

**CITY OF RICHMOND RENT BOARD RESOLUTION NO. 21-01**  
**ADOPTING CITY OF RICHMOND RENT BOARD RESERVE POLICY**

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WHEREAS, on November 8, 2016, Richmond Residents passed ballot initiative Measure L, with 65.27% voting Yes, which established Rent control and Just Cause for Eviction within the City limits of Richmond; and

WHEREAS, Measure L encapsulates the edicts of Rent Control and Just Cause for Eviction within a voter-adopted Ordinance, called “The Richmond Fair Rent, Just Cause for Eviction and Homeowner Protection Ordinance,” and herein referred to as “Rent Ordinance”; and

WHEREAS, Measure L, among other things, created an independent agency and vested within that agency broad powers of administering and executing the provisions of the Rent Ordinance; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Richmond Municipal Code Section 11.100.060(m), to ensure the integrity and autonomy of the Rent Board, Measure L mandates the Rent Board “be an integral part of the government of the City [of Richmond]”, and establishes that the Rent Board “shall exercise its powers and duties under [Chapter 11.100] independent from the City Council, City Manager, and City Attorney, except by request of the [Rent] Board.”; and

WHEREAS, in furtherance of its independence, Measure L vests the Rent Board with the sole power to oversee and adopt its own budget, while establishing that “the City Council and the City Manager shall have no authority to oversee, supervise, or approve this budget”; and

WHEREAS, to finance the budget, which must be comprised of only reasonable and necessary expenses, Measure L provides that the Rent Board shall charge Landlords annual registration fees in an amount deemed reasonable by the Rent Board; and

WHEREAS, in affirmation of the Rent Board’s independence, the City of Richmond City Council, successfully voted to not provide the City of Richmond Rent Board with any financial relief if the Rent Board were to fall into a fiscal deficit; and

WHEREAS, having no financial safety net from the City of Richmond City Council and being an independent agency, which necessitates an ability to self-determine through financial independence, it is fiscally prudent and consistent with the mandate of Measure L for the City of Richmond Rent Board to maintain reserves in an amount necessary to overcome any shortfalls in its ability to cover its annual expenses; and

WHEREAS, consistent with prudence, on December 18, 2019, the City of Richmond Rent Board directed Rent Program staff members to negotiate and execute a contract with a financial consultant to: (1) Develop and present two, five, and 10-year financial projections of both revenues, expenditures, and reserves for the Rent Program agency, specifically as they relate to collection of the Rental Housing Fee; (2) Provide recommendations on how to meet the Rent Program's goal of building 17% operating reserves by the close of the 2020-21 fiscal year, and how best to achieve long-term financial stability in a manner that is consistent with all applicable laws and regulations including but not limited to Section 50076 of the California Government Code; and (3) Provide recommendations regarding financial and budgetary "best practices" to be utilized by the Rent Board and Rent Program staff members, specifically as it relates to the preparation of an annual budget and fee study for approval by the Rent Board; and

WHEREAS, on February 3, 2020, the City of Richmond Rent Board contracted with Kevin W. Harper CPA & Associates to engage his financial services; and

WHEREAS, between the months of February and March 2020, Rent Program staff members worked with Kevin W. Harper CPA & Associates to develop financial and budgetary recommendations and best practices for the City of Richmond Rent Board's consideration; and

WHEREAS, on April 15, 2020, in consideration of the recommendations and best practices presented by Kevin W. Harper CPA & Associates, the City of Richmond Rent Board directed staff to develop a financial reserve policy; and

WHEREAS, it is prudent that the City of Richmond Rent Board adopt a reserve balance policy that adequately reflects both (1) the City of Richmond Rent Board's dependence on the Residential Rental Housing Fee, charged to all Richmond Landlords on an annual basis, and which has proved to be a volatile revenue source given year-to-year fluctuations in the number of applicable Rental Units upon which the Residential Rental Housing Fee may be assessed, and (2) the City of Richmond's inability to financially support the City of Richmond Rent Board during times of crisis and/or financial uncertainty.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

The City of Richmond Rent Board adopts the City of Richmond Rent Board Reserve Policy contained in Attachment A, which will do the following:

- 1) Establish three categories of Reserves and create a procedure whereby those amounts within the Reserves may be accessed;
- 2) Require that any amount of the Reserves that are appropriated for spending be replenished; and
- 3) Sets a maximum cap on the total amount of Reserves that can be held at one time and require that

any amount in excess of the Reserve maximum cap be used to reduce future annual registration fees.

**ATTACHMENT A:**

**TITLE: Richmond Rent Board Special Revenue Fund Operating Reserve Policy**

The Richmond Rent Board Special Revenue Fund Operating Reserve Policy is to be reviewed by the Rent Board as part of their annual operating budget review and adoption process.

**AUTHORITY:**

Richmond Municipal Code Section 11.100.060(m) confers on the Rent Board integrity and autonomy, rendering the exercise of its powers and duties independent from the City Council, City Manager, and City Attorney, except by request of the Rent Board. As a consequence of its independence, Richmond Municipal Code 11.100.060(n) establishes that the Rent Board has the sole power to establish its own annual budget for each ensuing fiscal year, and that the City Council and City Manager shall have no authority to oversee, supervise, or approve this budget. This authority necessarily includes the approval of financial policies which establishes and directs the operations of its services provided through the Richmond Rent Program. The Executive Director of the Richmond Rent Program is responsible for carrying out the policy directives of the Rent Board and managing the day-to-day operations of the Richmond Rent Program. This policy shall be administered on behalf of the Richmond Rent Board by the Executive Director of the Richmond Rent Program or their Designee.

**PURPOSE:**

The Rent Board provides services that have an impact on quality of life for community members. Prudent use of resources helps determine how effectively these services are provided on an ongoing basis. Reserve funds help ensure that the Board sets aside adequate resources to mitigate the potential negative economic impacts of unforeseen circumstances and emergencies.

The Rent Board desires to maintain a prudent level of financial resources to ensure compliance with the Rent Ordinance while guarding its stakeholders against service disruption in the event of unexpected temporary revenue shortfalls or unforeseen one-time expenditures. The Special Revenue Operating Fund Reserves are accumulated and maintained in governmental funds in order to provide stability and flexibility to respond to unexpected adversity and/or opportunities.

This policy establishes the amount that the Rent Board will strive to maintain in its Special Revenue Operating Fund Reserves, how the Reserves will be funded, and the conditions under which Reserves may be used.

**BACKGROUND:**

Fiscally, the Rent Board operates under a Special Revenue Operating Fund. The Special Revenue Operating Fund is an account for financial resources that are restricted or committed to expenditures for specific purposes other than debt service or capital projects. Because the Rent Board is a Cost-Recovery Agency, State law restricts the use of its funds received through the Residential Rental Housing Fee. The expenditure of Residential Rental Housing Fees is limited to only those services and/or activities that pertain to those landlord/tenant matters that reasonably relate to rents and evictions.

Under ordinary accounting standards, and consistent with the Fiscal Year 2020-21 Reserve Policy of the City of Richmond, there are five separate components of a Fund balance, each of which establishes specific parameters controlling the specific purpose for which amounts may be spent:

1. **Non-Spendable Fund Balance** – Cannot be spent because they are either (a) not in spendable form or (b) legally or contractually required to remain intact.
2. **Restricted Fund Balance** – Restricted either externally imposed or imposed by law through constitutional provisions or enabling legislation.
3. **Unrestricted Committed Fund Balance** – Reserved for specific purposes pursuant to constraints imposed by formal action of the Rent Board.
4. **Unrestricted Assigned Fund Balance** – Reserved by the Rent Board or Executive Director for specific purposes, but neither restricted nor committed.
5. **Unrestricted Unassigned Fund Balance** – Residual balance not classified in any of the above categories and has not been restricted, committed, nor assigned to specific purposes.

In the Unrestricted Committed Fund Balance, the Rent Board, as the City of Richmond’s highest level of decision-making authority as it relates to the Rent Board budget, may commit funds for specific purposes pursuant to constraints imposed by formal action taken, such as an ordinance or resolution. These committed amounts cannot be used for any other purpose unless the Rent Board removes or changes the specific use through the same type of formal action taken to establish the commitment. An affirmative vote of three (3) Rent Board members is required to both approve and remove a commitment. Any Commitment of Fund Balance by the Rent Board must be prior to the end of the fiscal year. An example of committed funds is committing an amount of fund balance equal to the expected costs for replacing an existing database, which is demonstrated to be a reasonable and necessary expense, or establishing an operating reserve.

It is recommended that the Rent Board adopt a policy that provides for three reserves within the Rent Board’s Unrestricted Committed Fund Balance: (1) an Operating and Stability Reserve, (2) a Catastrophic Legal Reserve, and (3) a Catastrophic Reserve. Furthermore, because the bulk of Rental Housing Fee revenue is collected in the third and fourth period of the fiscal year (September and October), it is also recommended that the Rent Board include in this policy the requirement that Rent Board monitor its finances with the intent to end each fiscal year with a fund balance equivalent to a minimum of two months, and maximum of three months, of budgeted expenses for the next fiscal year. These funds shall not be considered part of the Rent Board’s reserve balance.

**DESCRIPTION AND APPROPRIATE RESERVE BALANCE LEVELS:**

The Rent Board shall maintain a minimum Special Revenue Operating Fund Unrestricted Committed Fund balance of at least eighteen percent (18%) of operating expenditures for budget stability, cash flow, and contingencies such as catastrophic events and unforeseen operating or capital needs. This is based on the risk assessment methodology for setting reserve levels developed by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada. Following are the three categories of Reserves hereby created and their respective reserve target levels:

- (1) **Operating and Stability Reserve:** The Rent Board shall maintain year-end contingency reserve balances in an Operating and Stability Reserve equivalent to a minimum of eighteen percent (18%) of current year budgeted expenditures. The purpose of the Operating and Stability Reserve is to provide fiscal stability and mitigate loss of service delivery and financial risks associated with unexpected revenue shortfalls during a single fiscal year or during a prolonged recessionary period. As the Rent Board experiences net revenue gains in future years, the Operating and Stability Reserve balance must grow back to eighteen percent (18%) of total expenditures to allow the Rent Board to build up its capacity to handle future

short term economic downturns or emergencies without cutting services. A policy based upon a percentage assures that the reserve will remain a prudent cushion as the Rent Board's budget grows over time.

- (2) ***Catastrophic Legal Event Reserve:*** The Rent Board shall maintain a Catastrophic Legal Event Reserve equivalent to fifty percent (50%) of any remaining reserve balances after the Operating and Stability Reserve is sufficiently funded at eighteen percent (18%) of current year budgeted expenses. The purpose of the Catastrophic Legal Event Reserve is to offset unforeseen legal costs that exceed currently allocated legal fees. Should an unforeseen lawsuit be brought against the Rent Board that results in the Rent Board owing fees and costs that exceed those legal expenditures provided for in the annual budget, the Executive Director or their Designee shall have the authority to approve Catastrophic Legal Event Reserve appropriations; however, the Executive Director's or their Designee's approval of use of Catastrophic Legal Event Reserves shall not automatically result in the disbursement of said funds. Subject to the principles of Attorney Client Privilege and the Brown Act, the Executive Director or their Designee's approval must be certified by a majority of the Rent Board Member's at a noticed Board Meeting. The certification shall be accompanied by a budget amendment confirming the nature of the emergency and authorizing the appropriation of reserve funds.
- (3) ***Catastrophic Reserve:*** The Rent Board shall maintain a Catastrophic Reserve equivalent to fifty percent (50%) of any remaining reserve balances after the Operating and Stability Reserve is sufficiently funded at eighteen percent (18%) of current year budgeted expenses. The purpose of the Catastrophic Reserve is to mitigate costs associated with unforeseen emergencies, such as a disaster or catastrophic event. Should unforeseen events occur that require the expenditure of the Rent Board's resources beyond those provided for in the annual budget, the Executive Director or their Designee shall have the authority to approve Catastrophic Reserve appropriations; however, the Executive Director's or their Designee's approval of use of Catastrophic Reserves shall not automatically result in the disbursement of said funds. Rather, the Executive Director or their Designee's approval must be certified by a majority of the Rent Board Member's at a noticed Board Meeting. The certification shall be accompanied by a budget amendment confirming the nature of the emergency and authorizing the appropriation of reserve funds. Should a catastrophic event occur, the required reserve level of fifty percent (50%) of any remaining reserve balances after the Operating and Stability Reserve is sufficiently funded should be adequate to meet the Rent Board's financial needs. For instance, in the event of a natural disaster, the Catastrophic Reserve would provide necessary coverage for basic operating expenses, including costs of relocating of the Richmond Rent Program to another site if the current structure is destroyed and lease costs therein, while still meeting debt service obligations for approximately 90 days. This time frame would enable the Rent Board to seek other available cash alternatives.

## **COMPLIANCE:**

The Rent Board will measure its compliance with this Policy as of June 30 of each year, or as soon as is practical after final year-end account information becomes available. During the course of the year, Rent Program staff members shall deliver to the Rent Board monthly variance reports, so that the Rent Board may closely monitor its revenues and expenditures to ensure Reserves are, or are projected to be, sufficiently funded and used only in accordance with this Policy.

If, based on staff's analysis and forecasting, the target level of Reserves is or is anticipated to be insufficient based upon the target levels established in this Policy, then during the annual budget process, Fund Balance levels shall be provided to the Rent Board as an agenda item for discussion. Should the projected year-end Fund Balance be below the minimum Reserve amount established by this Policy, a plan to replenish the Reserve shall be established based on the requirements outlined in this Policy.

## **FUNDING OF RESERVES:**

Funding of all Reserve targets will generally come from committed funds, excess revenues over expenditures, or one-time revenues.

## **CONDITIONS FOR USE OF RESERVES:**

It is the intent of the Rent Board to limit the use of all Reserves under this Policy to address unanticipated, non-recurring (one-time) needs. Reserves shall not normally be applied to recurring annual operating expenditures. Reserves may, however, be used to allow for the Rent Board to restructure its operations in a deliberate manner (as might be required in an economic downturn), but such use will only take place in the context of an adopted long-term financial plan.

## **ALLOCATION OF RESERVE FUNDS:**

The Rent Board will allocate committed funds, excess revenues over expenditures, or one-time revenue to Reserves by June 30 of each year, or as soon as is practical after final year-end account information becomes available

## **PERIODIC REVIEW OF RESERVE TARGETS:**

Compliance with these sections will be reviewed in conjunction with the annual budget process. At a minimum, during the annual budget process, Rent Program staff members shall review the current and three-year projected Reserves to ensure that they are appropriate given the economic and financial risk factors the Rent Board is subject to.

## **USE AND REPLENISHMENT OF FUNDS:**

The Rent Board's discretionary use of the reserve balances shall be limited by the "Compliance" section of this Policy. Where the Rent Board exercises its direction and appropriates any Reserve Funds consistent with Section (2) of this Policy, the funds shall be replenished in a manner consistent with the following:

- (1) Reserve Funds may be allocated for one-time emergencies (or capital projects deemed appropriate by the Board) only; reserve funds are not to be used for ongoing expenses. Rent Board approval is required before any withdrawals from a reserve fund are initiated.
- (2) In no event shall the total amount of Reserve Funds, as described in Section (2) of this Policy, exceed twenty-five percent (25%) of the annual budget in any current year. Where the total

Reserve Funds either exceed twenty-five percent (25%) of the current year annual budget or are anticipated to exceed twenty-five percent (25%) of the following year's annual budget, the Executive Director or their Designee shall prioritize the use of the excess funds in reducing any subsequent Residential Rental Housing Fee proposal.

- (3) Notwithstanding Section (2), since the majority of Rental Housing Fee revenue is collected in the third and fourth period of the fiscal year (September and October) the Rent Board shall monitor its finances with the intent to end each fiscal year with a fund balance equivalent to a minimum of two months, and maximum of three months, of budgeted expenses for the next fiscal year. These funds shall not be considered part of the Rent Board's reserve balance.

Dated: February 17, 2021

Adopted by the Richmond Rent Board of the City of Richmond by the following vote:

AYES: Boardmembers, Conner, Finlay and Chair Maddock.

NOES: None.

ABSENT: Vice Chair Gerould.

ABSTENTIONS: None.

CYNTHIA SHAW  
Cynthia Shaw, Rent Board Clerk

LAUREN MADDOCK  
Lauren Maddock, Chair

Approved as to form:

CHARLES OSHINUGA  
Charles Oshinuga, Rent Board Legal Counsel

