

Updated Utility Fiscal Policy for Sanitary Drainage and Land Drainage

Recommendation:

That the Utility Committee recommend to City Council:

That Policy C304C Drainage Services Utility Fiscal Policy – Sanitary and Land (Stormwater) Utilities, as outlined in Attachment 1 of the May 6, 2011, Asset Management and Public Works Department report 2010PW6508REV2, be approved.

Report Summary

This report and attachments outline an updated Utility Fiscal Policy for Drainage Services that reflects the directions provided by the Utility Committee on February 18, 2011, and motions from Special City Council Meeting held April 5, 2011.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the April 5, 2011, Special City Council Meeting, Asset Management and Public Works Department Report 2011PW4994 Approach to Review Utility Fiscal Policies was presented and the following motions were passed:

That Administration return to the May 6, 2011, Utility Committee meeting, with draft utilities fiscal City Policies which include, but are not limited to the following:

1. That the local access fees:
 - a) Continue to be charged for the Sanitary Drainage Utility

- b) Be initiated for the Land Drainage Utility at a rate to be recommended by Administration
 - c) Not be charged to the Waste Management Utility
2. That dividends not be paid by the Waste Management Utility
 3. The discussions of the April 5, 2011, Special City Council meeting, regarding the key utilities fiscal City Policy considerations be reflected

Report

- Utility Fiscal Policy C304B was adopted by City Council in May 2006, dealing specifically with Drainage Utilities. The 2009 Financial, Rate and Regulatory Review conducted by HDR Engineering, Inc. recommended the review and revision of policy as appropriate.
- Attachment 2 provides a discussion of the implications on the financial indicators if the proposed policy is approved. It also highlights the rationale for the proposed changes.

Framework Used in Policy Development

- The proposed policy is based on Council's direction regarding the objectives for the Sanitary and Land (Stormwater) Utilities as they relate to Local Access Fees and Dividends.
- The proposed policy reflects summary discussion from the February 18, 2011, Utility Committee meeting regarding full cost accounting, government transfers, non-regulated activities and **"The Way Ahead."**

- The proposed policy incorporates best practices identified by the Government Finance Officers Association, adapted for Utility operations.

Policy

- Policy C304C, Drainage Services Business Plan and the Drainage Master Plan that outlines the strategic directions for the Drainage Utilities and capital investments necessary to meet Council's strategic goals and regulatory requirements.

Corporate Outcomes

This Policy supports City Council's Strategic Plan "***The Way Ahead***" in the following focus areas:

- Preserve and Sustain Edmonton's Environment
- Improve Edmonton's Livability
- Ensure Edmonton's Financial Stability
- Transform Edmonton's Urban Form

Budget/Financial Implications

- Policy C304C provides direction for the financial management of the Sanitary and Land (Stormwater) Utilities.
- The determination of the customer rate requirements will be a function of policy application.
- The ongoing financial performance measurement of the Sanitary and Land (Stormwater) Utilities will be assessed against this policy.

Justification of Recommendation

The recommended policy reflects Council's directions and provides Administration with a formal framework for financial decision making.

Attachments

1. Policy C304C Drainage Services Utility Fiscal Policy
2. Implications of Proposed Policy Changes on the Financial Indicators

Policy C304C Drainage Services Utility Fiscal Policy



CITY POLICY

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Policy Number: C304C

REFERENCE:

C304B Council Minutes 2006 06 20/21, Pg. 47
 C125 Council Minutes 1984 07 10, Pg. 1049
 C126 Council Minutes 1982 03 23, Pg. 542
 C304 Council Minutes 1977 04 14, Pgs. 842-7

ADOPTED BY:

City Council - Date

SUPERCEDES:

C304B

PREPARED BY: Asset Management and Public Works**DATE:** May 6, 2011

**TITLE: DRAINAGE SERVICES UTILITY FISCAL POLICY – SANITARY & LAND
 (STORMWATER) UTILITIES**

Policy Statement:

1. Each Utility is to be operated in a manner that balances the desire to provide the best service at the lowest cost (public utility) while employing private sector approaches to encourage innovation and using a cost structure that sends the proper price signal to the customers (private utility).
2. Each Utility will be subject to Local Access Fee, similar to private utilities for the use of public right of ways and in lieu of property taxes. The Local Access Fee will be up to 8% of Qualifying Revenues, as determined by City Council.
3. Each Utility will pay an annual Dividend to the City of Edmonton, its owner, based on actual net income from the previous year. The Utility is exempt from Dividend payment until it achieves the minimum Return on Rate Base and there is sufficient Cash Balance to make the payment. At that time, the Utility will pay 30% of actual Net Income as a Dividend in the following year, with the expectation that it will increase to 40% when all the Financial Indicators targets are achieved.
4. Similar to private utilities, each Utility will account for the cost of service under a full cost accounting approach.
5. Where government transfers are not provided for the exclusive use of the Utility, access to government transfers is dependent upon the completion of a business case that takes into account the overall needs of the community. The goal is to ensure that any government transfers have been best leveraged to achieve the City's overall priorities.
6. Where the Utility is contemplating the provision of non-regulated services and such services require significant capital investment and/or net operating costs, a business case is to be prepared such that the Utility Committee may make recommendations to City Council regarding the initial and/or ongoing funding of such activities from sources other than Rate Revenue.
7. Each Utility is to contribute towards achieving the City's Strategic Plan.

This Policy is subject to any specific provisions of the Municipal Government Act or other relevant legislation or Union Agreement.



CITY POLICY

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Policy Number: C304C

The purpose of this policy is to:

- 1.0** Ensure that the Sanitary and Land (Stormwater) Drainage Utilities are operated in a manner that reflects City Council's overall vision and philosophical objectives for the Utilities.
- 2.0** Ensure that there is a consistent approach year over year for the financial planning, budgeting, and rate setting for the City managed Utilities.
- 3.0** Ensure that the Utilities are financially sustainable over the long term.

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CITY POLICY

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Policy Number: C304C

1.0 Definitions

- 1.1 Appropriated Retained Earnings** – past accumulated surplus of the Utility that has been set aside for specific purposes.
- 1.2 Debt Coverage Ratio** – is a measure of the ability of each utility to meet both interest and principal payment obligations.
- 1.3 Debt to Net Assets Ratio** – is a measure of the extent to which the net book value of non-contributed assets is being financed by debt.
- 1.4 Dividend** – an amount that is payable to the City of Edmonton from the actual net income of the Utility, payable in the following year.
- 1.5 Financial Indicators** – a set of financial measures that provide signals on the financial health of the Utility.
- 1.6 Financial Sustainability** – financial sustainability is achieved when all targets set for the Financial Indicators (as recommended by the Utility Committee and approved by City Council) are attained.
- 1.7 Full Cost Accounting** – shall include cost allocation from services provided by the Corporation and may include administration costs, and other shared services such as Communication, Personnel, Information Technology, Law, Materials Management, Customer Information System, Fleet Services, Financial Services, Building Maintenance, Custodial, Space Rent, and general Corporate Overhead.
- 1.8 Local Access Fee** - an amount recommended by the Utility Committee and approved by City Council that would otherwise be equivalent to property taxes, and compensation for the exclusive rights afforded each utility for as long as such property is deemed by the relevant legislation of the Province of Alberta to be non-assessable and non-taxable for property taxes.
- 1.9 Non-regulated Activities** – are activities that are not essential to the provision of services by the Utility.
- 1.10 Qualifying Revenue** – includes rate revenue and other revenues from regulated activities.
- 1.11 Rate Revenue** – revenues generated through monthly customer rates.
- 1.12 Regulated Activities** – are activities that are core to the services provided by the Utility. Examples include activities that are provided under Rate Revenue, service connections, lot grading, etc. Currently, all services provided by the Sanitary and Land (Stormwater) Drainage are regulated activities.
- 1.13 Unappropriated Retained Earnings** – past accumulated surplus of the Utility that is available for other uses.

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- 1.14 Utility** – refers to Sanitary and Land (Stormwater) Utilities, which are self-funded operations that provide collection and transmission of stormwater services to customers on a fee for service basis, including a return on rate base, at rates regulated by City Council.
- 1.15 Weighted Cost of Capital** – the total interest paid on outstanding debt.
- 1.16 Working Capital** – amount of cash required to enable the operations to meet its obligations in the short term.

What follows are additional policy statements and targets the City of Edmonton aims to reach for the Drainage Services Utility Fiscal Policy. An update to this policy will be attached to this policy annually. This update will advise on the City's progress in achieving the targets.

2.0 Financial Indicators

Policy Statement: Financial indicators are measures that provide information on the financial health of the Utility. The selection of indicators will be based upon best practices identified by the Government Finance Officers Association, adapted for Utility operations. Taken collectively, these indicators provide the long-term viability of the Utilities assuming that there are no rate shocks in the system.

2.1 Rate sufficient to meet expenses

Policy Statement: As a minimum, projected total revenue generated will be equal to projected expenses for the year. This will provide a balanced budget. Otherwise, customer rates are not sufficient to pay for the current cost of service and the Utility is not self-sufficient.

2.2 Return on Rate Base

Target: City Council expects dividends from the Sanitary and Land (Stormwater) Drainage Utilities and expects the Utilities to be self-sufficient.

The Alberta Utilities Commission typically allows a Return on Equity of between 6% - 12% (assuming a 65% debt financing of capital) to be earned as profit to ensure that customers receive safe and reliable service at just and reasonable rates. Return on Rate Base is the total return before applying assumptions on debt load. The components to be used in the calculation of the return are defined by the Commission. City Council, as Regulator, will aim to achieve the following:

The targeted Return on Rate Base is to be between 4% and 10%, subject to City Council decision making through the budget process. The lower limit of 4% reflects the lowest expectation for average cost of debt. The return should

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cover the cost of debt used to finance capital investment. The upper limit at 10% provides for a reasonable return for a public utility.

2.3 Debt Financing of Capital– Policy Statements

- a. The Utilities will not utilize Short-Term Debt or Long-Term Debt obligations to finance current operating expenditures.
- b. Long-Term Debt will be considered for Capital Expenditures in:
 - i. projects with benefits that extend 10 years or longer;
 - ii. major rehabilitation or upgrade of existing assets; and
 - iii. emerging requirements to support corporate priorities and strategic plans.
- c. The Utility will follow the City of Edmonton's process for debt issuance, including the term of the debt and the legislated debt limits.
- d. When making a decision about the use of debt, alternative capital financing sources will be considered first, including a review of the Debt Coverage Ratio and the Debt to Net Assets Ratio.

2.4 Debt Financing of Capital – Targets

- a. The **Debt Coverage Ratio** is a measure of the Utility's ability to meet both interest and principal payment obligations. It is calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Net income before interest and depreciation}}{\text{Current year's principal and interest payments}} = \text{Debt Coverage Ratio}$$

The targeted Debt Coverage Ratio is 1.3 or higher.

- b. The **Debt to Net Assets Ratio** is a measure of the extent of capital investment that is financed through debt. It is calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Total Long Term Debt}}{\text{Net book value of Non-Contributed Assets}} = \text{Debt to Net Assets Ratio}$$

The targeted Debt to Net Assets Ratio is less than 60%.

2.5 Financial Stabilization Reserve- Target

Financial Stabilization Reserve is established to manage operational variability (revenue shortfall or one-time expenses) and to provide flexibility in the financing mix of capital investments. To the extent possible, it should be supported by Cash. The targeted Financial Stabilization Reserve balance is determined as follows:

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$$\begin{array}{r}
 10\% \text{ of Non-rate Revenue} \\
 + \text{ 45 days working capital} \\
 \hline
 = \text{ Financial Stabilization Reserve Target}
 \end{array}$$

2.6 Capital Replacement Reserve - Target

Capital Replacement Reserve is established to ensure that the Capital Investment Program that is to be financed through Retained Earnings has been set aside and is supported by Cash for capital purposes. The targeted Capital Reserve Target is 100% of the average 10-Year Capital Investment Plan that is intended to be financed by cash.

2.7 Cash Balance - Target

To be financially sustainable, the Utility must have sufficient access to cash to meet obligations as they become due. Furthermore, it is important that Capital Investments that are planned to be financed by Cash (based upon the Debt Ratios) are achievable. Accordingly, the targeted Cash Balance is as follows:

$$\begin{array}{r}
 100\% \text{ of the Targeted Capital Replacement Reserve} \\
 + \text{ 60\%-120\% of the Targeted Financial Stabilization Reserve} \\
 \hline
 = \text{ Targeted Cash Balance}
 \end{array}$$

3.0 Financial Planning – Policy Statements

Budget and financial planning follow the general principles of budget, long range planning, and management of capital assets as established by the City of Edmonton and in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles defined by the Public Sector Accounting Board.

The Utility will prepare 3-year Business Plans, to be presented annually to the Utility Committee prior to the preparation of the annual operating budget and 3-year Capital Program.

The Utility Committee shall recommend annually to City Council the customer rates for the following year, based on a 10-year planning horizon with budgets that are prepared based upon current year forecast, business plan implementation, and directions regarding the desired level of Local Access Fees, Dividends, and Return on Rate Base.

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Implications on Proposed Policy Changes on the Financial Indicators

Sanitary Drainage – Results based on 2010 actual

Financial Indicators	C304B Target	C304C Target	2010 Actual
<p>1. Rate sufficient to meet expenses This was not a required indicator previously; however, the rate charged has been sufficient as well.</p>	N/A	N/A	yes
<p>2. Return on rate base Policy C304B calculates return on average equity based on net income over retained earnings less contributed assets. Proposed Policy C304C calculates the return based on net plant assets, which includes working capital and principal shortfalls and gives acknowledgement to the cost of capital. The proposed return on rate base calculation reflects industry standard.</p>	6%-12%	4%-10%	1.61%
<p>3. Debt Coverage Ratio There is no change being proposed in the calculation of the ratio, only that the target be increased from 1.2 to 1.3 based upon recommendation from the consultant.</p>	1.3	1.3	1.3
<p>4. Debt to Net Assets Ratio Policy C304B calculates the percentage of current year's capital that is financed by debt. Proposed Policy C304C calculates the percentage of all existing non-contributed assets that have debt outstanding. While it is beneficial to know the current year's financing mix; ultimately, it is the overall mix that signals the financial health of the Utility.</p>	50%-70%	< 60%	54%
<p>5. Financial Stabilization Reserve (FSR) Policy C304C introduces the concept of a reserve to set aside a portion of the accumulated surplus to manage operational variability and to provide flexibility in the financing mix of capital investments.</p>	N/A	10% of non-rate revenue + working capital	10% non-rate revenue + working capital (\$9,010)
<p>6. Capital Replacement Reserve (CRR) Policy C304C introduces the concept that funds should be set aside to ensure that cash is available to meet the financing needs identified in the 10-year Capital Investment Plan on an annual basis.</p>	N/A	100% of average 10-year capital to be financed by cash	100% of average 10-year capital to be financed by cash (\$7,738)
<p>7. Minimum Cash Balance Instead of selecting the desired Cash Balance within a dollar range, the indicator has been adjusted to reflect the purpose for which minimum cash balance is required. Proposed Policy C304C recommends that this should be based upon maintaining sufficient cash to meet the purpose established for the two reserves.</p>	\$17M-\$38M	100% (60%-120% of targeted FSR balance + targeted CRR Balance)	78.7% (based on 60%) \$10,340

Financial Indicators	C304B Target	C304C Target	2010 Actual
<p>8. Financial Planning Policy C304B was silent on the provision of pro-forma financial information although typically, 5 years of financial indicators have been provided as a part of the budget process. Policy C304C proposed that the information provided be extended to 10 years to provide early signals of potential concerns.</p>	N/A	10 years	5 years
<p>9. Local Access Fees Proposed Policy C304C was amended to recognize Council's direction that Local Access Fees reflect a legitimate cost of providing the Utility services. However, Council also needs a mechanism by which to vary the rate charged because of other policy considerations. The inclusion of a range allows that flexibility to meet different needs.</p>	8%	0%-8%	8%
<p>10. Dividends There is no change to Dividends in the proposed Policy, other than providing a caveat that the payment of Dividends should be paid only when all the targets set out in Financial Indicators are reached.</p>	30%-40%	30%-40%	30%

Land (Stormwater) Drainage – Results based on 2010 actual

Financial Indicators	C304B Target	C304C Target	2010 Actual
1. Rate sufficient to meet expenses This was not a required indicator previously; however, the rate charged has been sufficient as well.	N/A	N/A	yes
2. Return on rate base Policy C304B calculates return on average equity based on net income over retained earnings less contributed assets. Proposed Policy C304C calculates the return based on net plant assets, which includes working capital and principal shortfalls and gives acknowledgement to the cost of capital. The proposed return on rate base calculation reflects industry standard.	6%-12%	4%-10%	9.7%
3. Debt Coverage Ratio There is no change being proposed in the calculation of the ratio, only that the target be increased from 1.2 to 1.3 based upon recommendation from the consultant.	1.3	1.3	3.4
4. Debt to Net Assets Ratio Policy C304B calculates the percentage of current year's capital that is financed by debt. Proposed Policy C304C calculates the percentage of all existing non-contributed assets that have debt outstanding. While it is beneficial to know the current year's financing mix; ultimately, it is the overall mix that signals the financial health of the Utility.	50%-70%	< 60%	70%
5. Financial Stabilization Reserve (FSR) Policy C304C introduces the concept of a reserve to set aside a portion of the accumulated surplus to manage operational variability and to provide flexibility in the financing mix of capital investments.	N/A	10% of non-rate revenue + working capital	10% non-rate revenue + working capital (\$1,884)
6. Capital Replacement Reserve (CRR) Policy C304C introduces the concept that funds should be set aside to ensure that cash is available to meet the financing needs identified in the 10-year Capital Investment Plan on an annual basis.	N/A	100% of average 10-year capital to be financed by cash	100% of average 10-year capital to be financed by cash (\$7,225)
7. Minimum Cash Balance Instead of selecting the desired Cash Balance within a dollar range, the indicator has been adjusted to reflect the purpose for which minimum cash balance is required. Proposed Policy C304C recommends that this should be based upon maintaining sufficient cash to meet the purpose established for the two reserves.	\$17M-\$38M	100% (60%-120% of targeted FSR balance + targeted CRR Balance	313% (based on 120%) \$29,774

Financial Indicators	C304B Target	C304C Target	2010 Actual
<p>11. Financial Planning Policy C304B was silent on the provision of pro-forma financial information although typically, 5 years of financial indicators have been provided as a part of the budget process. Policy C304C proposed that the information provided be extended to 10 years to provide early signals of potential concerns.</p>	N/A	10 years	5 years
<p>12. Local Access Fees Proposed Policy C304C was amended to recognize Council's direction that Local Access Fees reflect a legitimate cost of providing the Utility services. However, Council also needs a mechanism by which to vary the rate charged because of other policy considerations. The inclusion of a range allows that flexibility to meet different needs.</p>	8%	0%-8%	0%
<p>13. Dividends There is no change to Dividends in the proposed Policy, other than providing a caveat that the payment of Dividends should be paid only when all the targets set out in Financial Indicators are reached.</p>	30%-40%	30%-40%	0%