

# Chapter 8—The budget committee and approving the budget

## Budget committee members

The budget committee is a local government’s fiscal planning advisory committee. The governing body of each local government must establish a budget committee (ORS 294.414, renumbered from 294.336). The budget committee is composed of the governing body and an equal number of electors appointed by the governing body.<sup>6</sup> An elector is a qualified voter who, for example, has the right to vote for a ballot measure submitted by the local government.

If, after a good faith attempt, the governing body cannot find a sufficient number of registered voters who are willing to serve, the budget committee becomes those who are willing plus the governing body. If no willing electors can be found, the governing body is the budget committee [ORS 294.414(2), renumbered from 294.336(2)].

The appointive members of the budget committee cannot be officers, agents or employees of the local government [ORS 294.414(4), renumbered from 294.336(4)]. An agent, generally, is someone who is authorized to act for the local government, or who can make commitments or sign contracts in the name of the local government. This is sometimes a grey area if an appointee candidate already serves on other advisory committees or commissions of a local government. If you are in doubt about whether a particular person is an agent, consult your legal counsel.

Spouses of officers, agents or employees of the local government may serve on the budget committee if they are qualified electors and not themselves officers, agents, or employees.

Appointive members of the budget committee are appointed for three-year terms. The terms must be staggered so that about one-third of the terms end each year [ORS 294.414(5), renumbered from 294.336(5)]. When a new local government is appointing its first budget committee, the terms may be for one year, two years and three years for each third of the appointive members. After the first two years, the local government will then be able to appoint all new members to three-year terms.

If a local government prepares a biennial budget, the appointive members have four-year terms, with about one-fourth of the terms ending each year.

Appointed budget committee members may be reappointed for additional terms, at the discretion of the governing body.

If an appointive member of the budget committee is unable to complete the term, or resigns before the term is over, the governing body must appoint another elector to serve out the unexpired portion of the term [ORS 294.414(6), renumbered from 294.336(6)].

There is no provision in budget law for “stand-by” or “alternate” appointed members.

All members of the budget committee have equal authority. Each member’s vote counts the same. Any member can be elected by the committee as its chair.

No member of the budget committee (including governing body members) may receive any compensation for their services as a member of the budget committee [ORS 294.414(3), renumbered from 294.336(3)].

Budget committee members should develop a general understanding of the budget process, the departments or programs included in the budget document, and the legal constraints imposed on the local government’s tax levy after budget committee approval. “*Local Budgeting in Oregon*” (150-504-400) is recommended as a good resource for budget committee members for information on the basics of taxation and budget law. This publication can be found at <http://www.oregon.gov/dor/ptd/pages/localb.aspx>. You can also request copies of the booklet by calling the Finance and Taxation analysts at 503-945-8293.

<sup>6</sup>There is an exception to this in Multnomah County, where there is a tax supervising and conservation commission. There, the governing body serves as the budget committee for any local government with a population exceeding 200,000 (ORS 294.423, renumbered from 294.341). Another exception is the city of Portland, where the city council performs the duties of the urban renewal agency and its budget committee [ORS 457.440(11)]. Another exception is that the appointive members of the budget committee for an education service district are members of the component school district boards within the education service district or are designees of the school district boards (ORS 334.240).

## Duties of the budget committee

The budget committee meets publicly to review the budget document as proposed by the budget officer. The committee receives the proposed budget and the budget message and holds at least one meeting in which the public may ask questions about and comment on the budget. Notice of the first meeting held for these purposes must be published in a specific way (See “Chapter 9 – Publication Requirements”). The committee must eventually approve the budget and, if ad valorem property taxes are required, approve the amount of tax or the rate per \$1,000 of assessed value for each levy that will be certified to the assessor.

The budget committee may meet from time to time throughout the year at the governing body’s discretion for purposes such as training. All of these meetings are open to the public and notice of the meeting must be given in the same manner as notice for meetings of the governing body, or through one of the local budget law publication methods [ORS 294.428(2), renumbered from 294.406(2)]. Take care not to discuss specifics of the ensuing year’s budget at these informal meetings until the notice requirements for the first budget committee meeting have been satisfied.

## Copies of the budget

The budget officer may make the proposed budget available to the budget committee at any time before the first budget committee meeting advertised in the notice. Alternatively, the budget officer may choose to make the budget available at the first budget committee meeting [ORS 294.426(6)(b), renumbered from 294.401(6)(b)]. Immediately following the release of the proposed budget to the budget committee, the budget officer must file a copy of the budget in the office of the governing body. This copy becomes a public record. The governing body must provide copies of this budget, or a means of quickly duplicating it, to any interested person. A local government may charge a fee for the copy [OAR 150-294.401(7), implementing ORS 294.426].

## Budget committee meetings

The budget committee must have a quorum present to hold a meeting [OAR 150-294.336-(B), implementing ORS 294.414]. A quorum is a majority of the total membership of the committee. For example, if the budget committee has 10 members, six must be present to hold a meeting.

The budget committee elects a presiding officer from among the members at the first meeting [ORS 294.414(9), renumbered from 294.336(9)]. The budget committee also hears the budget message at its first meeting. One of the committee’s most important duties is to hear and consider any testimony presented by the public about the budget.

The budget committee reviews and, if a majority of the committee feels it is necessary, revises the proposed budget submitted by the budget officer. The committee generally studies the budget by comparing the two previous years’ actual data, the current budgeted data, and the figures proposed by the budget officer. The budget committee may reduce or increase the estimates of resources and requirements proposed by the budget officer. Among the most common items discussed are the questions of taxation (how much?) and allocating revenues and expenditures (where will the spending occur?). If the amount of tax revenue needed to balance the budget exceeds the local government’s existing taxing authority, the committee may decide that the additional amount needed should be requested from the voters in the form of a local option tax. If the committee decides to stay within its existing taxing authority, and other resources cannot be found, then the committee must reduce budgeted requirements to balance the budget. The committee must ultimately balance each fund and approve the budget. Committee members may not discuss or deliberate on the budget outside of a public meeting.

The committee may ask questions of the executive officer or other staff, and request additional information. The committee is entitled to receive any information it needs to make decisions about the budget (ORS 294.428, renumbered from 294.406).

Any budget committee action requires the affirmative vote of a majority of the total budget committee membership [OAR 150-294.336-(B), implementing ORS 294.414]. For example, if only six members of a 10-member committee are present, they have the quorum necessary to meet, but they all must vote in favor of any proposed action to achieve the required majority.

The budget committee may approve the budget at the first meeting. However, it could take several meetings to do so. When the budget officer prepares the budget calendar, several budget committee meetings can be scheduled. The public notice then can include the date, time and place of each of the meetings. If more meetings are

needed than were scheduled, give notice of those meetings in the same manner as notice of meetings of the governing body or by one or more of the publication methods used for the initial budget committee meetings [ORS 294.428(2), renumbered from 294.406(2)].

## **Approving the taxes**

The budget committee sets and approves the amount or rate of property taxes to be imposed. This is a very important responsibility of the budget committee. Less than the full amount of the available tax revenue may be needed to balance the budget. In that event, the budget committee may choose to impose less tax than the local government's full taxing authority. If that is the budget committee's decision, then the amount or rate of tax the committee approves can only be increased later by the governing body after additional process steps. That is, to increase the tax above the rate or amount approved by the budget committee, the governing body must republish the financial summary and hold a second budget hearing (ORS 294.456, renumbered from 294.435). To enforce this requirement, a statement certifying that the approved tax has not been increased unless the governing body held a second hearing is included on the tax certification form filed with the county assessor.

The committee's motion to approve taxes under the district's permanent rate authority may state either the tax rate per \$1,000 of assessed value or the amount of taxes that the budget committee wants to impose. It must state separately the tax rate or amount to be imposed under any voter-approved local option authority. It must also state separately the amount of tax for any qualifying bonded debt levy. These statements should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Once the budget committee has approved the budget, it has completed all of the duties required of it by Local Budget Law. However some local governments have a policy of including the budget committee in other parts of the process, such as adopting a supplemental budget. These are local policy decisions that are up to the discretion of the governing body.

After the budget committee approves the budget, it is turned over to the governing body and the process enters into the adoption stage. The governing body has the final responsibility for allocating the resources of the budget to the programs and departments of the local government. This authority is part of the responsibility given the governing body to adopt the budget and to make the appropriations by which the budget is administered [ORS 294.456(1), renumbered from 294.435(1)]. Chapter 11 has more details on adopting the budget and making appropriations.

If any changes are necessary after the budget committee approves the budget, the governing body may make the revisions after the budget hearing and before adopting the budget. The governing body's authority to change the approved budget is limited. It cannot increase expenditures in a fund by more than \$5,000 or 10 percent, whichever is greater, unless it publishes a revised financial summary and hearing notice, and holds another budget hearing. For a biennial budget, this limit is \$10,000 or 10 percent, whichever is greater. Also, it cannot increase the tax amount approved by the budget committee unless it publishes a revised financial summary and hearing notice, and holds another budget hearing.