

TOWN OF GROTON, CONNECTICUT

DEBT POLICY

&

MANAGEMENT / FISCAL PRACTICES

Revised by the Town Council on: October 5, 2021

Revised by the Town Council on: November 28, 2017

Revised by the Town Council on: February 4, 2014

Revised by the Town Council on: May 19, 2009

ADOPTED BY THE TOWN COUNCIL ON: SEPTEMBER 21, 1993

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A. Purpose:

1. To establish a criteria for the issuance of debt obligations so as not to exceed acceptable levels of indebtedness.
2. To provide consistency and continuity to public policy development through the Town's Capital Improvement Program, a mechanism that provides evidence of a commitment to meet infrastructure needs through a planned program of future financing, and
3. To transmit a message to investors and rating agencies who value such evidence of a community's commitment to financial management.

B. Guiding Principles/General Policies:

1. The Town Charter Section 9.13 "Borrowing" and applicable State Statutes governs the Town's issuance of debt as it pertains to referendum requirements and state mandated debt limitations.
2. The Town will conduct its debt management functions in a manner designed to maintain or enhance its existing credit ratings (Fitch: AA; Moody's: AA2; and Standard & Poor: AA).
3. Debt issuance will be utilized by the town only in those cases where equity, effectiveness and efficient use of limited resources favor debt over alternative sources of funds. The Town shall view debt as a mechanism to equalize the costs of improvements to present and future residents. The issuance of debt should provide a sufficient sum of money to make major improvements when it is needed and should take into account the relative costs of obtaining the funds. Decision criteria considered shall include the following:
 - (a) Debt shall be primarily used to finance capital projects with a relatively long life expectancy, i.e., ten (10) years or greater. Capital requirements that are recurring, of relative small scale, or are for short-lived improvement should be funded through current funds or the Capital Reserve Fund.
 - (b) Debt shall be issued in such a way so that the term of the financing does not exceed the useful life of the asset.

4. All budgeted funds are required to be balanced. As such, total anticipated revenues, plus fund balance applied if applicable, must equal the sum of budgeted expenditures for each fund.
5. The Town maintains a financial and budgetary control system to ensure adherence to the budget and an awareness of the financial environment, preparing quarterly reports to compare actual revenues and expenditures to budgeted amounts.

C. Capital Improvement Program:

1. A Capital Improvement Program shall be prepared by Town staff and submitted to the Planning Commission as per Connecticut General State Statutes.
2. The Town Council shall approve a Capital Improvement Program annually.
3. The Capital Improvement Program shall consist of a multi-year priority listing of long term capital projects, accompanied by a financing plan which finances all projects in the plan, and is supported by the appropriate sources of revenue. The financing plan shall be in accordance with the debt management policies contained herein.
4. It is the intent of these policies that authorized projects must be part of an adopted Capital Improvement Program.
5. Appropriations for construction or for other permanent improvements from whatever source derived shall not lapse until the purpose for which the appropriation was made shall have been accomplished or abandoned. However any project shall be deemed to have been abandoned if three (3) fiscal years lapse without any expenditure from or encumbrance of the appropriation therefore. Furthermore, any such appropriation which has not been completely expended at the end of five (5) years from the date thereof shall thereupon lapse, unless re-appropriated or extended.

D. Capital Reserve Fund:

1. A Capital Reserve Fund shall be funded annually to ensure that adequate funds are available to purchase equipment, repairs and improvements on a timely basis. This program is designed to stabilize budgeting for such purchases and to fund that part of the Town's capital budget related to those purchases.
2. As per council resolution adopted in December of 1984 and Ordinance Number 179 adopted on September 17, 1985, the Town Manager shall include in the proposed annual budget not less than four (4) percent of the total General Fund Budget for the purpose of paying current outstanding debt service and allocating funds to a "Reserve Fund for Capital and Non-Recurring Expenditures". The amount of said Capital Reserve Fund for capital items will be the remainder after subtracting the necessary debt service payments. The amount so allocated shall be subject to the annual budgetary process.

E. Management:

1. It shall be the responsibility of the Town Manager or his designee to maintain all necessary files associated with the issuance of Town debt.
2. The Town Manager shall submit for Council consideration a fiscal impact statement prior to any Council action to authorize a project involving the issuance of debt. The fiscal impact statement shall contain tables, charts and graphs which address the following:
 - (a) an estimate of the debt service levy to be required at the time of long term debt issuance,
 - (b) a calculation showing the impact of this additional levy to the existing debt service levy at that time,
 - (c) a schedule showing the impact of such issuance on the mill rate over the period of time that the issuance is for, and
 - (d) a table setting forth the computation of the debt limit of the Town and the debt incurring margin as set by State Statute and listing various debt ratios relating to the Town's indebtedness.

F. Debt Issuance Ratios/Limits and Repayment Schedules:

1. The Town shall use the following limits to guide issuance of debt:
 - (a) The Town shall not exceed fifty (50) percent of its statutory debt limit.
 - (b) Total direct indebtedness shall not exceed five (5) percent as percentage of full valuation (most recent equalized grand list as developed by the State of Connecticut).
 - (c) Total debt service shall not exceed ten (10) percent of the Total General Fund expenditures.
2. Repayment schedules shall be designed to relate to the useful life of the asset and generally be in accordance with the following:
 - (a) Fifteen (15) years for most general obligation public improvement debt.
 - (b) Twenty (20) years for benefit district debt and debt supported by special revenues.
 - (c) Ten (10) to twenty (20) years for capital improvement of town-wide significance and where justified by the magnitude of the project.
 - (d) On an overall basis, all general obligation debt shall be structured to retire at least fifty (50) percent of the Town's indebtedness within ten (10) years.

G. Operating Reserves:

1. The maintenance of adequate operating reserves is essential to the financial strength and flexibility of the Town. Undesignated levels should not be construed as surpluses or over taxation by the town but rather an element of sound fiscal management required for sustaining a high credit rating and financial management flexibility. They are an integral part of the financial structure of the Town and provide a cushion against potential revenue and expenditure volatility.

Operating reserves are a significant factor considered in evaluating and assigning credit ratings by the bond rating agencies.

2. The Town shall maintain the following reserves:
 - (a) An annual contingency reserve in the general fund operating budget which is not more than two (2) percent of annual expenditures.
 - (b) An unassigned General Fund reserve maintained in an amount equal to at least fifteen percent (15%) of annual general fund expenditures. In the event the balance falls below the minimum a plan will be developed to promptly address the shortfall.
 - (c) Any General Fund surplus exceeding 20% on a budgetary basis will be reviewed annually by the Council after completion & acceptance of the annual audit.
 - (d) A sixty (60) day reserve in special revenue funds in order to meet potential unanticipated needs.

H. Continuing Disclosure:

1. The Town is committed to continuing disclosure of financial and pertinent credit information relevant to the Town's outstanding securities and will abide by the provisions of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Rule 15c2-12 concerning primary and secondary market disclosure. The Town shall file such information through the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board's Electronic Municipal Market Access (EMMA) system and where applicable on the Town's web page.

I. Alternative Financing Plan:

The Town Manager is allowed to suggest to the Town Council an alternative financing plan for proposed capital projects if a complete analysis indicates that an alternative approach is deemed in the best interests of the Town of Groton.