

CITY OF ESCONDIDO
FY 2019-20 Operating Budget
Budgetary and Financial Policies

There are many benefits to adopting budgetary and financial policies, some of which are the safeguarding of resources and providing guidance for the development and administration of the operating budget and long-term financial plan. The policies described below were adopted by City Council and are located on the City website at: <https://www.escondido.org/city-financial-policies.aspx>.

1. The Budget Will Be Structurally Balanced

Background – A budget is structurally balanced if it does not spend more on ongoing costs than it receives in ongoing revenues. A structurally balanced budget is a necessary component of good financial management and financial discipline and will help sustain the consistent delivery of services to residents. An unbalanced budget (spending more than is received) undermines the City’s ability to deal with financial problems. It may lead to reduced services in the future and inhibit the City’s ability to take advantage of opportunities that will periodically occur.

Policy - The budget for the General Fund will be structurally balanced for the fiscal year. It is not a violation of this policy to have a planned use of funds available to fund one-time items, including capital, equipment, land or transitional costs for operations (starting up or termination of a service element). It is also not a violation of this policy to use funds previously set aside to mitigate temporarily higher costs or lower revenues.

2. Multi-Year Financial Projections Will Be Incorporated in to The Budget Process

Background – The City’s financial situation and projected future status are important factors in the financial and economic decisions the City Council may make. To support the City’s budgetary planning and financial decision-making process, the City needs to analyze its financial situation and the key factors impacting its economic and financial status.

Policy - At a minimum, the proposed annual budget should include a three-year General Fund projection (the fiscal year plus two additional years). Major assumptions should be identified. It is desirable that the budget should include similar projections of key funds and potentially all funds.

3. The Budget Process Is Based On an Annual Cycle with Minimal Mid-Cycle Adjustments

Background - The service plan for the City is based on an annual budget and by good financial and operational practice. Budgeting on an annual basis provides time to review all revenue sources, develop solutions to previously identified problems, and to discuss and decide on policies and priorities. An annual budget process also provides time for management to plan and more efficiently and effectively implement changes incorporated into the budget. Shortening or interrupting the process with significant mid-cycle changes can lead to poor decision-making due to incomplete information and to inefficient and ineffective operations or expenditures.

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- a. The annual budget process will be the general method used by the City to develop its annual service priorities and the level and type of resources to fund those services.
- b. Changes to the budget and to service levels during the fiscal year will be minimized. Changes during the fiscal year will generally be limited to technical adjustments, emergency funding, time sensitive opportunities or issues, or new grants or awards that are intended to be spent during the year. The creation of a new program, a higher service level, or other expenditures during mid-budget cycle is discouraged.
- c. Unexpected revenue shortfalls or other significant issues that may create a budget shortfall during the fiscal year are to be reported to the City Council with recommendations by the City Manager as to whether a mid-year budget adjustment should be made.

4. User Fees and Charges Will Be Set at The Cost of the Service

Background - Fees and associated charges are associated with recovering the cost of providing a service. The City can charge up to the full cost of providing a service.

Policy – Fees will be set at a level to fully recover costs, except where there is a greater public benefit through use of a lower fee, such as where full recovery may adversely impact overall revenue or may discourage participation in programs where the participation benefits the overall community.

5. One-Time Resources Will Be Used Only for One-Time Purposes

Background – One-time resources are revenues that only occur once, for a very limited time, or are too unpredictable or unstable to fund operations. One-time revenues are not suited to fund ongoing operations because they are not available in the future or cannot be relied on from year-to-year to pay the ongoing costs of operations.

Policy - One-time resources will not be used to fund ongoing operations. They will be used for one-time uses, including capital and other one-time expenditures, transitional funding of operations (for a limited time period with a planned ending date), increasing reserves, or paying down unfunded liabilities. The General Fund will be receiving one-time resources from the Successor Agency – Redevelopment Fund for repayment of the former Escondido Redevelopment loan. All of these repayments shall be contributed to the Section 115 Irrevocable Pension Trust.

6. Capital Projects Will Be Budgeted and Funded for Both Capital and Operating Costs

Background – Expenditures for capital and infrastructure often have an impact on operating costs. New capital projects typically increase costs while repairs may lower costs. When capital and infrastructure funding decisions are made, it is important to provide information to the City Council about future operating costs as a result of the expenditures. For capital expenditure decisions, both the one-time capital costs and the ongoing net operating costs should be considered.

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Policy – Before approving any capital expenditure, the City Council shall consider both the capital (one-time) and operating (ongoing) components of costs, including the full capital cost of the project, regardless of funding sources, and all City incurred site, design, overhead costs and start-up costs. Site costs for land already owned by the City do not need to be reported. Projected operating costs through any stabilization period, as well as projected future operating and maintenance costs, are to be identified. If the project has a limited economic life, the fiscal impact information should discuss proposed end of life actions and costs. The method for funding the projected operating costs is to be included in any funding description.

7. Adequate General Fund Reserves Will Be Maintained

Background – Maintaining adequate reserves is a basic component of a financially strong City. Adequate reserves help sustain City operations when adverse or unexpected circumstances impact the City. Maintaining a reserve balance allows a city to continue operations while responding to short-term problems, eliminating the need to reduce service levels when these temporary fluctuations occur. It also provides an organization time to address longer term problems while comprehensive response plans are developed.

Policy

- a. The City Council established a target General Fund Reserve balance of 25 percent of General Fund operating revenues in order to maintain adequate levels of fund balance to mitigate current and future risks and adequately provide for cash flow requirements and contingencies for unseen operating or capital needs of the City.
- b. The Reserve balance is available to fund one-time unanticipated expenditure requirements, local disasters, or when actual revenue received is less than the amount budgeted resulting in an operating deficit in the General Fund.
- c. If Reserves are used the method for replenishing deficiencies including the source of funding and time period of replenishment to occur will be defined in the resolution. Generally, the replenishment will come from future surpluses or one-time resources.
- d. The City may establish and maintain special purpose operating reserves (in addition to the operating reserve described above). Special purpose operating reserves are intended to be used for specific revenue and expense variations and will generally be formulaic and automatic in nature in terms of when the reserves will be added and when they will be used.
- e. A Pension Rate Smoothing Reserve was established to provide economic relief during recessionary cycles and/or rate increases that are significantly above anticipated projected employee rate increases. Increases or decreases to this reserve will be included in the proposed annual operating budget.
- f. The City may establish and maintain other reserves.

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8. Revenues Will Be Projected Using a Methodology That Is Reasonably Conservative

Background - Revenue projections are critical to budget decisions, particularly a budget that is intended to be structurally balanced. Unfortunately, many of the City's key revenues are subject to material variation depending on the economy. No revenue projection is likely to be accurate" when the economy is changing direction or moving quickly. As a result, it is important to have a consistent approach to projecting revenues and for decision-makers to understand the basis used to project the resources available for the budget. Revenue should be projected in a way not likely to lead to a revenue shortfall and not be so conservative that the projection is always substantially under revenues.

Policy - Revenue projections are to be objectively prepared using a conservative approach. That approach should result in overall budgeted revenues for a fund being set at a level such that it is reasonably unlikely that actual revenues will be lower than budgeted.

9. Fiscal Analysis Will Be Included with All City Council Staff Reports Which Involve Decisions for Spending, Revenues, Debt, Investments, Or Other Potential Economic Impact

Background – The City Council should receive information on the actual or potential fiscal impact of its potential actions to aid in making decisions.

Policy – For any expenditure, the funding source must be identified as well as whether the expenditure has been budgeted. In addition, for any proposed City Council action impacting City finances or its economic situation, the projected or potential fiscal impact on current and future revenues and expenditures, and the projected or potential impact on the City's financial position shall be analyzed. A discussion on any overall economic impacts to the City, if relevant, will also be included.

10. The Budget Will Fund Costs Incurred in The Current Year or Will Identify the Costs That Have Not Been Fully Funded

Background – Governments sometimes have financial issues because they do not budget for or fund costs that are incurred in a budget year, but not paid out until a future year. This practice can lead to higher costs to taxpayers in the future if they have to pay for the services provided in the past. Typically, these costs are for employee benefits, but may also be associated with other costs. Funding current year costs is not the same as funding unfunded liabilities. Paying current costs does not have any impact on existing unfunded liabilities, but it does have an impact on keeping unfunded liabilities from occurring or growing in dollar amount. Current costs, whether paid in the current year or not, are a component of structural balance.

Policy – The budget will include funding for the costs for services for the current year. If that is determined not to be appropriate for a given year, the budget will disclose that and include a discussion of those costs that were not fully funded.

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11. Financial Status and Financial Issues Will Be Reported

Background – Annual audited financial statements are an essential component of financial control and management. In addition, the City prepares interim quarterly financial reports that give the City Council more up to date financial information on the City's fiscal status.

Policy

- a. The City's comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR) will be made available to the City Council, the general public, bond holders and rating agencies after completion of the annual audit. In addition, there will be periodic reporting on the budgetary status of the City, particularly the General Fund and other funds that have unusual or problematic status. Any major or critical issue will be reported as soon as it is practical.

- b. The City presents quarterly financial reports to the City Council that provide a financial update on the General Fund and other major City funds. These reports include budgetary information, along with actual resources received to date, in addition to the use of these resources in fulfilling each fund's financial plan. Any major or critical issues will be reported as soon as it is practical.

12. Grants Will Be Actively Sought, But Only as Appropriate and with Suitable Oversight to Ensure Compliance

Background - Grants are an essential component of City resources. All grants have rules and regulations that must be followed, including but not limited to the use of the awarded funds. Failure to follow the rules and regulations may require a return of the funds, even after they have been spent. Grants often come with matching funds requirements. Grant applications must be carefully reviewed to determine if the grant is appropriate for the City. Appropriateness shall be determined based on type of match requirements (cash or in-kind), dollar amount of match required, ability to recover administrative costs, excessive restrictions on expenditures, compliance risk, and/or incompatibility with other City priorities.

Policy - The City will pursue grants that are consistent with City priorities and when the benefit to the City substantially outweighs the cost of application and administration, and the risk of unintentional non-compliance. The City will not seek grants if the purpose does not provide a significant net benefit to the City for existing priorities. Before applying for any grant, staff shall ensure that the above conditions have been met. The City shall maintain the necessary administrative support and training to ensure compliance with grant terms and requirements.

13. Debt and Capital Leases Will Be Maintained at Appropriate Levels

Background - Debt (borrowing) is a valuable and necessary tool for financing major infrastructure and other capital assets. However, misuse of debt or poor debt management, including excessive debt and poor choices for the structure of debt, can contribute to financial weakness and compromise the City's ability to deliver services over the long-term.

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Policy – Limits on the amount of debt shall be defined in the Debt Management Policy which has been adopted by the City Council. The term of debt will generally not exceed the life of the asset being acquired. Capital leases for vehicle replacement or other recurring costs should be part of a comprehensive strategy that provides for ongoing replacement of the equipment. Debt will not be used to fund operations. Incurring short-term debt (less than one year) to provide for cash flow in anticipation of revenues is not a violation of this policy. A separate Debt Management Policy has been adopted by the City Council and is located on the City website.

14. Cash and Investments Will Be Effectively Managed

Background – The primary objective of the City’s cash and investment management system is to safeguard government funds while providing adequate liquidity to meet the daily cash flow demands of the City.

Policy – All funds that are not required for immediate expenditures shall be invested in accordance with State and Federal laws as outlined in the City’s Investment Policy. Cash management shall be performed daily to determine how much of the cash balance is available for investment. The priorities for investment decisions shall be (in order of importance):

1. Safety – preserving the principal of investments by mitigating the two types of risk: credit risk and market risk.
2. Liquidity – structuring the investment portfolio with sufficient liquidity to enable the City to meet expected cash requirements.
3. Yield – generating a market rate of return on the portfolio within the investment constraints to provide income to the City.

A separate policy on Cash and Investment management has been adopted by the City Council and is located on the City website.

15. Capital Assets Will Be Inventoried and Their Conditions Assessed Periodically

Background- An effective capital asset accounting system is important to safeguard and manage the City’s capital asset investment. Periodic review of the City’s assets and infrastructure is necessary to ensure that the items are still in service. This also allows the departments to determine what assets can be maintained and what needs to be replaced.

Policy - It shall be the responsibility of the City’s finance department to record capital asset transactions, tag assets, and change records as necessary. It shall be the responsibility of the various City departments that maintain the assets to provide custodial responsibility, safeguard the assets from damage and theft, inventory assets, and assess the condition of the assets periodically.

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16. Delinquent Accounts Will Be Written Off When Deemed Uncollectible

Background – The timely identification of losses is an essential element in appropriately measuring the value of the City's assets. The write-off process is a critical component of that measurement. The policy is intended to enable the City to reflect the value of its receivables and ensure that resources are used efficiently and not devoted to the recovery of uncollectible receivables.

Policy - Delinquent accounts are reviewed by the Collections Officer and when appropriate, unpaid accounts will be assigned to the collections agency. Accounts deemed uncollectible will be written off as bad debt. No less than annually, the Director of Administrative Services and the Assistant Director of Finance will present to the City Council all proposed write offs above \$5,000 where collection efforts have been exhausted. Amounts due under \$5,000 will be written off if requested by the Revenue Manager and approved by the Assistant Director of Finance.

A separate policy on writing off bad debt has been adopted by the City Council and is located on the City website.

17. A Long-Term General Financial Plan Will Be Maintained

Background - The long-term financial health of the City and the ability to provide services and a quality of life for the City's residents depends on the actions that City officials take. To help guide the decisions of City officials where the decisions impact the long-term finances of the City, a plan that identifies adopted general strategies for the long-term financial strength of the City is helpful, if not essential, to the long-term financial success of the City. The general financial plan would be specific enough to determine whether or not a particular proposal is consistent with the plan.

Policy - The City will continue to develop and update our long-term financial plan. The plan will outline general approaches the City should follow over the long-term to maintain and increase the ability of the City to provide services through maintaining and increasing revenues, growing the City's economy for the purpose of revenue generation, and controlling and managing the cost of services and the method of delivery of services. This plan will identify and discuss unfunded liabilities and other deferred costs such as maintenance. A plan or options will be identified to address them. This plan is not intended as a general statement of overall City strategies and goals, but rather a focused approach to long-term finances and to enhancing the economic strength of the City to generate more revenues and resources for services. The plan may be integrated into an overall set of goals and strategies for the City such as the City Council Action Plan. The City Council will modify the plan as it desires and adopt it as a general guideline for future financial and economic direction. The plan is to be reviewed and updated no less frequently than every five years.

18. Financial Policies Will Be Periodically Reviewed

Background - Financial policies need to be periodically reviewed to ensure that they do not become out-of-date and also to help reinforce compliance with the policies.

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Policy – Financial policies will be reviewed by the City Council every three years or more frequently, if appropriate. The City Manager will report annually on any noncompliance with the policies.

19. Procedures and Practices Are to Be Consistent with Financial Policy

Background – Financial policies are high level expressions of direction. Implementation of policies requires detailed procedures and practices.

Policy – Policy implementation procedures and practices designed and implemented by the City Manager and any associated administrative procedures and practices shall be consistent with the adopted City Council policies.