

## FORT BEND COUNTY BUDGET POLICY FOR FY 2012

The Fort Bend County Budget appropriates the funds for the operations of each department in the county according to the financial policy of the Commissioners Court. The budget must be prepared and administered according to the laws of the State of Texas. The Commissioners Court of Fort Bend County (the Court) adopts this official budget policy in preparation of the FY 2012 Budget with the expectation that defining and announcing that policy will inevitably lead to better, more realistic budget requests, and that the public and the county departments should know and have access to the policy,

### 1.0 General Information

- 1.1 The first duty of the Court is to govern the County in compliance with the ***laws of the State of Texas and of the United States***. The Commissioners Court recognizes its duty to the citizens of Fort Bend County to operate the County in a fiscally responsible manner. It is the ***duty and responsibility*** of each elected official and department head to operate their office or department frugally and efficiently. Costs for services mandated by the State and Federal Government have increased, and the County continues to grow. Therefore, it is especially important to eliminate all unnecessary expenditures.
- 1.2 Every department should make every effort to reduce expenditures or hold the line on expenditures by increasing efficiency within the office in order to meet this goal without reducing the required level of services. All programs should be examined periodically as needed to ensure they are still viable and still provide the best method of serving an identified duty of the office or department. The use of technology to increase efficiency and effectiveness and to reduce costs and manpower should be adopted when fiscally dictated.
- 1.3 Fort Bend County is one of the fastest growing counties in the United States of America. As such, we experience increasing requirements for additional services and facilities continually. Given this factor, the Departments and Offices of the County must plan and execute needed new programs to best mitigate the cost to the County, while still meeting the needs of the citizens. New programs that address a mandated or identified need by providing new services should, if possible, be proposed during budget hearings so that they may be prioritized in light of the total county budget. County government has a responsibility to its citizens to set the standard of efficiency and care by reducing costs whenever and wherever possible.
- 1.4 The Court will continue to be aware of the cost of government that is borne by taxpayers. Costs of capital projects planned for the near future may impact the financial needs of the county in the current budget. While the county's tax base had expanded at an average annual rate of almost 10% over the past eleven years, the tax base decreased by one percent for the 2010 tax year. This may strain the taxing capacity of the County. It is the County's objective to adequately provide funds for prudently managed county services without an increase in taxes. Legislation that limits the growth of property tax revenues to less than the growth of the County without consideration of programs or services mandated by the state or Federal Government will negatively impact the ability of the County to provide those services.
- 1.5 It is a major priority of the Court to advance the economic development efforts in the county. The Court will support efforts to advance economic prosperity of the county when it finds that such efforts are in the best interest of the county and its citizens. The Court will provide funds only when it can legally do so, and in the amount that represents a fair share of the efforts considering all parties that stand to benefit and all entities covered.
- 1.6 All internal services should operate efficiently. The Commissioners Court will examine internal services to see if they can be better performed by the private sector. The county will continue to perform those services that it is best suited to perform. The county will adopt the policy of allocating the costs of internal services to the user departments and will initiate the allocation of those costs as rapidly as is economically feasible.
- 1.7 The cost of operations of all automobiles and light trucks will be allocated to each using department. Each department requiring a replacement car or light truck, will be allocated an amount for the replacement vehicle, and will be required to return the vehicle being replaced. Replaced vehicles will be returned to Vehicle Maintenance for sale or redistribution to other departments. Each department requesting an additional car or light truck will be required to justify the need for the additional car or light truck. If the court allows the

additional vehicle, it will be an addition to the authorized list of vehicles for that department. All departments that are requesting a vehicle are required to fill out and submit a vehicle installation request form with your budget. This will allow Vehicle Maintenance in conjunction with the County Purchasing Agent to standardize vehicles and equipment and purchase in bulk if discounts are available. Funds for all new vehicles and equipment to outfit the new vehicles will be allocated in the requesting department's budget.

## **2.0 Fund Balance**

- 2.1 The financial integrity of the County depends on having good financial policies. In order to maintain an excellent bond rating by the rating agencies, the County must maintain an adequate fund balance to account for emergencies. To this end, the County will budget a fund balance for the General Fund of at least fifteen percent (15%) of the total operating budget for the General Fund. Additionally, the overall total of all fund balances for all the Counties funds will be no less than fifteen percent (15%) of the total County budget.

## **3.0 Capital Improvement Projects**

- 3.1 Each department or office should present their capital projects for the next five years to the Facilities Management and Planning Director so that he may assist the County Budget Officer in consolidating them into a five-year Capital Improvements Plan and budget. Departments in a common functional area (e.g., courts or law enforcement) are encouraged to cooperate in planning for capital projects that affect the whole functional area. Budgeting and allocation of funds for capital projects will be made on the basis of long term planning. Capital projects include major equipment and software purchases (with capitalized costs of implementation) as well as construction and remodeling. Minor remodeling will be reviewed by the Building and Space Committee, and, if approved, be budgeted within the department.
- 3.2 Capital improvement projects may be paid from current revenues or bonds. Bonds or other forms of debt will normally be used for capital projects when appropriate, but only when the capital asset created will have a useful life equal to or longer than the debt repayment period. All Capital Projects, whether funded with bonds or other indebtedness, or from current funds, will be managed by a multiyear budget if the construction period extends over more than one fiscal year.

## **4.0 Performance Measures**

- 4.1 Properly designed performance measures measure the effectiveness of the operating unit being measured. As such, they will encourage operating units to increase efficiency and effectiveness in order to improve the measures. Each department will prepare and submit to the Budget Office measures of the Department's performance. These performance measures will reflect the goals of the Department as stated in their long-term plan, and will, as accurately as possible, measure attainment of an operational aspect of the goal. Departments should submit from 4 to 7 performance measures. Each Department will be responsible for maintaining data to measure attainment of these goals as set out in the performance measures, and will submit the annual results at the time the budget is submitted. The Budget Office will recommend projects of highly performing departments before those of departments whose measures indicate low performance, or which do not submit performance measures or data to support the measures.

## **5.0 Staffing / Training**

- 5.1 It is the priority of the Court to provide adequate, qualified staffing for offices and departments, while ensuring that organizational structures are efficient. Requests for increases in staff should be made only for new programs and/or upon demonstrated increases in service requirement that cannot more efficiently be met with improved technology or changes in procedures. New staffing required by approved grants will be limited to the duration of the grant. Needs should be documented by comparisons to recognized performance standards whenever possible, by comparisons with other similarly situated counties, or by other verifiable documentation. Positions will only be approved when a verifiable need exists. Excessive overtime usage will be investigated to determine if new positions are warranted, or if the overtime is caused by a temporary situation.

- 5.2 All requested new positions will be scrutinized very closely. Highly performing departments will be recommended above those whose performance measures are sub-par or which do not submit performance measures.
- 5.3 The Court anticipates that employee compensation will be competitive with those of other comparable employers in the area. Salaries and other benefits of local governments and private sector employers in the area have been surveyed to provide a logical basis for comparison. Positions that perform nearly identical functions, or that can be classified as requiring the same skill and experience sets will be compensated equally.
- 5.4 The Court will appropriate adequate funds to ensure that the county's work force is properly trained. Every effort should be made to find or organize training in the area to minimize travel costs. Offices and Departments are encouraged to join together in training efforts within the county when common training requirements exist. Training should be coordinated through Human Resources whenever possible.
- 5.5 In order to minimize training costs while maximizing effectiveness, it shall be a policy of the County to conduct as much training as possible within the State of Texas. Out-of State travel shall not be used when acceptable alternatives exist within the State. Similarly, travel for conferences will only be approved when the educational content is applicable to the individual's duties and of a high quality so that the benefit to the County can be clearly demonstrated.

#### **6.0 Fee Schedules / Collections**

- 6.1 Each county office or department should examine their fee schedule at least annually to ensure that fees are set in accordance with applicable statutes and that an appropriate amount of the cost of service is being borne by the actual user of the service. When a fee is allowed by statute, but has not been adopted by the county, this fact should be brought to the attention of the Budget Officer who will notify the Commissioners Court.
- 6.2 Every fee office will make a bona fide effort to collect all revenues rightly due the county. When collections are below standard, the county will adopt other compliance efforts (outsourcing collections or developing in-house compliance efforts), if justified by potential returns, or required by law.
- 6.3 Each annual operating fund maintained by the county shall be budgeted, including special revenue funds that are for the use of only a single department or a single purpose. All such budgets will be submitted to the Commissioners Court for consideration during the budget adoption process.

#### **7.0 Transfer of Funds**

- 7.1 Transfers within a department's budget, or within the same fund, may be made from available, budgeted money with Commissioners Court's permission. To minimize the need for excessive court actions, the budget will be prepared and managed at the account level, but adopted at a major category level, so that Departments may utilize operating funds as needed. All department heads are expected to manage their budgets to maximize efficiency and achieve the goals of the department.
- 7.2 Departments may move moneys from account to account within the major category area (except salaries, which are managed by the Budget Office). A major exception is that any movement of funds to pay for items or programs that have been discussed and disallowed during the budget process may only be made with the approval of the Commissioners Court.
- 7.3 The detail level of the adopted budget will be as follows:

**Salaries and Personnel Costs** – Includes all Salary and benefit costs.

**Operating and Training Costs** – Includes all day-to-day costs of operations.

**Information Technology Costs** – Includes all Information Technology costs, including acquisition, leasing, and software costs except those items which are capitalized as over \$5,000.

**Capital Acquisitions** – Includes all capital items with a cost over \$5,000, including Information Technology and software.

- 7.4 The Budget Office shall verify all departmental requests for budget transfers by an analysis of all previously approved budget transfers for the requesting department. All transfers of funds from the Contingency account shall be accompanied by a detailed report prepared by the Budget Office of all contingency transfers for the fiscal year and showing the current Contingency Balance.
- 7.5 Items budgeted for the purchase of specific items shall be budgeted for an adequate amount to make the purchase. Excess amounts are not available for other uses, and may be transferred by the Budget Office. For example, automobiles that are anticipated to cost a certain amount, and actually are purchased for less will result in unintended excess in the departmental budget. The Budget Office may transfer this excess to the contingency account. The Commissioners Court may, at its sole discretion, allow the money to be used for another purpose in the department's budget upon proper application by the department.

## **8.0 Amendments to the Budget**

- 8.1 Amendments to the budget (increases in the total amount of the budget for a given fund) will only occur in case of a bona fide emergency. An emergency is defined as a circumstance that will adversely impact the health or safety of citizens of the county, or severely impair the operation of the county, and that could not reasonably have been foreseen during the preparation of the budget.
- 8.2 Amendments may be made under the provisions of Local Government Code §111.0705 when the county receives the proceeds of bonds or other obligations. Upon receipt of the proceeds, the Commissioners Court may make expenditures from the proceeds in the manner provided in Chapter 111, Subchapter C for expenditures for general purposes.
- 8.3 Amendments may be made under the provisions of Local Government Code §111.0706 when the county receives a public or private grant that will make money available during the budget year, and that was not known during the budget process, if the County Auditor certifies the availability of the funds for disbursement. Upon certification, the Commissioners Court shall make a special budget for the expenditure of the funds for the purposes of the grant.
- 8.4 Amendments may be made under the provisions of Local Government Code §111.0707 when the county enters into an interlocal contract that will make money available during the budget year, and that was not known during the budget process if the County Auditor certifies the availability of the funds for disbursement. Upon certification, the Commissioners Court shall make a special budget for the expenditure of the funds for the purposes of the contract.
- 8.5 Amendments may be made under the provisions of Local Government Code §111.07075 for the purpose of spending revenues received after the start of the fiscal year from a new source not anticipated before the adoption of the budget. The Commissioners Court may adopt a special budget for the purpose of spending the revenue for general purposes or its intended purpose.

## **9.0 Interdepartmental Construction**

- 9.1 Offices and Departments may utilize the Interdepartmental Construction department for carpentry needs or minor remodeling upon availability. However, to ensure reimbursement to the Interdepartmental Construction Department for materials, departments must allocate funds into their department's account 63700- Repairs & Maintenance before work is begun. If a department does not have the funds available in their budget, the Officer or Department Head must obtain these funds through a transfer prior to work beginning. All invoices for materials will be charged to the department's 63700 account as the project progresses so that the department can monitor the balance. Monies in this account will be restricted to reimbursing Interdepartmental Construction for material costs until the project is complete.