

Policy Issues

The following policy issues are presented for consideration and approval as part of the proposed FY 2012-13 budgets.

1. Harris County will continue to focus on building reserves to maintain financial stability and current high bond ratings. A recommendation will be provided to court for the issuance of tax anticipation notes during the first quarter of FY 2012-13. A long-term goal is established to build reserves to minimize the need for interim financing over the next several years.
2. Departments that spend less than their budget for FY 2012-13 will be allowed to roll over up to 15% of their budget to FY 2013-14. These funds will be recorded in a reserve account in General Administration and will be accessible only by the contributing department in FY 2013-14 or future budget years.
3. A presentation to court covering capital projects and related debt service requirements will be made on June 26 and Mid-Year Review will be held on September 25.

Positions and Position Control

4. Positions that are funded for the entire FY 2012-13 in the accompanying position budget list may be filled at approved levels requested. This will include changes planned during the year as presented in the position listing by departments. The filling of vacancies during the year is subject to the availability of funding for final benefits for any employees who retire or otherwise leave county employment.
5. Positions that are partially funded in the position budget list can also be filled at approved levels requested, but require Budget Management and Auditor review to make sure funds are available prior to filling them.
6. Positions that are not funded in the position budget list are eliminated.
7. Budget Management will work with the Auditor and Purchasing to change the coding of contract temporary personnel so that these expenditures can be identified as labor expenses for reporting purposes.

Departments and Cost Centers

8. A new cost center, General Administration is established for budget and accounting purposes to provide all of the expenses for audit fees, insurance, bank charges, interest, etc. that were previously in Management Services. The General Administration budget will also have reserves for the extra payroll expenses and other expenses where a reserve is appropriate.
9. A new cost center for lease and utility expenses (Dept. 298) will be established under the direction of Facilities and Property Management, Public Infrastructure and Budget Management.
10. A new cost center for court appointed attorney fees and related expenses (Dept. 698) will be set up under the direction of the Public Defender and Budget Management.
11. Budget Management will work with the Sheriff's Office to break out detention housing and medical expenses into new cost centers under the direction of the Sheriff. A plan for implementing these changes for the FY 2013-14 budget year will be addressed at Mid Year Review.

12. In December 2011, court approved a plan to separate Management Services into two departments, Budget Management (Dept. 201) and Financial Services & Planning (Dept. 203). With the retirement of the Director of Financial Services & Planning in February 2012, a proposal to combine the departments back into a single department, Budget Management and reorganize some of the responsibilities are provided for court consideration at this time. A new organization chart is included in this section. Budget Management will review the recently adopted Investment procedures and bring recommendations for changes that may be necessary after the reorganization.
13. The salary for the County Budget Officer and Executive Director of Budget Management is recommended to be increased to the level approved in December for that position, effective March 24, 2012.

Law Enforcement

14. Harris County jail population on March 1, 2012 is 8,620 inmates, well below the design capacity of 10,142 which includes 720 variance beds. As a general rule, the jail is considered to be at capacity when 93% of the beds are being utilized resulting in a general capacity limit of 9,432. Should the inmate population grow back above this level it may be necessary to contract with other jail facilities as has been done over the last few years. If this happens, the cost of other jail facility utilization will be recorded in the General Administration cost center.
15. Budget Management will work with the Harris County Hospital District and MHMRA to explore opportunities for collaboration to improve the coordination and delivery of medical services in the jail.
16. Budget Management will complete a comprehensive analysis of the contract patrol programs including rates and bring back recommendations to court.
17. Fleet Services will engage an independent firm to conduct a study of vehicle utilization and bring back recommendations to court as necessary.

Justice of the Peace Courts

18. Budget Management will continue to work with the J.P. courts to adjust staffing levels based on workloads. This review will also consider a tier structure pay differential for the courts.

Technology

19. Budget Management will continue to work with ITC and departments to develop technology and find efficiencies in providing government services to the public.
20. Credit card expenses related to providing online services will be recorded in the General Administration cost center to help encourage departments to provide new online services or expand existing services to improve efficiency without the added cost of these fees.