles that minimize the cost of government to the extent consistent with services desired by the public and that minimize financial risk;
- To continue effective financial management within the Town that conforms to generally accepted accounting principles;
- To simplify, clarify and modernize the financial systems of the Town as the need occurs;
- To provide increased public confidence in public financial management;
- To protect and enhance the Town's credit rating and prevent default on any municipal debts;
- And to provide safeguards to ensure the quality and integrity of the financial systems.

In order to attain the above objectives, the Board of Selectmen adopts the following policies.

## **II. ACCOUNTING, AUDITING AND FINANCIAL REPORTING**

- A. The Town will utilize accounting practices that conform to generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) as set forth by the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB), including compliance with GASB Statements 34, 40 and 45.
- B. An annual audit will be performed by an independent public accounting firm.
- C. A Management Letter shall be provided by the independent public accounting firm as a companion document to the annual audit.

## **III. GENERAL FUND**

- A. Budget Goals and Objectives shall be determined annually by the Board of Selectmen in consultation with the Town Administrator. However, the annual operating budget as submitted to the Town must be balanced with the estimate of proposed expenditures for a given period less than or equal to the proposed means of financing these expenditures

(from various sources of funds or revenues). In short, for a budget to be balanced, proposed expenditures shall not exceed projected resources for the given period.

- B. The Town will carefully and routinely monitor all amounts due the Town. An aggressive policy of collection will be followed for all receivables, including property taxes. An average collection rate of at least 95% of current levy shall be maintained.
- C. Charges for services and other revenues shall be reviewed on a regular on-going basis at least every three years. Charges shall be adjusted as necessary to respond to changes in the cost of providing services. The Board of Selectmen may set specific cost recovery goals for individual departments or services as appropriate.
  - 1. Recreation Department—Recreational user charges and fees will be set to recover approximately 100% of the total direct costs associated with recreational programs.
- D. Reserves reflect a community's ability to react to unforeseen circumstances and to minimize or avoid borrowing for capital expenditures. Reserves should normally average between 5% and 10% of the Town's General Fund (operating budget) Expenditures. The Town will endeavor to continue its policy of maintaining reserves at 10% of General Fund Expenditures. Reserves are defined to include the Town's Stabilization Fund and Free Cash.

The Stabilization Fund is the Town's main reserve fund designed to provide financial stability for the Town while improving the Town's credit worthiness and flexibility. The provisions of this fund are dictated by Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 40, Section 5B. The Stabilization Fund may be appropriated for any lawful purpose. However, at no time can an appropriation placed into the fund exceed 10% of the previous year's real property tax levy, nor can the fund itself exceed 10% of the equalized value of the Town.

Free Cash reserves are the remaining, unrestricted funds from operations of the previous fiscal year; these include unexpended Free Cash from the previous year, actual receipts in excess of revenue estimates and unspent amounts in budget line-items. Once certified, monies held in this reserve may be appropriated during the current budget year and may also be used as a source of revenues for the ensuing budget year.

The Town has historically used some portion of its Free Cash to subsidize the ensuing year's annual operating budget. However, it is the Town's goal to limit the amount of Free Cash used in the operating budget to a sustainable level and to use these available funds for non-recurring one-time expenses, such as capital items.

For purposes of this policy, the following are deemed to be appropriate uses of Free Cash:

- Appropriated Reserve – an amount to provide for extraordinary or unforeseen expenditures as authorized by MGL Chapter 40, Section 6.

- Operating Budget – in order to pursue a gradual transition from using Free Cash to fund recurring operational expenses, the Town will reduce its annual appropriation by \$100,000 each year until such time as the annual appropriation from Free Cash for the operating budget is lowered to \$500,000.
- Stabilization Fund – to fund or replenish the Stabilization Fund.
- Capital Improvement Program – to fund capital projects that would otherwise incur borrowing costs associated with the issuance of debt.
- Special Use – to augment the trust funds related to fringe benefits and unfunded liabilities related to employee fringe benefits.
- Extraordinary Deficits – to fund any potential deficits that would otherwise be carried over to the following fiscal year.
- Emergency Appropriations – to allow for fiscal flexibility.

The overall level of Financial Reserves is critical to maintaining the Town’s Bond Rating and ensuring sufficient funds to manage unanticipated needs. Funds shall be allocated from Reserves only after an analysis has been prepared by the Town Administrator and presented to the Board of Selectmen. The analysis shall provide sufficient evidence to establish that the remaining balance is adequate to offset potential downturns in revenue sources and provide sufficient cash balance for daily financial needs.

#### IV. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

- A. The Town shall continue to prepare a six-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) updated on an annual basis.
- B. Definitions of Capital Improvement Program/Project:
  1. Capital Improvement Program: A comprehensive list of major public improvement projects that are proposed for the Town’s expenditure within the next six years. The CIP shall be reviewed annually.
  2. Capital Improvement Project: Items included within the Capital Improvement Program will involve the improvement or betterment of the physical plant of the Town of a non-recurring nature as differentiated from ordinary repairs or maintenance of a recurring nature. Projects include acquisition of land, improvement of facilities and the replacement/purchase of equipment with a useful life of at least five (5) years and a cost of \$25,000 or more.

## V. DEBT MANAGEMENT

- A. A critical measure for bond rating agencies is the ratio of debt service payments to total expenditures. The Town recognizes that maintaining debt levels within industry standards allows the Town to more easily maintain its credit standing. Bond rating agencies consider individual community needs and circumstances (including emergencies) when evaluating the fiscal health of a community. Thus, while exceeding such limits could translate into a decrease in bond rating, such a decrease is not necessarily a totally negative factor in every case in a particular community. The Town's consideration of doing so, however, should be reserved for extraordinary or unforeseeable circumstances.
- B. The Town will endeavor to manage debt so as not to exceed the following ratios, which are reflective of municipal bonding standards:
- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| 1. Gross General Fund debt service/General Fund expenditures | 15%     |
| and  |         |
| 2. Net General Fund debt service/General Fund expenditures   | 8 – 10% |
- C. Definitions of Gross/Net Debt Service:
1. General Fund Gross Debt Service: Annual debt payments (principal and interest) for which the Town is held accountable; inclusive of assessments from Regional School Districts, Town and K-8 School appropriations and debt exclusions. Excluded are Water and Sewer Utility Funds.
  2. General Fund Net Debt Service: After State reimbursement and State aid, the annual debt payments (principal and interest) for which the Town is held accountable; inclusive of assessments from Regional School Districts, Town and K-8 School appropriations and debt exclusions (i.e., Gross Debt Service less reimbursements/aid). Excluded are Water and Sewer Utility Funds.
- D. When considering the use of debt, the Town shall be guided by the following:
1. Borrowing versus Cash—The Town will endeavor to finance Capital Improvement Projects with a total cost of less than \$50,000 through cash appropriation rather than borrowing.
  2. Useful Life—When borrowing, the Town will ensure that the term of bonds issued will not exceed the useful life of the project.
  3. Capital Expenditure versus Capital Improvement Project—Capital expenditures not meeting the definition of “Capital Improvement Projects” should be financed through inclusion within operating budgets.
- E. When considering debt financing strategies, the Town shall be guided by the following:

Exclusions from Proposition 2-1/2 Limits

The maximum amount a community can collect in taxes in a given year is its levy limit. Proposition 2½ (Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 59, Section 21C) restricts growth in the levy limit from one year to the next by limiting the growth to an increase of not more than 2½% over the prior fiscal year plus any increase in valuation due to new growth in the community.

There are provisions that allow a community to exceed the limits of Proposition 2½. The “debt exclusion” option is a temporary tax increase used to raise additional taxes to fund capital projects for which the community may borrow as defined in Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 44, Sections 7 and 8. The additional amount is added to the levy limit only during the life of the debt.

A community may also temporarily exceed the levy limit by raising additional taxes for a capital improvement in order to finance the purchase with cash. Such a “capital outlay expenditure exclusion” is used for the year in which the capital item is acquired.

The Town will continue its policy to raise appropriations for large projects, such as school or municipal buildings, outside the limits of Proposition 2½, in order to retain budget capacity within the limits of Proposition 2½.

State, Federal and Other Sources of Funding

State, Federal and other sources of funding including grants and reimbursements, will be aggressively sought for eligible Town and School capital projects.

**VI. ENTERPRISE FUND MANAGEMENT**

Enterprise funds (Water, Sewer and Solid Waste) should be fully self-sufficient operationally with user charges and fees set to recover all costs associated with the activities of these funds including capital expenditures. Enterprise Funds are governed by Massachusetts General Law, Ch. 44 §53F½.

**VII. GIFTS AND GRANTS**

- A. All grants shall be managed to comply with the laws, regulations and guidance of the grantor, and all gifts and donations shall be managed and expended according to the wishes and instructions of the donor.
- B. All gifts and grants shall be evaluated for suitability and consistency with Town policies. They shall be formally accepted by the Board of Selectmen after review and recommendation by the Town Administrator. Gifts and grants of funds are governed by Massachusetts General Law Ch. 44 §53A. Gifts of tangible property are governed by Massachusetts General Law Ch. 44 §53A½.

## VIII. TRUST FUND MANAGEMENT

Trust Fund management shall be consistent with the legal requirements and spirit of each respective trust document and, to the maximum extent possible, realize the purpose the trusts were intended to achieve. All Trust Funds shall be invested in accordance with Section X of these policies.

## IX. INVESTMENT POLICY FOR GENERAL FUNDS, SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS, ENTERPRISE FUNDS AND CAPITAL PROJECTS FUNDS

- A. **Scope**—Section IX of this policy applies only to short term operating funds such as general funds, special revenue funds, enterprise funds, bond proceeds and capital project funds. Section X will deal with trust funds and any other funds with special circumstances such as stabilization funds. Massachusetts Teachers Retirement Board and the Worcester Regional Retirement Board are responsible for the investment of the pension funds.
- B. **Objectives**—Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 44, Section 55B requires the Treasurer to invest all public funds except those required to be kept uninvested for purposes of immediate distribution.

The state law further requires that invested funds are to be placed at the highest possible rate of interest reasonably available, taking account of safety, liquidity and yield. Therefore, these guidelines are intended to further the objective of securing the highest return that is consistent with safety of principal while meeting the daily cash requirements for the operation of the Town's business.

1. Safety of principal is the foremost objective of the investment program. Investments shall be undertaken in a manner that seeks to ensure the preservation of capital through the mitigation of credit risk and interest rate risk. These risks shall be mitigated by the diversification and prudent selection of investment instruments, and choice of depository.
  - i. Credit risk is the risk of loss due to the failure of the security issuer or backer.
  - ii. Interest rate risk is the risk that the market value of the security will fall due to changes in general interest rates.
2. Liquidity is the next most important objective. The overall investment portfolio shall remain sufficiently liquid to meet all operating requirements that may be reasonably anticipated. Since all possible cash demands cannot be anticipated, the Treasurer shall carry out investment activities in a manner that provides for meeting unusual cash demands without the liquidation of investments that could result in forfeiture of accrued interest earnings, and loss of principal in some cases.

3. *Yield* is the third, and last, objective. Investments shall be undertaken so as to achieve a fair market average rate of return, taking into account safety and liquidity constraints as well as all legal requirements.

**C. Investment Instruments**—Public investments in Massachusetts are not protected through provisions in State law. Therefore, they are largely uncollateralized. Many banking institutions are willing to put up collateral, albeit at a cost to the entity of a lower interest rate. The Treasurer negotiates for the highest rates possible, consistent with safety principles. **The Treasurer may legally invest in the following instruments:**

1. *Massachusetts State Pooled Fund*: Unlimited amounts (Pool is liquid)—The Massachusetts Municipal Depository Trust (MMDT), an investment pool for state, local, county and other independent governmental authorities, is under the auspices of the State Treasurer and currently managed by Fidelity Investments. It invests in Bankers Acceptances, Commercial Paper of high quality, Bank Certificates of Deposit, Repurchase agreements (Repos) and U.S. Treasury Obligations. It has Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (F.D.I.C.) pass-through insurance on the C.D.'s and takes delivery on the Repos and Treasuries.
2. *U. S. Treasuries* that will be held to maturity: Unlimited amounts (Up to one year maturity from date of purchase).
3. *U.S. Agency obligations* that will be held to maturity: Unlimited amounts (Up to one year maturity from date of purchase).
4. *Bank accounts or Certificates of Deposit*, hitherto termed C.D.'s. (Up to one year) which are fully collateralized through a third party agreement: Unlimited amounts.
5. *Bank accounts and C.D.'s* (Up to one year) insured by F.D.I.C. up to at present a \$250,000 limit. All bank accounts and C.D.'s in one institution are considered in the aggregate to receive the \$250,000 insurance coverage. In some cases banking institutions carry additional insurance, Depository Insurance Fund of Massachusetts (D.I.F.M).
6. *Unsecured bank deposits* of any kind such as other checking, savings, money market, or Certificates of Deposit accounts at banks that do not fit the above categories. These investments are subject to the following limitations: No more than 5% of an institution's assets and no more than 25% of a municipality's cash may be composed of unsecured bank deposits. This percentage may be increased for not more than 30 days during times of heavy collection or in anticipation of large payments that will be made by the Town in the near future. These payments may be for such items as debt service payment or regional school assessments. They will be diversified as much as possible.



- D. **Authorization**—The Treasurer has authority to invest municipal funds, subject to the statutes of the Commonwealth Massachusetts General Law Chapter 44 Section 55, 55A, & 55B.
- E. **Restrictions**—Chapter 44, Section 55 set forth the several restrictions that the Treasurer must be aware of when making investment selections for short term operating funds.
1. A Treasurer shall not at any one time have on deposit in a bank or trust company an amount exceeding 60% of the capital and surplus of such bank or trust company, or banking company, unless satisfactory security is given to it by such bank or trust company, or banking company for such excess.
  2. The Treasurer shall not make a deposit in any bank, trust company or banking company that he is associated with as an officer or employee or has been the same for any time during the three years immediately preceding the date of any such deposit.
  3. All securities shall have a maturity from date of purchase of one year or less.
  4. Purchases under an agreement with a trust company, national bank or banking company for repurchase at not less than original purchase price of said securities on a fixed date, for a term that shall not exceed ninety days.

## **X. INVESTMENT POLICY FOR TRUST FUNDS, STABILIZATION FUNDS AND COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT**

- A. **Scope**—Section X of this policy applies to funds that could be invested long term and includes accounts that are designated as Trust Funds, Stabilization Funds, Conservation Fund and Community Preservation Funds. These funds include all accounts that are received as scholarships and perpetual care receipts.

All accounts will be maintained separately receiving their proportionate interest allocation and any realized and unrealized gains or losses. The account will be established as a pooled investment portfolio unless otherwise stated. Any additional amounts added to such accounts will be maintained in this same manner.

- B. **Authorization**—Massachusetts General Law Chapter 44, Section 54 pertains to the investment of Trust Funds. All trust funds shall fall under the control of the Treasurer unless otherwise provided or directed by the donor.
- C. **Objectives**—Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 44, Section 55B requires the Treasurer to invest all public funds except those required to be kept uninvested for purposes of immediate distribution.

This section also requires that invested funds are to be placed at the highest possible rate of interest reasonably available, taking into account safety, liquidity and yield. Therefore, these guidelines are intended to further the objective of securing the highest return that is consistent with the safety of principal while meeting the daily cash requirements for the operation of the Town's business.

1. Safety of principal is the foremost objective of the investment program. Investments shall be undertaken in a manner that seeks to ensure the preservation of capital through the mitigation of credit risk and interest rate risk. These risks shall be mitigated by the diversification and prudent selection of investment instruments, and choice of depository.
  - i. Credit risk is the risk of loss due to the failure of the security issuer or backer.
  - ii. Interest rate risk is the risk that the market value of the security will fall due to changes in general interest rates.
2. Liquidity is the next most important objective. The overall investment portfolio shall remain sufficiently liquid to meet all operating requirements that may be reasonably anticipated. Since all possible cash demands cannot be anticipated, the Treasurer shall carry out investment activities in a manner that provides for meeting unusual cash demands without the liquidation of investments that could result in forfeiture of accrued interest earnings, and loss of principal in some cases.
3. Yield is the third, and last, objective. Investments shall be undertaken so as to achieve a fair market average rate of return, taking into account safety and liquidity constraints as well as all legal requirements.

D. **Investment Instruments**—Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 44 Section 54 states that money should be deposited into savings banks, trust companies incorporated under the laws of the commonwealth, banking companies incorporated under the laws of the commonwealth which are members of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, or national banks, or invested in participation units in a combined investment fund under Chapter 29, Section 38A, or in a paid-up shares and accounts of and in co-operative banks, or in shares of savings and loan associations or in share or savings deposits of federal savings and loan associations doing business in the Commonwealth.

Additionally the Treasurer may invest such funds in securities, other than mortgages or collateralized loans, which are legal for the investment of funds of savings banks under the laws of the Commonwealth; provided, that not more than fifteen percent of any such trust funds shall be invested in bank stocks and insurance company stocks, nor shall more than one and one-half percent of such funds be invested in the stock of any one bank or insurance company. **The Treasurer may invest in the following instruments:**

1. U. S. Treasuries that may be sold prior to maturity: Unlimited amounts (With no limit to the length of maturity from date of purchase).

2. U.S. Agency obligations that may be sold prior to maturity: Unlimited amounts (With no limit to the length of maturity from date of purchase).
3. Bank accounts or Certificates of Deposit, hitherto termed C.D.'s: Unlimited amounts (With no limit to the length of maturity from date of purchase), which is fully collateralized through a third party agreement.
4. Bank accounts and C.D.'s (With no limit to the length of maturity from date of purchase), fully insured by F.D.I.C. and in some cases also Depository Insurance Fund of Massachusetts (D.I.F.M) presently with a \$250,000 limit. All bank accounts and C.D.'s in one institution are considered in the aggregate to receive the \$250,000 insurance coverage.
5. Unsecured bank deposits of any kind such as other checking, savings, money market, or Certificates of Deposit accounts at Banks that do not fit the above categories. These investments are subject to the following limitations: No more than 5% of an institution's assets and no more than 25% of a municipality's cash may be composed of unsecured bank deposits. This percentage may be increased for not more than 30 days during times of heavy collection or in anticipation of large payments that will be made by the Town in the near future. These payments may be for such items as debt service payment or regional school assessments. They will be diversified as much as possible.
6. Common and preferred stocks that are listed in the List of Legal Investments. Massachusetts General Law Chapter 44 Section 54 sets forth that Treasurers may invest in instruments that are legal for savings banks. This list of investments is included in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts List of Legal Investments, Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 167 Section 15A.
7. Investment Funds that are listed in the List of Legal Investments, Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 167 Section 15A.
8. List of Legal Investments—All other items not separately identified here that are listed in the List of Legal Investments, Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 167 Section 15A.

Trust Funds may be co-mingled and invested in any instruments allowed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts List of Legal Investments issued by the Banking Commissioner each July. Each Trust Fund must be accounted for separately.

## **XI. INVESTMENT POLICY—OVERALL PROVISIONS**

- A. **Diversification**—Diversification should be interpreted in two ways: 1) in terms of maturity, and 2) in terms of instrument type and issuer. The diversification concept should include prohibition against over concentration of maturities, as well as

concentration in a specific institution, with the exception of U.S. Treasury obligations and agencies or investments fully collateralized.

- B. **Ethics**—The Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer shall refrain from any personal activity that may conflict with the proper execution of the investment program or which could impair or appear to impair ability to make impartial investment decisions. Said individuals shall disclose to the Town Administrator any material financial interest they may have in financial institutions that do business with the Town. They shall also disclose any large personal financial investment positions or loans that they have which could be related to the performance of the Town's investments. All municipal employees shall comply with the State Conflict of Interest Law, Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 268A.
- C. **Standards of Care**—The standard of prudence to be used by the Treasurer shall be the “prudent person” standard set forth in Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 203C and shall be applied in the context of managing an overall portfolio. The Treasurer acting in accordance with written procedures and this investment policy and exercising due diligence shall be relieved of personal responsibility for an individual security’s credit risk or market price changes, provided the purchases and sale of securities is carried out in accordance with the terms of this policy.

The “prudent person” standard states that, “Investments shall be made with judgment and care, under circumstances then prevailing, which persons of prudence, discretion and intelligence exercise in the management of their own affairs, not for speculation, but for investment, considering the probable safety of their capital as well the probable income to be derived.”

- D. **Reporting Requirements**—On an annual basis, a report containing the following information will be prepared by the Treasurer and distributed to the Town Administrator. The report will include as a minimum requirement, the following information:
1. A listing of the individual accounts and individual securities held at the end of the reporting period.
  2. A listing of the short-term investment portfolio by security type and maturity to ensure compliance with the diversification and maturity guidelines established in the "Diversification" section of this Investment Policy.
  3. A summary of the income earned on a monthly basis and on a year to date basis.
  4. The Treasurer shall include in the report a brief statement of general market and economic conditions and other factors that may affect the Town's cash position.
  5. The report should demonstrate the degree of compliance with the tenets set forth in the Investment Policy.