

Financial Management of the City

OVERVIEW

Strong financial management is the underpinning of City operations. Clear financial policies and practices provide a framework within which the City is able to safeguard the present, meet its obligations, and position itself for the future.

As the City's Chief Executive Officer, the Mayor directs the City's financial operations and has general supervision of and control over the City's boards, commissions, officers, and departments.

The City operates under a cabinet form of government. This structure helps to facilitate the execution of mayoral priorities and the day-to-day executive and administrative business of the City.

The following departments are included in the Administration & Finance Cabinet and have major roles in the fiscal management of the City:

- The Treasury Department collects all revenues due to the City and pays all amounts due for payrolls and outside vendors. The Treasury Department prudently manages the investment of City funds and prioritizes the safety of such investments.
- The Auditing Department prepares the City's annual financial statements, implements fiscal controls over departmental spending, provides technical assistance to departments, and reviews and processes all financial transactions for accuracy, completeness, and compliance.
- The Assessing Department is responsible for the valuation and

assessment of all real and personal property in the City for the purpose of taxation.

- The Office of Budget Management coordinates the analysis and presentation of the Mayor's operating budget and capital plan, assembles, analyzes, and presents data with respect to revenue and debt management, and facilitates the establishment and use of data to analyze performance.
- The Procurement Department procures all supplies, materials, and equipment, selects vendors through public bidding and processes purchase orders and contracts.

The Cabinet also includes the Office of Human Resources and the Office of Labor Relations. With employee compensation and health benefits comprising over three quarters of the City's total appropriation, the management of these policy areas within a broader context promotes coordination and accountability across City government.

STRATEGIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Maintaining a healthy financial base that fully supports City services according to mayoral priorities requires both careful planning and proactive management. This work is reflected in restructuring City services in order to streamline operations, gaining improved operational efficiencies from financial management systems, securing sound recurring revenues, and making responsible spending adjustments in light of any revenue growth limitations in

order to achieve a balanced budget. Strong financial management provides a framework within which the City is able to safeguard the present and position itself for the future.

Balanced Responsible Budgets

In accordance with state law, the City develops a balanced budget every year. The Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) approves property tax rates during the tax certification process governed under General Laws Chapter 59, Section 23. This approval ensures that all cities and towns have balanced budgets and that tax levies are within the limits set by Proposition 2 ½ (see *Revenue Estimates and Analysis* section of Volume I for detail on Prop. 2 ½). Appropriations, fixed costs, and any prior year deficits along with the approved property tax levy, estimated local revenues, and available prior year surpluses must be in balance in order to obtain DOR authorization to issue property tax bills.

Healthy Credit Profile

In February 2019, Standard & Poor's and Moody's affirmed their AAA and Aaa bond ratings, respectively, the highest possible to achieve. These ratings reflect Boston's sound fiscal management of a stable financial position and the City's substantial and economically diverse tax base.

This superior credit quality allows the City to borrow new money and refinance existing debt at extremely attractive interest rates. In March 2019, the City sold a par amount of \$145.1 million general obligation bonds which resulted in proceeds of \$170.9 million.

Maximizing Return on Investment

The City has articulated a vision to make finance a high performing organization in supporting and serving the departments and citizens of Boston. By making daily operations more efficient, using leading business practices, spending more time on value-added activities, improving customer service while maintaining appropriate

controls, and engaging the next generation of finance leaders, this City has been at the forefront of municipal finance.

Stable Revenue Base

Over 85 percent of recurring general fund revenue comes from the property tax and state aid. The continued net decline in state aid, the City's second largest single source of revenue, highlights the risk of relying on any one source of revenue. The City protects and grows its revenue base through the expansion of current revenue sources and the pursuit of diversified revenue sources that fit well with its economic strengths.

The City's tax base has experienced significant growth. Based on assessed values as of January 1, 2019, Fiscal 2020 assessments totaled \$176.2 billion, a 76% increase over Fiscal 2014 assessments.

Multi-Year Budget Plan

The City develops a financial forecast as part of the yearly budget process. Preparing a multi-year planning horizon provides time for the Administration to make adjustments and/or policy decisions that may be necessary.

FINANCIAL POLICIES, PROCEDURES & CONTROLS

Pursuant to state law mandates and policy initiatives, the City has well-established policies and internal controls to govern its financial operations effectively. These policies and controls are designed to maximize revenue collections, safeguard assets, monitor both operating and capital spending, evaluate infrastructure needs, and enhance the City's internal control of its business procedures. The major components of the City's system of financial management controls and relevant financial policies are discussed below.

Expenditure Controls

The City operates under several statutory financial control systems which are summarized in the Statutes and Ordinances

section in Volume I. Along with conservative revenue estimates and strong budgetary flexibility, the City is able to maintain a solid financial position. The City monitors spending and all transactions go through a budget-check process prior to procurement. Maintaining tight central expenditure controls allows for critical review of all non-personnel spending as well as the ability to adjust to fiscal changes or trends. Additionally, the Office of Budget Management prepares a monthly variance report, updating all departments expected year-end position using actual information, and maintains continuous dialogue with departments throughout the year.

Position Review Committee (PRC)

The PRC is comprised of the Chief Financial Officer, the Human Resources Director, and the City’s Budget Director. In place for over a decade, the committee serves to strictly control and monitor all hiring. In a budget where people and the benefits they carry account for over three quarters of total appropriations, this committee has been instrumental in maximizing City resources.

Debt Management

The City continually evaluates the potential impact of debt issuance on cash flow, credit, and statutory debt capacity. The Treasury Department manages all City borrowings, focusing on the timing of them in order to take advantage of favorable market conditions. The City’s cash flow is anchored by the quarterly billing of the property tax and the monthly receipt of state aid distributions. Treasury manages this cash flow wisely, obviating the need to borrow for operating purposes. The Treasury Department also ensures adherence to the City’s conservative debt policies, including the rapid repayment of debt where at least 40% of overall debt is repaid within 5 years and 70% in 10 years, as well as a 7% ceiling on debt service as a percentage of general fund expenditures. The City imposes a 20% ceiling on variable debt and has no variable debt outstanding at this time. Lease-purchase financing of

equipment with a three-to-seven year useful life is used to replace front-line equipment and upgrade technology.

Capital Planning

A capital planning process aligned with the annual operating budget cycle allows for the regular reassessment of capital needs, the refinement of projections, and the update of the City’s rolling five-year capital plan. The City prioritizes capital requests and takes into account the financial requirements and timing of these requests in order to recommend the responsible allocation of resources.

The City primarily funds its capital plan through the issuance of general obligation bonds. The size of the City’s bond issue is consistent with the City’s financial management policies regarding debt levels, debt service, and rate of debt retirement.

Fund Balance Policy

The City maintains adequate levels of fund balance to mitigate current and future risks – a generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) Unassigned Fund Balance in the General Fund that is 15% or higher than the current fiscal year’s GAAP General Fund Operating Expenditures, and a Budgetary Unassigned Fund Balance at 10% or higher than Budgetary Operating Expenses.

Budgetary Fund Balance

Date Certified	Annual Amount Certified	Amount Appropriated from Certification*
Jan. 2007	63.1	25.0
Apr. 2008	110.2	35.0
Mar. 2009	121.2	45.0
Mar. 2010	139.0	45.0
Mar. 2011	117.8	30.0
Mar. 2012	142.8	-
Mar. 2013	217.3	40.0
Mar. 2014	185.3	40.0
Mar. 2015	239.4	40.0
Mar. 2016	280.0	48.0**
Mar. 2017	337.8	40.0

Mar. 2018	346.5	40.0
May 2019	375.0	40.0

*Not all amounts appropriated were used

**Includes \$8 m capital appropriation

Notes: (\$millions)

Table 1

Budgetary fund balance can be appropriated for use during the fiscal year. Budgetary fund balance is more commonly referred to as “free cash” when used this way. This item is most simply described as the portion of available reserves, generated to a considerable degree by annual operating surpluses, which the City can responsibly appropriate for spending. The appropriation of Budgetary Fund Balance or Free Cash certified by the MA Department of Revenue (DOR) is only considered to offset certain fixed costs (pensions, OPEB) or to fund extraordinary and non-recurring events as determined by the City Auditor.

Prior year certifications and the amount used or appropriated from each certification are in Table 1.

In March 2019, the Director of Accounts certified that the amount of funds available for appropriation (“free cash”), as of July 1, 2018, was \$375.0 million. The FY21 budget assumes the use of \$40 million in Budgetary Fund Balance from this certification. If the Budgetary Fund Balance is not required to fund expenses it reverts back to the pool of funds eligible to be certified as free cash. Budgetary Fund Balance was not required to be used in FY18 and FY19.

Investment Policy

Investment policies are defined in Chapter 643 of the Acts of 1983 (“The City of Boston Bond and Minibond Procedure Act”), Chapter 107 of the Acts of 1991, and Chapter 44 of the Massachusetts General Laws. The City’s policy for the investment of operating funds prioritizes security, liquidity, and yield. Certain limitations placed on the City’s investment activities or operational protocols are self-imposed so as to make sound, timely, and safe investment decisions. As a matter of practice, the City tends to limit its investments to repurchase

agreements, money markets and certificates of deposit, all of which are collateralized by U.S. Government obligations and are held with a third party.

Contracting Procedures

The Uniform Procurement Act (the UPA), Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 30B, creates uniform procedures for the contracting of services and supplies by all municipalities in the Commonwealth. The City has implemented internal processes to conform its contracting procedures to the requirements of the UPA and utilizes an online eProcurement system to further support these compliance efforts.

Tax Collections

Tax collection remedies as prescribed by statute are utilized when taxes become delinquent. The City’s ability to secure its right to foreclose by recording its tax title lien at the Registry of Deeds is the most effective tool available for payment enforcement.

The property tax collection rate was 99.3% of the FY19 gross tax levy as of June 30, 2019.

A Taxpayer Referral and Assistance Center provides “one-stop” service on tax-related matters and the City offers an on-line payment option for taxpayer convenience. Parcel-specific information as well as payment history is also available on-line.

Pension Management

The City’s employees are not participants in the federal social security system. Instead, they participate in a contributory defined benefit retirement system that is administered by the Boston Retirement System (BRS), of which the City is the largest member. The BRS provides pension benefits to retired City employees under a state contributory retirement statute and is administered by a Retirement Board comprised of five members: the City Auditor, who serves ex-officio; two individuals elected by members of the system; an individual chosen by the Mayor;

and an individual chosen by the other four members or appointed by the Mayor, if a selection is not agreed upon within 30 days of a vacancy.

The BRS performs a full valuation every two years to determine the total system liability and assets and the annual funding requirement for future years.

The City's pension liability is currently 76.92% funded and is on track to reduce the unfunded liability to zero by 2025, fifteen years prior to the legally required funding date of 2040. The BRS hires an investment manager who oversees the various fund managers of all (non-teacher) pension assets.

Other Post-Employment Benefits

Similar to pensions, employees earn post-employment health care and life insurance benefits (OPEB) over their years of active service, with those benefits being received during retirement. The City, including the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC), has an unfunded liability for these benefits of \$2.40 billion, as of the most recent independent actuarial valuation on June 30, 2017. The size of this liability is largely influenced by changes to retiree health benefits, the City's annual additional contribution to fund the liability, and the discount rate assumed.

While the City is required by law to make an annual contribution toward reducing its unfunded pension liability, there is no such requirement for retiree health and life insurance benefits. In FY08, the City followed new Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) requirements to identify and disclose this estimated liability, and also began voluntary annual allocations to fund the liability. Annual allocations are retained in an irrevocable Trust Fund, authorized through the City's acceptance of M.G.L. Chapter 32B section 20. As of December 31, 2019, the Fund had a balance of \$698.9 million.

The annual Actuarially Determined Contribution (ADC) for the City to

significantly reduce the OPEB liability is projected at \$226.9 million in FY21, as shown in Table 2. \$195.6 million (86%) of this amount will be funded through a combination of pay-as-you-go benefit payments for current retirees, a \$40 million FY21 allocation by the City to the Trust, and an additional \$2.25 million deposit by the BPHC into the Trust.

FY21 Annual Actuarially Determined Contribution (ADC) for OPEB Liability

Total ADC		\$226.9	
Projected Benefit Payments by City	\$153.3		
Contribution to OPEB Trust	\$42.3	%ADC	
Total FY21 Payments	\$195.6	86%	
Difference	(\$31.3)		
<i>\$ in millions</i>			

Table 2

As noted above, the City is currently on a schedule that targets reducing its pension liability by 2025, and then plans on redirecting some portion of its annual pension contribution to further reduce the OPEB liability. However, this schedule is illustrative only of the currently expected funding schedule, and actual circumstances will likely vary from current assumptions.

Risk Finance

The City's risk-related costs related to legal liability claims, property losses, workplace injuries, and employee health care are managed by central departments, such as Law and Human Resources, in addition to individual operating departments. The Office of Budget Management's Risk Finance unit works to maximize the effectiveness of these departmental efforts by reviewing cost trends, assisting in improvements, and implementing the City's risk financing strategy.

The City's risk financing strategy budgets for predictable levels of risk-related costs through the general fund, except for self-insured health care costs which are financed through trust funds established

under MGL Ch 32b S. 3A. A catastrophic risk reserve is maintained for unexpected large losses, which allows the City to strategically purchase high deductible commercial insurance for specific exposures and minimum premium.

In addition to specific targeted insurance policies, the City purchases catastrophic property insurance for \$100 million all risk coverage, after a \$10 million deductible. The City partners with FM Global as its property insurer, to take advantage of FM Global's engineering and loss control expertise in improving the resilience of the City's buildings against all types of risk.

Reserve

As required by law since 1986, the City has maintained a reserve fund equal to 2 1/2% of the preceding year's appropriations for all City departments except the School Department. The fund may be applied to extraordinary and unforeseen expenditures after June 1 in any fiscal year with the approval of the Mayor and the City Council. To date, this budgetary reserve has not been utilized. As of June 30, 2019, the reserve fund had a balance of \$36.5 million.

Annual Audit/Management Letters

The City consistently receives unqualified opinions on the audit of its Basic Financial Statements and the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association for its Comprehensive Annual Financial Report. The City's independent auditors also deliver a yearly management letter containing comments and recommendations on internal financial controls.

Financial Accounting Systems

The Boston Administrative Information System (BAIS), an integrated financial and human resources management system, supports financial management and improves operational efficiency. These systems support the rigorous monitoring

and reporting requirements enforced by the City.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Performance Management and Program Evaluation

The City's performance management and evaluation program aims to create a sustainable and reliable system to capture the core functions of City departments and citywide strategic goals, assist in the decision-making process, identify areas of improvement, and effectively communicate performance results to a broad range of stakeholders.

Using performance management as its foundation, the program encourages organizational changes and operational improvements that increase the effectiveness and productivity of City departments. The program does this by providing reliable, objective, and independent information and reports to City managers about department performance and operations.

Operational Reviews

The City systematically engages in independent operational reviews and other planning efforts aimed at making government more efficient in order to address areas needing renewed attention.

Energy Management

An Energy Management Unit develops design standards and implements measures that enhance the energy efficiency of the City's new construction and capital improvement projects.

- The conversion of street lights to newer fixtures using Light Emitting Diode ("LED") technology has achieved significant operational savings.
- In FY19, the City began implementing improvements to achieve utility cost savings at City facilities, under an initiative entitled "Renew Boston

Trust.” The first phase was completed in FY20, the second phase is underway, and a third phase remains in development. The City plans to finance the program with general obligation bonds with debt service expected to be offset by the long-term energy savings guaranteed by the ESCO.

Table 4 shows a Statement of Revenues & Expenses and Changes in Fund Balance for FY17 & FY18 (actual) – FY19 (budgeted).

Financial statements for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2019 are expected to be available in late fall.

AUDITING & BUDGETING PRACTICES

The City prepares its comprehensive financial reports in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). However, accounting practices established by the Commonwealth’s Department of Revenue, the so-called “budgetary basis” which is a modified accrual method of accounting, is used in the annual general fund budget and property tax certification process. Budgetary basis departs from GAAP in the following ways:

- (a) Real and personal property taxes are recorded as revenue when levied (budgetary), as opposed to when susceptible to accrual (GAAP).
- (b) Encumbrances and continuing appropriations are recorded as the equivalent of expenditures (budgetary), as opposed to a reservation of fund balance (GAAP).
- (c) Certain activities and transactions are presented as components of the general fund (budgetary), rather than as separate funds (GAAP).
- (d) Prior years’ deficits and utilized available funds from prior years’ surpluses are recorded as expenditure and revenue items (budgetary), but have no effect on GAAP expenditures and revenues.

In addition, there are certain differences in classifications between revenues, expenditures and transfers. The reconciliation in Table 3 summarizes the differences between budgetary and GAAP basis accounting principles for the year ended June 30, 2018.

**Adjustments Between Budgetary Basis and
GAAP Basis of Accounting for FY19**

(in thousands)

	Revenue	Expenditures	Other Financing Sources, Net	Excess (Deficiency) of Revenue and Other Financing Sources
As reported on a budgetary basis	3,371,145	3,348,534	-	22,611
Adjustments:				
Revenues to modified accrual basis	35,400	-	-	35,400
Expenditures, encumbrances and accruals, net	-	(46,545)	-	46,545
On-behalf contribution for teachers pension	143,146	143,146	-	-
Reclassifications:				
Other transfers	-	(1,455)	1,455	-
As reported on a GAAP basis	3,549,691	3,443,680	1,455	104,556

Table 3

FUND STRUCTURE AND USE

The accounts of the City are organized on a fund basis. Each fund is considered to be a separate accounting entity and complies with finance-related legal requirements. All of the funds of the City can be divided into three categories: Governmental Funds, Proprietary Funds, and Fiduciary Funds.

The City has four governmental funds - the General Fund, Special Revenue Fund, Capital Projects Fund and all non-major governmental funds in an "Other" category. The General Fund is the only fund for which a budget is legally adopted and is used to account for all revenues, expenditures, and other financial resources except those required to be accounted for in other funds.

The Special Revenue Fund accounts for proceeds that are legally restricted for specific purposes. This fund accounts for federal and state grants and also money that has been set aside by state statute and can be used to support the City's general fund operations.

The Capital Projects Fund accounts for financial resources, primarily from the issuance of bonds, used for the acquisition or construction of major capital facilities.

The Proprietary Funds are used to show activities that operate more like those of commercial enterprises. The City's only

proprietary is its Internal Service Fund, which accounts for the City's self-insurance for health benefits.

Fiduciary Funds are used to account for resources held for the benefit of parties outside City government and are not available to support the City's own programs. The City's fiduciary funds are the Pension Trust Fund, the Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) Liability Trust Fund, as well as Private Purpose Trust Funds.

The City's operating and capital budgets are also supported by available governmental funds transferred and appropriated from other available funds. The City may appropriate yearly parking meter revenues (Special Revenue Fund) to support the Transportation Department and to support transportation capital projects and cemetery trust monies (Other Governmental Funds) to support the City's maintenance of its public cemeteries.

These tables provide a history as well as projected changes in fund balances for the available funds used to support the City's operating budget.

The table at the end of this chapter shows the appropriations that make up the City's FY21 budget.

CITY OF BOSTON
BUDGET SUMMARY - APPROPRIATED FUNDS

(Dollars in Millions)

	Direct General Fund	Parking Meter Fund Transfer	Cemetery Trust Fund Transfer	Budgetary Fund Balance	Total FY20 General Fund Budget
REVENUES					
Property Tax	2,636.49				2,636.49
Property Tax Overlay	(14.00)				(14.00)
Excises	187.54				187.54
Fines	70.72				70.72
Interest On Investments	8.00				8.00
Payments in Lieu of Taxes	49.28				49.28
Urban Redev Chapter 121A	30.70				30.70
Department Revenue	63.24				63.24
Licenses & Permits	61.96				61.96
Penalties & Interest	9.00				9.00
Available Funds	0.00	30.00	0.95		30.95
State Aid	473.61				473.61
Teachers Pension Reimbursement	0.00				0.00
Total Recurring Revenue	3,576.53	30.00	0.95		3,607.48
Budgetary Fund Balance	0.00			40.00	40.00
Total Revenues	3,576.53	30.00	0.95	40.00	3,647.48
EXPENDITURES					
City Appropriations	1,379.91	30.00	0.95		1,410.86
Public Health Commission	102.47				102.47
School Department	1,258.63				1,258.63
Reserve for Collective Bargaining	3.00				3.00
Other Post Employment Benefits	0.00			40.00	40.00
Total Appropriations	2,744.01	30.00	0.95	40.00	2,814.96
Pensions	292.09				292.09
Debt Service	205.63				205.63
Charter School Tuition	231.96				231.96
MBTA	93.35				93.35
Other State Assessments	5.65				5.65
Suffolk County Sheriff Dept	3.85				3.85
Reserve	0.00				0.00
Total Fixed Costs	832.52				832.52
Total Expenditures	3,576.53	30.00	0.95	40.00	3,647.48

Numbers may not add due to rounding