

Town of Needham  
Capital Improvement Plan  
January 2012

**CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT POLICIES**

**A. General Provisions**

1. Capital items for the purpose of this Capital Improvement Plan shall be defined as follows:
  - Items requiring an expenditure of at least \$25,000 and having a useful life of more than five years.
  - Projects consisting of real property acquisitions, construction, capital asset improvements, long-life capital equipment, or major maintenance/repair of and existing capital item, as distinguished from a normal operating expenditure.
  - Items obtained under a long-term lease.
2. Town departments will submit spending requests that provide sufficient funding for adequate maintenance and orderly replacement of capital plant and equipment.
3. All assets will be maintained at a level that protects capital investment and minimizes maintenance and replacement costs.
4. All equipment replacement needs for the coming five years will be projected and the projection will be updated each year.
5. Future operating and maintenance costs for all new capital facilities will be fully costed out.

**B. Capital Improvement Fund**

1. In accordance with the provisions of M.G.L. c. 40 Section 5B, as amended by Section 14 of Chapter 46 of the Acts of 2003 and Section 19 of Chapter 140 of the Acts of 2003, the Town of Needham has established a General Fund Cash Capital Equipment and Facility Improvement Fund hereinafter referred to as the Capital Improvement Fund or CIF (Article 58/2004 ATM). The purpose of the CIF is to allow the Town to reserve funds to use for general fund cash capital.
2. Appropriations from the CIF are restricted to the following items for which the Town may borrow for a period of five years or more: the acquisition of new equipment; the replacement of existing equipment; and building and facility improvements which cost less than \$250,000.
3. Only General Fund capital items that have been identified in the CIP for a period of three (3) years or more, and that have been recommended in the Capital Improvement Plan for the current year, are eligible for funding from the CIF.
4. The CIF may be used to pay for recurring equipment replacement needs that have been identified in the CIP and funded in at least three (3) of the five (5) immediately preceding fiscal years.
5. Appropriations into the CIF and interest earnings on the Fund become part of the Fund.

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**C. Capital Facility Fund**

1. In accordance with the provisions of M.G.L. c. 40 Section 5B, as amended by Section 14 of Chapter 46 of the Acts of 2003, and as further amended by Section 19 of Chapter 140 of the Acts of 2003, the Town of Needham has established a Capital Facility Fund (Article 10/2007 ATM). The purpose of this Fund is to allow the Town, from time to time, by appropriation, to reserve funds for the design, maintenance, renovation, or reconstruction relating to the structural integrity, building envelope, or MEP (mechanical, electrical, plumbing) systems of then existing capital facilities.
2. For the purpose of the Fund, the term "capital facility" shall refer to any building or structure which is located on Town property and is under the jurisdiction of the Town Manager.
3. The term "building or structure " shall include, but not be limited to, any Town-owned building, structure, room, or space within a building, facility, park or plaza, open space, driveway, landscaped area, or other physical improvements under the administrative control of the Town
4. Appropriations into the CFF and interest earnings on the Fund become part of the Fund.

*Approved May 1991; Revised December 20, 2005; Revised May 11, 2010*

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**DEBT MANAGEMENT POLICIES**

1. Proceeds from long-term debt will not be used for current, ongoing operations.
2. The Town will strive to limit total debt service, including debt exclusions and self-supporting debt, to ten percent (10%) of gross revenues.
3. The Town will allocate or reserve three percent (3%) of projected General Fund revenue (e.g. property taxes less debt exclusions, state aid, and local receipts) for debt service.
4. The Town will limit annual increases in debt service to a level that will not materially jeopardize the Town's credit rating.
5. For those previously authorized bonded projects with residual balances, the Town Manager shall propose the reallocation of these balances for other capital projects in conformance with MGL Chapter 44, Section 20.
6. For those previously authorized projects funded with available revenue (tax levy or reserves), that have residual balances in excess of \$5,000, the Town Manager shall propose the reallocation of these balances for other future capital projects in conformance with MGL Chapter 44, Section 33B. This practice will avoid abnormally inflating general fund surplus with one-time receipts.
7. For those previously authorized projects funded with available revenue (tax levy or reserves), with residual balances of less than \$5,000, the Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director may authorize the Town Accountant to close these balances to the appropriate fund surplus.
8. The Town will attempt to limit bond sales in any calendar year to \$10,000,000 in order to maintain bank qualifications and thereby receive lower interest rates on bonded debt.
9. Long-term borrowing will be confined to capital improvements too expensive to be financed from current revenues. In general, the Town will attempt to finance purchases costing less than \$100,000 with operating revenues.
10. Bonds will be paid back within a period not to exceed the expected useful life of the capital project.
11. To the extent practicable, user fees will be set to cover the capital costs of enterprise type services or activities - whether purchased on a pay-as-you-go basis or through debt financing - to avoid imposing a burden on the property tax levy.
12. Ongoing communications with bond rating agencies will be maintained, and a policy of full disclosure on every financial report and bond prospectus will be followed.

Approved May 1991; Revised December 1998, April 7, 2009

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**RETAINED EARNINGS POLICY FOR WATER AND SEWER ENTERPRISE FUNDS**

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; revenue shortfalls; unanticipated increases in MWRA wastewater assessments; and unanticipated and emergency expenditures.

Unreserved retained earnings are cumulative surplus funds, as certified by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue, that are available for appropriation by Town Meeting to support any capital expense of the enterprise or to reduce user charges.

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 set 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 following individual calculations. 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. 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 water and sewer enterprises must have access to working capital to finance operations. In the absence of retained earnings, operations would 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 water or sewer operations, retained earnings shall be maintained at a level to provide sufficient working capital to finance the operations of these enterprise funds. The amount retained for this purpose shall be equal to the average of the largest monthly operating deficit of the prior three years.

Consumption Contingency: Annual water and sewer revenue is a function of the amount of water purchased by customers. If, in any year, purchases are less than projected, a revenue shortfall will occur. Retained earnings shall be maintained at a level sufficient to offset any loss in revenue due to unanticipated decreases in purchases. That level shall be equal to the difference of the consumption used for rate making purposes versus the lowest level of consumption for the prior six fiscal years, multiplied by the current sewer rates and water rates shown as Step 3 of the Town's step rate structure. Step 3 is selected as it generally represents the point at which discretionary purchases of water begin. The scenario envisioned here is a wet year in which customers will not need to make discretionary purchases of water.

MWRA Assessment Mitigation: The Town's MWRA wastewater assessment is levied on a fiscal year basis, yet it is a function of the volume of effluent discharged into the MWRA system in the prior calendar year. The Town's wastewater system is subject to high levels of infiltration and inflow (I/I) given its age. Infiltration and inflow can substantially increase the volume of effluent discharged into the MWRA system. Following a year in which high levels of I/I occur, the Town's MWRA assessment will increase at a rate that

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substantially exceeds the average increase for all MWRA members. An increase of this magnitude can adversely affect rates charged to Town customers. Consequently, retained earnings shall be maintained at a level sufficient to mitigate rate increases needed to fund large increases in the Town's assessment. That level shall be equal to the largest annual amount - for the prior six year period - by which the average rate of increase in assessments for all MWRA members exceeds the rate of increase in the Town's assessment, multiplied by the most current MWRA assessment.

Unanticipated Budgetary Fluctuation: Retained earnings shall be maintained at a level sufficient to fund unanticipated or emergency capital or operating expenditures. It shall be a goal to maintain an amount equal to 6% of the annual sewer operating budget and 10% of the annual water-operating budget.

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.

*Adopted by the Needham Board of Selectmen on April 20, 1999; revised June 6, 2003, revised January 12, 2010*

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**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 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.

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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*