SIGNIFICANT FINANCIAL AND BUDGETARY POLICIES

The basic policies related to the City's financial and budgetary policies were formalized on November 10, 1987. These policies were expanded in subsequent years with the adoption of the Integrated Budgeting and Planning Resolution (88-87). The most recent relevant ordinance discussing this part of the City's financial policies is Ordinance No. 2003-474 dated May 21, 2003. The following sections entitled Operating Programs, Capital and Debt Management, and Accounting, Auditing and Financial Planning are largely excerpted from this ordinance and subsequent budget ordinances that have amended these policies:

Operating Policies

Revenues:

- Current revenues/resources will be sufficient to support current expenditures/expenses.
- Each Enterprise Fund will maintain revenues to support the full (direct and indirect) cost of services provided.
- An annual review of all fees and charges will be conducted to determine the extent to which the full cost of associated services is being recovered by revenues.

Expenditures/Expenses:

- The Mayor has the authority to transfer funds to and from the budget accounts within any department without limitation. In addition, the Mayor can authorize the transfer of funds from one department to another department within the same fund; however, such transfer cannot exceed 5% of the department's budget expenditure account group.
- All retirement and employee benefit systems will be financed in a manner to systematically fund liabilities. The City will assure that sufficient funds are provided to pay for current service plus interest on unfunded liabilities plus amortization of the unfunded liabilities over a program period.
- Recurring expenditures/expenses are to be funded with recurring revenue sources.
- The Beginning Fund Balance/Equity reflected in the Budget shall automatically be adjusted to the amount of the Ending Fund Balance/Equity as reported in the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the prior year. The revised Beginning Fund Balance/Equity shall thereafter be used to calculate the Ending Fund Balance/Equity. This policy applies to all funds for which an annual budget is adopted by the governing body.
- The Unassigned Fund Balance in the General Fund shall be maintained at a level sufficient to provide for temporary financing of unforeseen needs of an emergency nature and to permit orderly adjustment to changes resulting from the termination of revenue sources. The level of the Unassigned Fund Balance in the General Fund will be a minimum of 5% of total expenditures less debt service, beginning not later than Fiscal Year 1989. To the extent that funds in the General Fund Balance exceed 7.5% of total expenses less debt service, the excess funds are available upon appropriation for non-recurring expenses.

Capital and Debt Management Policies

- Any capital project or equipment funded through the issuance of bonds will be financed for a period not to exceed the expected life of the project/equipment.
- Weighted average general obligation bond maturities will be kept at or below 12 years.
- Annual general obligation debt service (contribution) will not exceed 20% of the total General Fund revenue, excluding state and federal grants.
- The City's practice has been to maintain no more than 20% of the total outstanding debt for each type of debt in a variable rate structure.
- The City will issue short-term securities for the purposes of providing: 1) interim financing for long-term capital projects; 2) financing of short-term assets at or near the useful life; 3) interim cash-flow/working capital needs as they arise; and, 4) to reduce the overall interest cost of debt financing of the City.

Accounting, Auditing and Financial Planning Policies

- Financial statements are prepared in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP).
- An annual audit is performed by an independent public accounting firm in accordance with GAAP and their opinion will be included in the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report.
- Full disclosure is provided in the Annual Financial Statements and in Official Statements relating to bond sales.

These policy statements are intended to serve as guidelines for financial practices and budgetary formulation and administration. Therefore, they have been applied in establishing specific assumptions and methods used in preparing the FY2015 Budget, as exhibited by the following methods:

Basis of Budgeting and Accounting

In general, the basis of budgeting and the basis of accounting used in the preparation of the City's annual financial report are the same for all governmental funds (general fund, special revenue fund, debt service fund, and capital projects) without exception. Revenues and expenditures are budgeted consistent with the City's financial statements, which are prepared in accordance with GAAP for all governmental funds.

Governmental funds are accounted for on a modified accrual basis. This means that revenues are recognized in the accounting period in which they become available and measurable. Expenditures are recognized in the accounting period in which the fund liability is incurred, with the exception of long-term liability.

Significant receivables (revenues) and liabilities (expenditures) are recorded in the prior year's budget up to sixty days after fiscal year end if they represent earned income or expenditures as of June 30, the last day of the fiscal year. This includes the cost of employees' time as well as supplies, services, and equipment delivered by June 30.

For Enterprise Funds, the budgeting and accounting basis are the same except for depreciation and non-current expenses. Enterprise Funds are accounted for on a full accrual basis. Revenues and expenses are recorded when they are earned/incurred. Enterprise Funds focus on expenses related to maintenance and operations, equipment purchases, and exclude depreciation and other allocations related to income determination. Revenues received and expenses paid for goods and services delivered by June 30 are credited or charged to the current fiscal year's budget.

Encumbrance accounting is used to reserve funds committed to vendors for supplies, services and equipment throughout the year in all funds. However, encumbrances for items not delivered by June 30 are canceled and re-established against the new fiscal year budget for all operating budgets. Encumbrances do not establish expenditures/expenses or liabilities. Appropriations and encumbrances for capital project funds are maintained in effect until they are liquidated.

Reserves

In every budget since FY1982, the City's fund balance level has been a critical component of the City's financial management program. Likewise, the General Debt Service Fund balances have been budgeted to provide adequate reserves for debt service payments in the first seven months of the subsequent fiscal year. Pension fund contributions and employee health care costs have been funded with reserve components through the budget as well. These budgetary policies were recognized by City Council in the adoption of the financial policies previously mentioned.

Reserves exist in two forms:

- Those specifically created by ordinance, and
- Those maintained as unappropriated or unassigned ending fund balance.

Most of the City's budgetary reserves take the form of ending fund balances and are consequently the result of financial activity as presented in the City's financial statements.

General Fund Reserves

The following table shows the ending unassigned fund balance as well as the actual year end maintenance and operating costs for preceding fiscal years, the estimated year end costs for the current fiscal year and the proposed year end costs for the subsequent fiscal year.

Historical Data FY1995 – FY2015

General Fund Available Fund Balances
($ thousands)

Fiscal Year	Unassigned Ending Fund Balance	M&O Expenditures
FY1995	50,682	849,766
FY1996	69,579	864,668
FY1997	84,105	903,228
FY1998	106,856	956,893
FY1999	80,409	1,030,235
FY2000	66,590	1,064,160
FY2001	79,432	1,105,408
FY2002	80,335	1,206,160
FY2003	83,027	1,199,766
FY2004	88,659	1,235,994
FY2005	120,042	1,279,879
FY2006	175,832	1,368,746
FY2007	234,535	1,459,076
FY2008	253,514	1,567,484
FY2009	236,275	1,668,700
FY2010	165,383	1,676,367
FY2011	129,040	1,680,038
FY2012	171,677	1,590,044
FY2013 Actual	202,842	1,705,450
FY2014 Estimate	199,782	1,841,524
FY2015 Budget	154,783	1,983,344

Debt Service Fund Reserves

The General Debt Service Fund reserves exist to ensure City bondholders that the City of Houston has set aside sufficient resources to meet debt service requirements.

A seven-month reserve is provided for fixed rate obligations. This reserve covers principal and interest amount payable in the first seven months of the following fiscal year for those issues which are funded from ad valorem taxes. This seven-month reserve policy has existed since FY1983 when the current fiscal year (July 1 to June 30) and the tax collection payment date (January 31) were established.

The City is required to maintain additional reserves due to changing interest rates on its variable rate debt (VRD). Reserves on VRDs are based on the amount by which fifteen percent (or the capped rate of the program, if less than 15%) exceeds the budgeted interest rate on the outstanding variable rate debt during the fiscal year. The City also issues variable rate commercial paper notes. The calculation for reserves on commercial paper notes are based on seven months interest on the projected average balance at six percent plus the difference between a cap of six percent and the budgeted interest rate on the amount projected to be outstanding during the twelve month period following the initial seven months. The reserve requirement may not be necessary in the case that the reserves are covered under a credit agreement.

Enterprise Fund Reserves

The City also maintains Enterprise Fund reserves, which in most cases, include:

- One to two months' operating budget (8.33% per month of annual maintenance and operating expenses).

- Amounts sufficient to pay the maximum annual debt service on outstanding bonds. The City satisfies the reserve requirement for the Enterprise Funds through a combination of cash and surety insurance.

Other Fund Reserves

- Pension Funds – The City makes annual contributions to its three employee pension funds in accordance with state law or with "meet and confer" agreements with the trustees of a pension system as authorized by state law. The annual contributions to each plan are based on actuarial analyses, which are performed by independent actuarial firms selected by the respective pension fund board trustees. Actuarial analyses on each of the three systems must be performed at least once every three years.

  The actuarial assumptions and techniques used in the development of each actuarial valuation are discussed and approved by the respective board of trustees in an open meeting and may also be reviewed by an actuarial firm chosen by the City administration. Details of these assumptions and techniques are summarized in each actuarial valuation which becomes a public document once it is adopted by the board of trustees of a fund.

- Long-Term Disability – The Long-Term Disability Plan is designed to provide City employees with an income protection plan in the event they become disabled. The Long-Term Disability Fund was established in FY1991 as an Internal Service Fund to budget and account for the revenues, expenses, and outstanding liabilities.

  Funds are provided to fully fund the outstanding and projected future liabilities from existing and unreported claims. These reserves will be adjusted annually based on an actuarial study of the funds.

Workers' Compensation Administration

The potential liability for the City employees due to injury while on the job is increasing as the definition of work-related injuries is expanded. To handle this increasingly complex subject, the City has taken a proactive approach to its administration of the workers' compensation program. Resources from accident prevention and loss control programs were consolidated to enhance the City's efficiency in handling these matters. Accident prevention works closely with loss control to develop programs to reduce the City's exposure in this area. The inclusion of this area in risk management as a revolving fund has allowed the City to focus attention on quantifying the City's liability on existing and unreported claims.

Emphasis is placed on targeting coordinated accident prevention initiatives, team claims handling approach, enhanced coordination with customer departments, and early intervention to facilitate employees return to work. These efforts should result in decreased amounts paid by the City for workers' compensation claims.

Through a needs assessment exercise, the Central Safety Office is committed to tailoring its activities to meet the needs of the customer departments. This is being accomplished by designing programs specific to the department activities and internal resources.

Property and Casualty

The potential liability resulting from injuries, property damage, and torts, which involve City employees, necessitates the property and casualty function. Property and Liability insurance protects the City's financial and physical assets from acts of God and other causes or changes. Contributions to this fund are provided by the General Fund, Enterprise Funds and proceeds from Claims and Judgment Bonds.

Interfund Transfers

Transfers between funds are an integral part of the budget. There are four types of transfers.

- Direct services provided by a department in one fund to a department in another fund, resulting in:
  - Expenditures in the provider fund for all costs incurred in rendering the service;
  - Revenues in interfund billing revenue account in the provider fund; and
  - Expenditures in a single expenditure account in the recipient fund.

The cost billed includes a proportionate share of overhead costs, as well as all direct costs attributable to the service provided. Major services billed directly are as follows:

Service	Provider	Recipient
Airport fire suppression	Fire Department	Aviation Department
Airport police protection	Police Department	Aviation Department
Legal services	Legal Department	Various departments/funds
Land acquisition	Public Works & Engineering (PWE) Engineering Construction and Real Estate (ECRE) Legal Department	Capital Improvement Project Funds
Design and engineering	PWE/ECRE General Services Department (GSD)	Capital Improvement Project Funds, Grant and Enterprise Funds
Signal installation	PWE	Street and Bridge bond funds
Building maintenance services	GSD	Various other departments (excluding Aviation) funds
Payroll	Administration and Regulatory Affairs (ARA)	Various other departments/funds

- Indirect costs are billed to the Enterprise, Special Revenue, and Grant funds of the City to recover each fund's proportionate share of the City's central administrative and support costs, which are originally borne by the General Fund.

  These costs are based on the annual cost allocation plan prepared by the Finance Department. The City's central service departments provide workload data used in the plan. Costs are taken from the City's audited financial statements. Each administration and support department's full cost, including overhead (i.e., rent, computer support, fringe benefits, and internal administrative costs), is calculated and allocated to all departments that receive the service(s). Certain line items in the Enterprise and Special Revenue Funds reflect the payment of these costs to the General Fund.

- Transfers of Enterprise Fund and operating reserves to sinking funds or reserves for renewal and replacement, maintenance and operations, and debt service are budgeted in the operating budget of each Enterprise Fund.

- Transfers from the General and Water and Sewer Funds to the General Debt Service Fund are based upon each fund's allocation share of the annual debt service requirements.

  - The Water and Sewer Fund and General Fund each pay a portion of previously issued water district debt assumed by the City in annexations, based upon the proportionate amount of assets annexed that fall into three categories: water facilities and improvements, sewer facilities and improvements, and drainage or other general improvements. After each annexation, the City's auditors, accounting, financial management, and utility management staff assume the records and facilities of the annexed districts. The proportions used to allocate each district's outstanding debt are developed in proportion to the then current value of the district's assets.

  - Previously, contract tax obligation payments were paid by the Water and Sewer Fund (Northwest Houston Water Supply Corporation obligations) because those obligations were incurred strictly to provide additional water and sewer system capacity. During FY1994 these obligations were refunded with general obligation refunding bonds. The Water and Sewer Fund continues to pay the refunding debt service related to these obligations.

  - Since 1986, the City has refunded some outstanding annexed water district bonds by issuing new general obligation refunding bonds. A proportionate share of the new debt service resulting from these sales are allocated to Water and Sewer Fund because the annexed water district assets are still held by those systems as a result of the original annexations. After this allocation is made, the Water and Sewer Fund realizes a proportionate share of the savings from the refunding.

  - The General Fund transfer to the General Debt Service Fund is calculated after all of the aforementioned allocations have been made. The transfers are set at a level to ensure that all existing and anticipated debt service obligations will be met and reserve requirements are satisfied.