

## THE FINANCIAL TREND MONITORING SYSTEM

### Financial Condition

Financial condition is broadly defined as the ability of a locality to maintain existing service levels, withstand local and regional economic disruptions, and meet the demands of natural growth, decline, and change.

**The ability to maintain existing service levels** means more than the ability to pay for services currently being provided. It also means the ability to maintain programs in the future that are currently funded from external sources such as state or federal grants where the support is likely to diminish, and where the service cannot practically be eliminated when the funds do disappear. It also includes the ability to maintain capital facilities, such as roads and buildings, in a manner that would protect the initial investment in them and keep them in usable condition. Finally, it includes the ability to provide funds for future liabilities that may currently be unfunded, such as pension, employee leave, and debt commitments.

**The ability to withstand local, regional, and national economic disruptions** is also important because these disruptions may have a major impact on the businesses and individuals who live and work in the locality, and therefore impact the locality's ability to generate new local tax dollars.

This leads to the third component of the definition of financial condition, which is **the ability to meet the future demands of change**. As time passes, localities grow, shrink or stay the same size. Each condition has its own set of financial pressures. Growth, for example, can force a locality to rapidly assume new debt to finance roads and public facilities, or it can cause a sudden increase in the operating budget to provide necessary services. Shrinkage, on the other hand, leaves a locality with the same number of roads and public facilities to maintain but with fewer people to pay for them.

### The Financial Trend Monitoring System

The Financial Trend Monitoring System (FTMS), adapted from the system developed by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), "identifies the factors that affect financial condition and arranges them in a rational order so that they can be more easily analyzed and measured." It is a management tool that pulls together the pertinent information from the County's budgetary and financial reports, mixes it with the appropriate economic and demographic data, and creates a series of local government financial indicators that, when plotted over a period of time, can be used to monitor changes in financial condition. The financial indicators include such things as cash liquidity, level of business activities, changes in fund balance, and external revenue dependencies. This system can also assist the Board of Supervisors in setting long-range policy priorities and can provide a logical way of introducing long-range considerations into the annual budget process. The following discussion has been developed using the ICMA manual entitled Evaluating Financial Condition, A Handbook for Local Government.

The FTMS is built on twelve overall "factors" that represent the primary forces that influence financial condition (see Chart 1). These financial condition factors are then associated with twenty-eight "indicators" that measure different aspects of these factors. Once developed, these can be used to monitor changes in the factors, or more importantly, to monitor changes in financial condition. Each factor is classified as an environmental factor, an organizational factor or a financial factor.

The **environmental factors** affect a locality in two ways. First, they create demands. Second, they provide resources. Underlying an analysis of the effect the environmental factors have on financial condition is the question: "Do they provide enough resources to pay for the demands they make?"

The **organizational factors** are the responses the government makes to changes in the environmental factors. It may be assumed in theory that any government can remain in good financial condition if it makes the proper organizational response to adverse conditions by reducing services, increasing efficiency, raising taxes, or taking some other appropriate action. This assumes that public officials have enough notice of the problem, understand its nature and magnitude, know what to do and are willing to do it. Underlying an analysis of the effects the organizational factors have on financial condition is the question: "Do legislative policies and management practices provide the opportunity to make the appropriate response to changes in the environment?"

The **financial factors** reflect the condition of the government's internal finances. In some respects, they are a result of the influence of the environmental and organizational factors. If the environment makes greater demands than resources provided and if the County is not effective in making a balanced response, the financial factors would eventually show signs of cash or budgetary problems. In analyzing the effect financial factors have on financial condition, the underlying question is: "Is government paying the full cost of operating without postponing costs to a future period when revenues may not be available to pay these costs?"

### **Financial Indicators**

The financial indicators are the primary tools of the Financial Trend Monitoring System. They represent a way to quantify changes in the twelve factors. The chart on page 4 shows the twenty-eight indicators along with the factors with which they are associated. Many aspects of financial condition cannot be measured explicitly; however, by quantifying twenty-eight indicators and plotting them over a period of eleven years, decision makers can begin to monitor and evaluate the County's financial performance. The use of these indicators will not provide answers to why a problem is occurring or what the appropriate solution is, but it may provide the opportunity to make an informed management response.

### **How to Use This Document**

Twenty-eight indicators have been selected for use in monitoring Henrico County's financial condition. They are displayed graphically on the following pages. These indicators were chosen based upon the availability of data and their appropriateness for Henrico County. The indicators selected are grouped by the seven financial factors as illustrated on page 4. The remainder of this document, in fact, is structured into seven sections, one for each of the seven factors. Appendix A provides the raw data used to develop the graphs. Appendix B provides a list of the Economic Data Sources used in the analysis.