

Town of Needham  
Capital Improvement Plan  
January 2011

**RETAINED EARNINGS POLICY FOR THE SOLID WASTE ENTERPRISE FUND**

It shall be the policy of the Board of Selectmen to maintain a level of unreserved retained earnings sufficient to address the financing of: working capital; unanticipated and emergency expenditures; revenue shortfalls; depreciation expense; pollution control surcharges; and unanticipated increases in the recycling costs.

Unreserved retained earnings are cumulative surplus funds, as certified by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue. In proposing the annual Solid Waste Disposal/Recycling operating budget, the Board of Selectmen shall recommend to Town Meeting the use of retained earnings that are available for appropriation by Town Meeting to support any capital expense of the enterprise or to reduce user charges, or both, as provided by State Law.

The rationale for, and the calculation of, unreserved retained earnings to be maintained by the Town are described below and are referred to as the "Liquidity Method" and the "Credit Quality Method." Retained earnings targets shall be calculated using both methods, and shall be determined using the method which represents the higher number in any given year. Under the Liquidity Method, the total amount of retained earnings to be maintained shall be equal to 80 percent of the sum of the individual calculations for working capital, unanticipated and emergency expenditures, revenue shortfalls, pollution control surcharges, and, unanticipated increases in the recycling costs and 100 percent of cumulative depreciation expense net any amounts appropriated for equipment replacement. The factor of 80 percent is based on the assumption that the likelihood of all factors occurring in one fiscal year is small; therefore there is no need to maintain one hundred percent of the calculated level of retained earnings. The use of a factor of 100 percent for depreciation expense is based on the assumption that all of these funds will be needed for equipment replacement. Under the Credit Quality Method, the total amount of retained earnings should not be less than fifteen percent of the operating revenue of the most recent audited fiscal year.

**Liquidity Method**

Working Capital: For those periods where monthly expenses exceed available cash, the RTS enterprise must have access to working capital to finance operations. In the absence of retained earnings, operations may require the use of General Fund cash which would reduce General Fund cash available for investment, and consequently reduce General Fund Revenue. To avoid the use of General Fund cash as working capital for the RTS operation, retained earnings shall be maintained at a level to provide sufficient working capital to finance the operations of this enterprise fund. The amount retained for this purpose shall be equal to the average of the largest cumulative monthly operating deficit of the prior three years.

Further, any general fund support of the RTS enterprise fund shall be made on a 1/12 basis throughout the fiscal year to preclude the RTS fund's use of general fund cash before the need truly exists.

Reserve for Unanticipated and Emergency Expenditures: Retained earnings shall be maintained at a level sufficient to fund

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unanticipated or emergency capital or operating expenditures as recommended to the Board of Selectmen annually by the Director of the Department of Public Works and the Director of Finance.

Reserve for Revenue Shortfall: Annual RTS revenue is, in part, a function of the amount of solid waste disposed of by Town residents. If, in any year, the amount disposed is less than projected, a revenue shortfall may occur. Retained earnings shall be maintained at a level sufficient to offset any loss in revenue due to unanticipated decreases in disposal.

Reserve for Depreciation Expense: Annually, the Director of Finance shall procure from the Director of Public Works, an inventory of all capital equipment used to support the operation of the RTS. This list shall be comprised of those pieces of equipment that cost \$50,000 or less and will include the purchase price and estimated useful life of each piece. Based on this information, the annual depreciation expense for each piece shall be calculated and revenues shall be raised to finance this expense. At the end of each fiscal year, the amount of revenue raised to offset depreciation expense shall constitute a reservation of retained earnings for the future replacement of capital equipment and shall be added to existing reservations attributable to prior years' depreciation. The purpose of this policy is to limit annual increases or decreases in RTS fees to fund small capital replacement.

Reserve for Pollution Control Surcharge - The Town's contract with Wheelabrator/Millbury for the tipping of solid waste contains a provision that allows Wheelabrator/Millbury to impose a pollution control surcharge on the Town to recoup the costs of installing pollution control equipment required by state and federal regulatory agencies. Retained earnings shall be maintained at a level needed to finance one year of pollution control surcharges imposed on the Town. Based on a surcharge imposed in FY92, that level shall be calculated annually at an amount equal to 3% of the current tipping fee multiplied by the tonnage tipped at the Wheelabrator Facility in the prior fiscal year.

Reserve for Unanticipated Increases in the Recycling Market - Notwithstanding any contract the Town may have for the collection and disposal of recyclable material collected at the RTS, the volatile nature of the recycling market poses the possibility that any contractor with whom the Town has an agreement could go out of business on short notice, leaving no alternative but to pay current market prices for disposal of recyclables. This exposure shall be calculated annually by the Directors of Public Works and Finance and shall be based on a comparison of costs reflected in any of the Town's active recycling contracts and the spot market for tipping and hauling at the time of this annual assessment. The amount of the exposure shall be recommended to the Board of Selectmen as a reservation of retained earnings.

Restoration of depleted Retained Earnings: If, in any year, retained earnings fall below the targets established by this policy, it shall be the policy of the Board of Selectmen to set future rates to restore retained earnings to the target level over the following three year period.

*Approved by the Needham Board of Selectmen November, 1999; revised January 12, 2010*