

City Fiscal Reserve Funds

The State of Washington permits the City to maintain two financial reserves to draw upon in the event of certain unanticipated expenditure or revenue pressures.

Emergency Fund

Under the authority of RCW 35.32A.060, the City maintains the Emergency Fund (EMF) of the General Fund. The EMF is the principal reserve for the City to draw upon when certain unanticipated expenses occur during the fiscal year. Eligible expenses include costs related to storms or other natural disasters. State law limits the amount of money the City can set aside in this reserve to 37.5 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value of property within the city.

Prior to 2017, the City's practice had been to fully fund the emergency reserve to this maximum limit. In 2017, the City modified the existing financial policies for the EMF to establish a minimum balance of \$60 million, and to adjust that minimum each year with the rate of inflation. This policy struck a balance between ensuring that resources will be available to address unanticipated expenditures and making resources available to address current needs.

Due to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and related economic downturn, the City's revenue forecasts are significantly reduced from prior expectations. Additionally, the City will continue to realize significant expenses to address the emergency into 2021. Due to the magnitude of the ongoing emergency, it will not be possible the City to meet the fund balance requirements for the Emergency Fund in the near future. City policy was amended in 2020 to require that the City return to making contributions as soon as is practically possible after a severe event requiring deep spending from the reserve.

In response to the ongoing COVID-19 emergency, the City anticipates withdrawing \$19.8 million from the EMF during 2020. For the 2021 Proposed Budget, the City draws \$47.1 million from the EMF, reducing the reserve balance to \$0.1 million in 2021.

Revenue Stabilization Fund

Under the authority of RCW 35.21.070, the City maintains a second financial reserve called the Revenue Stabilization Fund (RSF), also known as the Rainy Day Fund. The RSF provides resources for the City to draw upon to maintain City services in the event of a sudden, unanticipated shortfall in revenue due to economic downturns or other factors. City code limits the balance of this reserve to five percent of General Fund tax receipts. Ordinance 123743 requires the City to deposit an amount equivalent to 0.5% of General Fund tax revenues into the RSF, with some limited exceptions. In addition, City policy requires the deposit of 50% of any unplanned year-end fund balance in the General Fund into the RSF. The RSF has a fund balance cap equal to five percent of total annual General Fund tax revenue.

The City adopted significant RSF funding enhancements in 2011 via Ordinance 123743, including the required annual deposit of 0.5% of General Fund tax revenues into the RSF. These changes enabled the City to rebuild the Rainy-Day Fund reserves that had been spent down in 2009 and 2010 in the midst of the Great Recession. The new policies facilitated the rebuilding of this reserve fund from a low of \$10.5 million in 2010 to \$60.8 million by 2020. Additionally, the policies specified that contributions to the fund are suspended when tax revenues decline and are reduced to 0.25% in the following year.

In response to 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and related economic downturn, the City anticipates withdrawing \$29.0 million from the RSF in 2020. The 2021 Proposed Budget draws \$25.7 million from the RSF, reducing the reserve balance to \$6.0 million in 2021.

