

Finance and Audit Committee Memorandum

TO: Finance and Audit Committee

FROM: Judy Scharmer, Internal Auditor

DATE: 03 February, 2026

SUBJECT: Purchasing Thresholds, Management Delegation, and Preservation of Council Oversight

Purpose

This memorandum explains the rationale for proposed revisions to Ordinance 26-01 that establish defined purchasing thresholds, delegate routine purchasing authority to City management, and enhance transparency and fiscal oversight for the City Council, particularly through the Finance and Audit Committee.

Council Authority and Governance Are Preserved

The proposed revisions do not diminish the City Council's ability to govern. The Council retains full authority to adopt the annual budget and appropriate public funds, approve all unbudgeted expenditures regardless of amount, approve high-value and policy-significant contracts, oversee City finances through committee review, reporting, and audits, and require ratification of emergency procurements. These revisions clarify the distinction between Council's governance and policy responsibilities and management's administrative execution within Council-approved limits.

Why Purchasing Thresholds Are Appropriate

Clear purchasing thresholds are a recognized best practice in municipal government. They focus Council review on transactions that present material fiscal or policy risk, reduce delays and administrative burden for routine, budgeted operations, and improve accountability by establishing predictable and transparent approval standards. The proposed thresholds—\$250,000 annual contract value or \$500,000 aggregate multi-year commitment—are intended to capture transactions that meaningfully affect the City’s financial position while allowing efficient daily operations.

Unbudgeted Expenditures Remain a Council Decision

Under the proposed ordinance, any purchase or contract that is not budgeted or appropriated must receive Council approval, regardless of dollar amount. This preserves the Council’s authority over public funds and ensures management cannot commit the City to expenditures outside the adopted budget.

Transparency and Oversight Are Strengthened

Rather than requiring pre-approval of routine transactions, the ordinance emphasizes ongoing transparency, including monthly purchasing and contract reports to the Finance Committee, disclosure of large purchases, sole-source and emergency procurements, and reporting of significant contract amendments and cumulative spending. This approach allows Council to monitor trends, ask informed questions, and intervene when necessary.

Conclusion

The proposed purchasing framework balances efficient administration with strong fiscal oversight, preserves the City Council’s governing authority, reinforces transparency and accountability, and enables professional management to operate effectively within Council-approved budgets and policies.