

G. DEBT POLICY

G-1 Background

The City of Ellensburg (City) maintains conservative financial policies to assure strong financial health both in the short- and long-term. The City is an infrequent issuer of debt with debt primarily used as a tool to finance large capital investments.

Achieving and maintaining a solid bond rating is an important objective of the City's financial policies. To this end, the City is constantly working to improve its financial policies, budgets, forecasts, and financial health.

G-2 Purpose

This policy sets forth the criteria for issuance and repayment of debt. The primary objective of the Debt Policy is to establish criteria that will protect the City's financial integrity while providing a funding mechanism to meet the City's capital needs. All debt issued will be in compliance with this policy, Chapter 35A.40 Revised Code of Washington (RCW) - Fiscal Provisions Applicable to Code Cities and Chapter 43.80 RCW - Fiscal Agencies along with all other City, State, and Federal laws, rules, and regulations.

G-3 Scope

This Policy provides general guidance for the issuance and management of all City debt.

G-4 Responsibility

Authority to issue and manage debt is derived from titles 35 and 35A RCW (including without limitation RCW 35A.40.080-.090, chapter 35.37 RCW and chapter 35.41 RCW). This section gives the Finance Director authority to act in the capacity of City Treasurer, which includes the duties of debt management.

The Finance Director is responsible for assuring that the activities related to the issuance and payment of bonds or other obligations not jeopardize the bond rating.

G-5 Budgeting and Capital Planning

The City shall develop and maintain a capital planning process such as the annual Capital Investment Program for consideration and adoption by the City Council as part of the City's budget process. The Finance Department is responsible for coordinating and analyzing the debt requirements. This will include timing of debt, calculation of outstanding debt, debt limitation calculations and compliance, impact on future debt burdens, and current revenue requirements.

Prior to issuance of debt, the City will prepare revenue projections, such as the annual budget or the Financial Forecast, to ensure that there is adequate revenue to make principal and interest payments.

G-6 Types of Long-Term Debt

The following is a description of the types of long-term debt the City may issue:

1. General Obligation

This debt is backed by the full faith and credit of the City. State law limits this debt to 2.5% of the value of taxable property within the City for each of three purposes:

A. General Purposes

Debt issued in this category can be used for any purpose allowed by law.

Non-Voted

The City Council may authorize the issuance of general obligation debt up to 1.5% of the City's assessed value without a vote of the public as long as there is an available source of funding to pay the debt service. This funding source can be the diversion of an existing revenue source or a new revenue coming from the enactment of a new tax or other revenue source. The debt can take the form of bonds, lease-purchase agreements, conditional sales contracts, certificates of participation, or other forms of installment debt.

Voted

The City Council may place any general obligation debt issue before the electorate. According to State law, if a debt issue is placed before the City's electorate, it must receive a 60% or greater yes vote and have a turnout of at least 40% of those voting at the previous general election. Voted issues are limited to capital purposes only.

B. Open Space and Parks

Debt issued in this category must be used for park and open space and/or recreation facilities. All debt in this category must be approved by the voters, and if so approved, the City is provided with an additional amount of debt capacity up to 2.5% of the value of taxable property within the City.

C. Local Option Capital Asset Lending (LOCAL) Program Debt

The City Council may authorize a financing contract with the Office of the State Treasurer under chapter 39.94 RCW. LOCAL borrowings count against the City's non-voted debt limit.

2. Revenue Debt

Revenue bonds are generally payable from a designated source of revenue generated by the project which was financed. No taxing power or general fund pledge is provided as security. Unlike general obligation bonds, revenue bonds are not subject to constitutional or statutory debt limitations nor is voter approval required.

3. Local Improvement District (LID) Debt

LID bonds are payable solely from assessments of property owners within the local improvement district. Similar to revenue debt, no taxing power or general fund pledge is provided as security, and LID bonds are not subject to statutory debt limitations.

The debt is backed by the value of the property within the district and an LID Guaranty Fund. The LID Guaranty Fund is required by State law.

Assessment Debt (LID) is preferred to General Debt to fund improvements that specially benefit specific properties