



# REVENUE POLICY

## CROW WING COUNTY BRAINERD, MINNESOTA

**Adopted by County Board  
November 12, 2013  
Amended August 22, 2017  
Reviewed November 26, 2019**

**Our Vision:** Being Minnesota's favorite place.

**Our Mission:** Serve well. Deliver value. Drive results.

**Our Values:** Be responsible. Treat people right. Build a better future.

**REVENUE POLICY**  
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**I. REVENUE POLICY STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The objective of this policy is to provide guidelines for revenue goals and estimates, and to guide the County in the administration of user fees.

**II. SCOPE**

This Revenue Policy applies to all revenues collected by the County unless otherwise stated.

**III. REVENUE GOALS**

**A. DIVERSIFICATION AND STABILIZATION**

The County will maintain a stable and diverse revenue system to shelter programs and services from short-term fluctuations in any single revenue source.

**B. EQUITY**

Funding is derived from a fair, equitable, and adequate resource base, while minimizing tax differential burdens. Services having a County-wide benefit shall be financed with revenue sources generated from a broad base, such as property taxes and state aids. Services where the customer determines the use shall be financed with user fees, charges, and assessments related to the level of service provided to the individual in relation to the generalized benefit to society as a whole.

**C. COLLECTIONS**

The County will monitor all taxes for timely and accurate collections. The annual level of uncollected property taxes will generally not exceed three percent within the fiscal year of the levy.

**IV. NON-RECURRING AND VOLATILE REVENUES**

**A. USE OF ONE-TIME REVENUES**

One-time (non-recurring) revenues should be used only for one-time expenditures and not for ongoing expenditures, as they cannot be relied upon in future budget years. Appropriate uses of one-time revenues include early debt retirement, highway infrastructure, capital expenditures that will reduce operating costs, information technology projects that will improve efficiency, and special projects that will not incur on-going operating costs.

**B. USE OF VOLATILE REVENUES**

The County recognizes that certain annual revenues vary greatly in amount, such as interest earnings. It is not prudent to rely on interest revenues to fund operations. At a minimum, any interest earnings that exceed the average annual earnings over the last five years should be used for one-time expenditures or to increase reserves. Other volatile revenues shall be managed in a similar manner.

**V. NEW REVENUES AND CHANGES TO REVENUES**

The County shall seek means to expand its revenue portfolio to decrease reliance on traditional revenues and to relieve financial pressure, either by implementing entirely new revenue sources or making changes to existing ones to increase their yield. When implementing a new revenue source, or changing an existing source, the County will consider the following features:

- (1) Stability of the tax source over its expected life.
- (2) Suitability to the program or purpose it is intended to fund.
- (3) Fair distribution of revenue burden as measured by ability to pay, the benefits received, or the community's definition of the fair share of the revenue burden.
- (4) Acceptability to the community.
- (5) Impact on economic competitiveness relative to other communities.
- (6) The cost of administering a tax or fee in relation to revenues collected.
- (7) Effect on private economic decisions.

## **VI. ESTIMATES OF REVENUES**

### **A. FORECASTING PHILOSOPHY**

In general, the County shall take an *objective* approach in forecasting revenues. In contrast to a *conservative* approach, where revenues are often underestimated, the County shall strive to accurately forecast revenue sources, including likelihood of collection. This process will allow the County to create a balanced budget and provide a full range of services to constituents.

The County is aware, however, that forecasting errors may result in revenue shortfalls. At the beginning of each Long-Term Financial Planning and Budget cycle, the County shall examine revenue forecasting over the previous cycles to determine where adjustments to this approach may need to be made.

### **B. MULTI-YEAR FORECASTS**

To emphasize and facilitate the Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP) process, the County, as part of the LTFP, will maintain broad projections of revenues for the succeeding three years.

## **VII. EARMARKING**

The County recognizes that generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) for state and local governments discourage the earmarking of general revenues, and accordingly, the practice of designating general revenues for specific programs should be minimized in the County's management of its fiscal affairs.

Approval of the following revenue distribution policy does not prevent the County Board from directing general resources to other functions and programs as necessary:

- The County recognizes the volatility of County Program Aid, and its unreliability as an offset to operating expenditures. In general, the County shall direct County Program Aid funds towards capital improvements.

## **VIII. PROPERTY TAXES**

The County will maintain sound appraisal procedures to keep property values current. The assessor will value property at market value, as mandated by Minn. Stat. § 273.11. The year-to-year increase of actual revenue from property taxes will be kept as low as practicable.

## **IX. GRANTS**

The County will seek out, apply for, and effectively administer federal, state, and other grants that address the County Board's priorities and policy objectives and provide a positive benefit to the County. Before any new grant above \$50,000 is pursued, staff shall provide a detailed analysis to the County Board that addresses the immediate and long-term costs and benefits

to the County. Prior to acceptance of grant funding, an evaluation of the grant must determine the following:

- (1) The grant purpose is compatible with County program objectives.
- (2) The benefits provided by the grant exceed the cost of administration.
- (3) The grant does not commit the County to long-term tax funded expenditures after the completion of the grant period. All such services, programs, or positions funded by the grant shall cease at the end of the grant period unless approved for continuance by the County Board.

**X. USER FEES**

It is the County Board's policy to set user fees at full cost recovery levels, except where a greater public benefit is demonstrated to the satisfaction of the County Board, when the beneficiary has an inability to pay (i.e., public assistance programs), or when it is not cost effective to do so. A consistent approach to setting user fees is necessary to protect and anticipate these important revenue sources, as well as to ensure that the necessary information is available to enable decisions regarding user fees.

Each good or service provided by the County may be classified into one of four categories. Each category identifies different levels of individual and societal benefits received. User fees are appropriate for goods and services that are classified as either (1), (2), or (3) below. The categories for goods and services are

- (1) *Non tax-supported,*
- (2) *Partially tax-supported,*
- (3) *Licenses, permits, and approvals, and*
- (4) *Fully tax-supported.*

Every service supported by user fees or charges will be analyzed a minimum of every three years to determine the net cost of providing the service. Net cost will be determined by identifying all revenues generated or attributed to the service and subtracting all cost elements (direct and indirect expenditures, capital outlays and other one-time expenditures). The resulting figure will be level of subsidy, which the County Board will use as a basis for determining user fee increases or decreases.

If it is determined that there is a net cost to providing the service, the County Board may raise user fees to achieve full cost recovery, unless it is decided that the subsidy should be maintained. Additional information may be necessary to aid in the decision as to whether or not a service should be subsidized (public benefit, cost-effectiveness, etc.). User fees are only appropriate where the County is willing and able to exclude customers for non-payment in a way that is both legally and administratively feasible, as well as socially desirable.

**A. GOALS OF USER FEES**

The following general concepts will be used in developing, implementing, or maintaining service charges:

- (1) Revenues should not exceed the reasonable cost of providing the service.
- (2) Cost recovery goals should be based on the total cost of delivering the service, including direct costs, departmental administration costs, and organization-wide support costs such as financial services, human resources, information technology, vehicle maintenance, insurance, etc.

- (3) The method of assessing and collecting fees should be as simple as possible in order to reduce the administrative cost of collection.
- (4) Rate structures should be sensitive to the “market” for similar services as well as to smaller, infrequent users of the service.
- (5) A unified approach should be used in determining cost recovery levels for various programs.

## **B. COST RECOVERY**

### **1. COST RECOVERY LEVELS**

In setting user fees and cost recovery levels, the following factors will be considered:

- (1) Community-wide versus special benefit.
- (2) Service recipient versus service driver.
- (3) Effect of pricing on the demand for services.
- (4) Feasibility of collection and recovery.
- (5) Federal or State mandate.
- (6) Ability of recipients to pay for the cost of the benefit incurred in the delivery of the service

#### **a. FACTORS FAVORING LOW COST RECOVERY LEVELS**

Very low cost recovery levels are appropriate under the following circumstances:

- (1) There is *no* intended relationship between the amount paid and the benefit received.
- (2) Collecting fees is not cost-effective or will significantly impact the efficient delivery of the service.
- (3) There is *no* intent to limit the use of the service.
- (4) The service is non-recurring, generally delivered on a “peak demand” or emergency basis, cannot reasonably be planned for on an individual basis, and is not readily available from a private sector source.
- (5) Collecting fees would discourage compliance with regulatory requirements and adherence is primarily self-identified, and as such, failure to comply would not be readily detected by the County.
- (6) An overarching purpose of the program is to benefit a low-income recipient.

#### **b. FACTORS FAVORING HIGH COST RECOVERY LEVELS**

The use of service charges as a major source of funding service levels is especially appropriate under the following circumstances:

- (1) The service is similar to services provided through the private sector.
- (2) Other private or public sector alternatives could or do exist for the delivery of the service.
- (3) For equity or demand management purposes, it is intended that there be a direct relationship between the amount paid and the level and cost of the service received.
- (4) The use of the service is specifically discouraged.
- (5) The service is regulatory in nature and voluntary compliance is not expected to be the primary method of detecting failure to meet regulatory requirements.

**2. LOW COST RECOVERY SERVICES**

Based on criteria set above, the following types of services should have very low cost recovery goals. In selected circumstances, there may be specific activities within the broad scope of services provided that should have user charges associated with them. However, the primary source of funding for the operation as a whole should be general-purpose revenues, not user fees.

- (1) Delivering public safety emergency response services in instances where a bona fide or immediate threat to safety or property exists.
- (2) Maintaining and developing public infrastructure that is provided on a uniform, community-wide basis such as highways, parks and general-purpose buildings.
- (3) Providing social service programs and economic development activities.

**3. HIGH COST RECOVERY SERVICES**

-In areas in which the County Board has elected to charge at a high cost recovery level, the County shall clearly establish and articulate standards for its performance to ensure the external customer is receiving “value for cost.”

**4. COMPARABILITY WITH OTHER COUNTIES**

In setting user fees, the County will review fees charged by other agencies. Surveying the comparability of the County’s fees to other counties provides useful background information in setting fees for several reasons:

- (1) They reflect the “market” for these fees and can assist in assessing the reasonableness of the County’s fees.
- (2) If prudently analyzed, they can serve as a benchmark for how cost-effectively the County provides its services.

However, fee surveys should never be the sole or primary criteria in setting County fees as there are many factors that affect how and why other governments have set their fees at their levels.

**C. REVIEW OF FEES**

Fees will be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis to ensure that they keep pace with changes in the cost of living as well as changes in methods or levels of service delivery.

In implementing this goal, a comprehensive analysis of County costs and fees should be made at least every three years. Fees may be adjusted during the interim period based on supplemental analysis whenever there have been significant changes in the method, level, or cost of service delivery. All fees will be approved by the County Board prior to implementation, and reviewed and approved annually as part of the Budget process.

**XI. CONTRACTED SERVICES**

When contracting to provide services for other organizations or governmental activities, or acting as a fiscal agent for another entity, the County shall establish fees at full cost recovery levels plus a margin. Full cost recovery may include items such as

- (1) Compensation (includes wages, taxes, and fringe benefits),
- (2) Other direct costs, such as supplies and materials,
- (3) Internal indirect service costs (such as Finance, IT, Administration, or Human Resources, depreciation, and debt service),

- (4) Potential for increases in unemployment or worker's compensation costs, and
- (5) Any other knowu or approximated costs.

This method of charging for services more closely resembles that of the private sector. In doing so, it promotes an equal opportunity between potential public and private service offerings.

An exception to this policy would be where a greater public benefit is demonstrated to the satisfaction of the County Board by lowering the fee. These exceptions may be services of a similar nature as those deemed by the County as "low cost recovery services." The County may choose not to recover all costs, but it should identify such costs. Reasons for not recovering full costs should be identified and explained.

**XII. REVENUE RECOGNITION**

For governmental-type funds, the County will recognize (record) all revenues received within 60 days after year end (that relate to prior year services) as revenues for the prior fiscal year.

**XIII. REVENUE POLICY ADOPTION**

The County's Revenue Policy shall be adopted by resolution of the County Board. The policy shall be reviewed on a biennial basis by the Budget Committee and any modifications made thereto must be approved by the County Board.