

## **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*