Glossary

Provided below are some of the most commonly used terms in capital planning and debt management.

BOND – A written promise to pay a specified sum of money (called the face value or principal amount) at a specified date or dates in the future (called the maturity date), together with periodic interest at a specified rate. The difference between a note and a bond is that the latter runs for a longer period of time and requires greater legal formality.

BOND ANTICIPATION NOTE – Short-term interest-bearing notes issued by a government in anticipation of bonds to be issued at a later date. Notes are retired from proceeds from the bond issue to which they are related (also referred to as a BAN).

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN (CIP) – A financial planning and management tool that identifies public facility and equipment requirements and schedules them for funding and implementation.

CAPITAL PROJECT – Major, non-recurring expenditure involving one or more of the following: acquisition of land for a public purpose; construction of or addition to a facility such as a public building, water or sewer lines, play field, etc.; rehabilitation or repair of a building, facility, or equipment, provided the cost is $25,000 or more and the improvement will have a useful life of five years or more; purchase of equipment costing $25,000 or more, with a useful life of five years or more; and any planning, engineering, or design study related to an individual capital project.

CHAPTER 90 – Massachusetts General Laws (M.G.L.) Chapter 90, Section 34 authorizes the Commonwealth to allocate funds to municipalities, through the Transportation Bond Issue, for highway construction, preservation and improvement projects that create or extend the life of capital facilities; routine maintenance operations such as pothole filling and snow and ice removal are not covered. The formula for determining the Chapter 90 level of funding is based on a municipality's miles of public ways, population and level of employment. Municipalities receive Chapter 90 reimbursement only for pre-approved projects.

DEBT EXCLUSION – A *temporary* increase in a municipality's levy limit (and possibly the levy ceiling) when a municipality's voters elect to exclude the payment of particular debt service from the constraints of Proposition 2 1/2. The debt service is then added to the levy limit for the life of the debt only. To place a debt exclusion question on the ballot requires a 2/3 vote of the entire Board of Selectmen. A simple majority vote by the voters is required for passage.

DEBT LIMIT – The maximum amount of gross or net debt that is legally permitted under State Law.

DEBT SERVICE – The amount paid annually to cover the cost of *both* principal and interest on a debt issuance until its retirement.

ENTERPRISE FUND – A municipal fund established for the operation of a municipal utility, health care, recreational, or transportation facility whereby the operations are fully funded by the fees associated with that enterprise rather than by the tax levy. The "surplus" or retained earnings generated by the operation of the enterprise remain with the fund to offset future capital improvements, extraordinary maintenance expenses, or to reduce future fees and charges of the fund.

FIXED ASSETS – Assets of a long-term character, which are intended to continue to be held or used, such as land, building, and improvements other than buildings, machinery, and equipment.

FULL FAITH AND CREDIT – A pledge of the general taxing power for the payment of debt obligations. Bonds carrying such pledges are referred to as general obligation bonds or full faith and credit bonds.

GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS – Bonds for the payment of which the full faith and credit of the issuing government are pledged.

INFRASTRUCTURE – The underlying foundation or basic framework of an organization or system, e.g., roads, bridges, buildings, land, and natural resources.

LEASE-PURCHASE AGREEMENTS – Contractual agreements which are termed "leases," but which in substance amount to purchase contracts in which the financing is provided by an outside party.

LEVY LIMIT – Property tax levy limits that constrain the total amount of revenue that can be raised from the property tax. In Massachusetts, the levy limit is governed by Proposition 2 1/2.

NOTE PAYABLE – In general, an unconditional written promise signed by the maker to pay a certain sum in money on demand or at a fixed or determinable time either to the bearer or to the person designated therein.

OVERRIDE – A *permanent* increase of a municipality's levy limit (but not the levy ceiling) when the majority of voters in a municipal election approve such an override. The override amount becomes part of the levy base when setting the next year's levy limit. To place an Override question on the ballot requires a majority vote of the Board of Selectmen. A simple majority by voters is required for passage.

PAY-AS-YOU-GO – A term used to describe the financial policy of a government which finances all of its capital outlay from current revenues rather than by borrowing. A government which pays for some improvements from current revenues and others by borrowing is said to be on a partial or modified pay-as-you-go basis.

PAY-AS-YOU-USE – A term used to describe the financial policy of a government which finances its capital outlays from borrowing proceeds and pays for capital assets over their useful life.

PROPOSITION 2 ½ -- That measure which limits municipal property taxes to 2.5 percent of the community's full and fair cash value (levy ceiling), and which limits the amount of revenue a municipality can raise through property taxes (levy limit) to 2.5 percent each year, plus a factor for new growth. A municipality may exceed its levy limit in two ways: override or debt exclusion.

STABILIZATION FUND – M.G.L. Ch. 40, Sec. 5B allows a municipality to appropriate annually to such fund an amount to be raised in the preceding fiscal year; the aggregate amount in the fund shall not exceed ten percent of the equalized valuation of the municipality. The treasurer shall be custodian of the fund and may invest the proceeds legally; any interest earned shall remain with the fund. The Stabilization Fund may be appropriated in a town at a town meeting by two-thirds vote. The appropriation may be used for any lawful purpose.

UNRESERVED FUND BALANCE (ALSO CALLED FREE CASH) – A community's unrestricted available funds that may be used as a funding source for appropriations. Unreserved Fund Balance is generated when the actual operating results compare favorably with the budget. It can only be used after the certification process by the Department of Revenue is complete. For example, the July 1, 2006 certified amount may be used to fund supplemental appropriations voted during fiscal year 2007, or applied as a revenue source to support the fiscal 2008 budget voted in the spring of 2007.