



2015 Budget

Policies, Procedures, and Calendar

Adopted March 11,2014

BUDGET POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Policies

The County follows the policies below in establishing the budget.

Revenue Policy

The County will maintain a stable and diversified revenue system to protect it from short-term fluctuations in any single revenue source and, whenever applicable, establish user fees and charges permitted by law at levels associated with the direct and indirect costs of providing those services. Furthermore, the County will annually evaluate fees and charges to assure that total costs are covered and will adjust accordingly to keep pace with the cost of providing those services.

Tax Rate

The Commissioners' Court believes it is unacceptable to raise the tax rate next year. Every effort will be made to avoid increasing the tax rate.

Indebtedness

The County will confine long-term debt to capital projects.

General Level of Spending

All departments should expect to continue operations at the same level as this year. Exceptions may be requested, if fully documented, but may be granted only if revenues increase beyond currently foreseeable levels.

Department heads should request approximately the same funding they are receiving this year. The budget officer will make adjustments for inflation.

Investment Policy

The County annually adopts a formal investment policy that is consistent with the Public Funds Investment Act and Public Funds Collateral Act. The County follows the "prudent person rule" in investment decisions.

Salaries and Benefits

Salaries and benefits must remain at current levels unless unforeseen revenue is obtained. There is a possibility of merit raises next year and every effort will be made to provide a cost-of-living to all employees. The budget officer will calculate all raises and adjustments.

BUDGET POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Fund Balance Policy

The County practices conservative budgeting and adopted a fund balance policy that requires the County to maintain an unassigned fund balance in the General Fund not less than 25% of annual expenditures.

Procedures

The County follows the procedures below in establishing the budget.

- Chambers County fiscal year begins on January 1st and ends of December 31st. The budget process starts in January/February with establishing the budget calendar and policy. Then in May, department heads project their financial requirements for the upcoming year. The Budget Worksheet is a guide of initial budget requests.
- Departmental annual requests are then submitted by the department to the County Auditor in June. The County Auditor compiles the initial requests and in July, budget hearings are held for each department. Commissioners' Court, which includes the County Judge and the four County Commissioners, oversees the budget hearings. The hearings allow department heads the opportunity to discuss with Commissioners' Court any changes in their budget, and items that are a priority. The public is invited to attend all budget hearings, which are posted according to the Open Meetings Act.
- The County Auditor prepares an estimate of available resources in each fund for the upcoming fiscal year. Expenditures budgeted in the various fund may not exceed the fund balances as of the first day of the fiscal year.
- In September, the County Auditor prepares the proposed annual operating budget to be presented to Commissioners' Court. Public hearings are held on the proposed budget.
- The Commissioners' Court must adopt an annual operating budget by a majority vote before October 1st.
- The budgets of general government are prepared on the accrual basis. This means that all of the current year's revenues and expenses are taken into account even if cash has not yet changed hands.
- Encumbrance accounting is used for all funds. Encumbrance accounting means that an estimated cost is recorded on the books at the time of an order of goods and services so that all obligations are booked. When the actual cost is known, it is booked, and the encumbrance is reversed.
- The budget document doesn't include grants. Grants are restricted for specific purposes. Because grants are presented to Commissioners' Court throughout the year and some run on different fiscal years, the grant budgets and accountings are maintained separately from this document.

BUDGET CALENDAR

January

- Prepare preliminary revenue estimates

February

- Establish budget policy
- Establish budget calendar with governing body
- Develop budget format and outline of contents
- Begin preparing statistical and other supplementary information

March

- Communicate budget policy and calendar to department heads and all employees
- Distribute departmental request forms

March/April

- Help departments complete request forms

May

- Revise revenue estimates
- Prepare preliminary budget
- Revise departmental estimates and/or develop spending alternatives for governing body's consideration
- Receive Abatement and 381 Schedules from EDC.

May 15

- Chief appraiser submits estimate of total appraised value to appraisal review board for review and determination of protests.

June

- Governing body reviews preliminary budget

July

- Budget hearings

July 25

- Deliver certified appraisal roll to Tax Assessor

August 1

- Deliver the appraisal roll to the court showing:
 - Total appraised, assessed, and taxable values
 - Total appraised, assessed, and taxable values for new property
- Certify a collection rate for the current year

August 7

- Calculate, publish, and present to the court:
 - Effective tax rate, rollback rate, and calculation methods
 - Estimate amounts of unencumbered interest and sinking, and maintenance and operation balances
 - Schedule of debt obligations
 - Projected sales and use tax to reduce property tax
 - Amount of increase (decrease) based on effective tax rate
 - Information on transferred departments or functions
 - Information on tax effect of transferred department or functions

BUDGET CALENDAR

August

- Complete proposed budget
- File proposed budget with County Clerk and make it available for public inspection at least 15 days prior to public hearings
- Decide whether it is necessary to change taxes

August/September

- Hold public hearings for tax rate; if necessary vote on tax rate
- Hold public hearings on budget
- Adopt budget
- Final Budget Review with Department Heads and Elected Officials.
- Levy taxes before September 30, or the 60th day after the date the certified appraisal roll is received
- File copy of adopted budget with County Clerk

2014 Budget Calendar

2014	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
JANUARY	Prepare preliminary revenue estimates																														
FEBRUARY	Establish budget & calendar; develop budget format & outline; begin preparation & other supplementary information																														
MARCH	Communicate budget policy & calendar to department heads; distribute request forms; help complete forms																														
APRIL	Communicate budget policy & calendar to department heads; distribute request forms; help complete forms																														
MAY	Revise revenue estimates; prepare preliminary budget																														
	Receive Abatement and 381 Schedules from EDC																														
	Chief appraiser submits estimate of total appraised value																														
JUNE	Review Preliminary Budget																														
JULY	Deliver certified appraisal roll to tax assessor																														
	Post Preliminary Budget online and in the paper																														
AUGUST	Deliver appraisal roll to the court; certify collection rate																														
	Calculate, publish, and present effective tax rate, roll back rate, debt obligations, etc.																														
	Complete proposed budget, file, and decide if necessary to adjust tax																														
SEPTEMBER	Hold public hearing for tax rate and budget; adopt budget; Final budget review with Department Heads and Elected Officials; levy taxes before Sept.30; file copy of budget to County Clerk and post online																														