

# RatingsDirect®

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## Summary:

# Town of Windsor, Connecticut; General Obligation

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### Credit Profile

US\$5.945 mil GO bnds ser 2017 B due 05/15/2037

*Long Term Rating* AAA/Stable New

Windsor GO

*Long Term Rating* AAA/Stable Affirmed

Windsor Twn GO bnds iss (Various Cap Proj)

*Long Term Rating* AAA/Stable Affirmed

#### Windsor GO

*Unenhanced Rating* AAA(SPUR)/Stable Affirmed

Many issues are enhanced by bond insurance.

## Rationale

S&P Global Ratings assigned its 'AAA' long-term rating and stable outlook to the Town of Windsor, Conn.'s series 2017 B general obligation (GO) bonds. At the same time, S&P Global Ratings affirmed its 'AAA' long-term rating, with a stable outlook, on the town's GO debt outstanding.

Windsor's unlimited-tax-GO pledge to levy ad valorem taxes without limit as to rate or amount on all taxable property within its borders secures the bonds. Bond proceeds will finance capital improvement projects in the town.

Windsor's GO bonds are eligible to be rated above the sovereign because we believe the town can maintain better credit characteristics than the nation in a stress scenario. Under our criteria, titled "Ratings Above The Sovereign--Corporate And Government Ratings: Methodology And Assumptions," published Nov. 19, 2013, on RatingsDirect, the town has a predominately local revenue source with 77.4% of general fund revenue coming from property taxes. It also has taxing authority and treasury management independent from the federal government.

The long-term rating reflects our opinion of the following factors for the town:

- Very strong economy, with access to a broad and diverse metropolitan statistical area (MSA);
- Very strong management, with strong financial policies and practices under our Financial Management Assessment methodology;
- Strong budgetary performance, with slight operating surpluses in the general fund and at the total governmental fund level in fiscal 2016;
- Very strong budgetary flexibility, with an available fund balance in fiscal 2016 of 21% of operating expenditures;
- Very strong liquidity, with total government available cash at 50.5% of total governmental fund expenditures and 9.3x governmental debt service, and access to external liquidity we consider strong;
- Very strong debt and contingent liability position, with debt service carrying charges at 5.5% of expenditures and

net direct debt that is 35.9% of total governmental fund revenue, as well as low overall net debt at less than 3.0% of market value and rapid amortization, with 90.0% of debt scheduled to be retired in 10 years; and

- Very strong institutional framework score.

### **Very strong economy**

We consider Windsor's economy very strong. The town, with an estimated population of 29,016, is located in Hartford County in the Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford, Conn., MSA, which we consider to be broad and diverse. The town has a projected per capita effective buying income of 118% of the national level and per capita market value of \$142,126. Overall, the town's market value fell by 1.3% over the past year to \$4.1 billion in 2018. The county unemployment rate was 5.3% in 2016.

Windsor is a predominantly residential community with a large and diverse mix of commercial and industrial developments. It covers a 31.1-square-mile area on the west bank of the Connecticut River and borders Hartford to the north. Interstate Highway 91 traverses the town, connecting residents with regional employment in Hartford and the surrounding metropolitan area. From 2005 to 2015, the number of jobs in Windsor increased by 33.5% to 24,883 from 18,636.

The town is home to a number of sizable employers in the financial services, advanced and precision manufacturing, distribution and logistics, data management, and hospitality industries. Leading private employers include:

- Hartford Life (2,200 employees);
- VOYA Financial Inc. (1,720);
- GE-Alstom Power (1,050);
- Cigna (1,000);
- Amazon.com (800); and
- Walgreens (660).

In 2015, Amazon completed construction of a 1.5-million-square-foot regional fulfillment center.

According to management, a number of initiatives will further improve highway access, manage transportation demand, and enhance community livability. Officials have approved a 600-acre mixed-use project, known as Great Pond Village in the Day Hill Road Corporate Area. In addition, a 130-unit market-rate apartment development was completed in Windsor Center in early 2017. The Connecticut Department of Transportation has initiated a project for enhanced commuter rail service between New Haven and Springfield, which we expect to more than double the stops in Windsor by the beginning of 2018.

### **Very strong management**

We view the town's management as very strong, with strong financial policies and practices under our Financial Management Assessment methodology, indicating financial practices are strong, well embedded, and likely sustainable.

Demonstrating the town's key budgeting practices, management uses three-to-five years of historical information to formulate its annual budget revenues and expenditure assumptions. Local property tax assessments, the governor's budget for state aid, and other economic and demographic information inform annual revenue growth trends. Management determines its annual budget appropriations by evaluating fixed costs such as debt service and

contractual obligations from collective bargaining to determine its baseline. Management also identifies anomalies, such as large one-time expenditures, and estimates savings from cooperative purchasing agreements. The remainder of budgeted appropriations are then identified and prioritized based on department needs and requests. Management and department heads monitor budget-to-actual performance internally, and management delivers quarterly budget-to-actual reports to the town finance committee, which addresses budget variances with the full town council.

Highlights of management policies include a strong focus on financial and capital planning. Windsor maintains a comprehensive six-year capital improvement plan, which it updates annually and identifies internal and external funding sources. It also maintains a forward-looking, long-term financial plan that tracks revenue and expenditure conditions and challenges across five years. According to management, the town uses this information to refine its budgeting assumptions for service level increases and state aid. Windsor complies with state guidelines and statutes for investments. Management tracks investment earnings and holdings quarterly, which it reports in the town comprehensive annual financial report.

Windsor maintains a formal debt issuance policy. It limits its total debt outstanding to 50% of the legal limit allowable under Connecticut statute and its debt service to 8% of total operating expenditures by town policy, and targets a principal amortization schedule of 70% over a 10-year horizon. In 2015, Windsor updated its formal reserve policy, which requires an unassigned general fund balance of 15%-20% of expenditures and is based on an evaluation of best practices. In the policy, the town also includes a provision to replenish the fund balance if it falls below the minimum reserve amount by allocating at least 25% of the difference per year until the policy minimum is achieved.

### **Strong budgetary performance**

Windsor's budgetary performance is strong in our opinion. The town had slight operating surpluses of 0.7% of expenditures in the general fund and of 0.7% across all governmental funds in fiscal 2016. General fund operating results have been stable over the past three years, with a result of 2.2% in 2015 and 0.3% in 2014.

In fiscal 2016, Windsor realized an operating surplus of nearly \$766,000, or 0.7% of general fund expenditures. For analytical consistency, we adjusted out approximately \$7.6 million for recurring transfers into other governmental funds for capital expenditures and debt service from the general fund. Management attributes the operating surplus largely to better-than-budgeted property tax collections, building permit fees and conveyance fees, which totaled \$853,000 over budget. At the same time, the town realized lower-than-budgeted expenditures, including cost savings from salary savings, vacant positions, and savings in the storm budget.

Management expects to close fiscal 2017 with a surplus and expects to add to the fund balance. General fund revenues are projected to exceed budget by at least \$1.2 million owing to better-than-budgeted property tax collections and building fees and a one-time delinquent property tax sale. In addition, on the expenditure side, management expects expenditure savings of about \$472,000 due to vacant positions.

Windsor's electorate will vote on a proposed fiscal 2018 budget during a town-wide referendum on June 6, 2017. Management noted that there is some uncertainty regarding the state's proposed budget and we note that there are potential decreases in education cost-sharing grants and the potential for Windsor to have to pay into the Connecticut Teachers Retirement System. The preliminary 2018 budget accounts for this, but management notes that the potential decrease in state aid might be less than initially anticipated. Management is looking at various actions to reduce

expenditures, including increasing the mill rate as well as appropriating a small portion of reserves. It historically sets aside the general fund reserve for general fund stabilization, but the town typically recovers the majority of this appropriation.

Furthermore, we believe Windsor maintains a stable and predictable revenue profile that is largely independent of state or federal funds. The town benefits from its high property tax base, which makes up more than 77.4% of total revenue. Tax collections have historically remained strong, with current collections exceeding 98.8% during the past five years. Intergovernmental sources represent the second-highest share of the general fund revenue, at 19.1%.

### **Very strong budgetary flexibility**

Windsor's budgetary flexibility is very strong, in our view, with an available fund balance in fiscal 2016 of 21% of operating expenditures, or \$24.4 million.

Due in part to strong budgetary performance from fiscal years 2013-2016, the town increased available fund balances to \$24.4 million, or 22.9% of total general fund expenditures, leading to improved budgetary flexibility. Management expects to add to total reserves and anticipates a potential \$800,000 increase in fiscal 2017; however, there could be a drawdown in fiscal 2018 depending on the state budget. Management expects budgetary performance to be strong and stable.

Furthermore, Windsor has a written reserve policy to maintain available fund balances of 15%-20% of general fund expenditures, which the town has historically met and sustained. The town council revised and approved the new reserve target in September 2015; previously, the policy required the maintenance of reserves at 8%-11% of expenditures. According to management, should fund balances fall below the 15% minimum, Windsor is required to appropriate at least 25% of the difference of the fund balance in subsequent years to restore the balance and comply with the policy. Therefore, we expect the town's flexibility to remain very strong over the next two fiscal years.

### **Very strong liquidity**

In our opinion, Windsor's liquidity is very strong, with total government available cash at 50.5% of total governmental fund expenditures and 9.3x governmental debt service in 2016. In our view, the town has strong access to external liquidity if necessary.

Windsor is a regular market participant that has issued debt frequently over the past several years, including GO bonds and short-term bond anticipation notes. In addition, the town does not have any variable-rate or direct-purchase debt; management has confirmed it does not have any contingent liquidity risks from financial instruments with payment provisions that change upon the occurrence of certain events. Town investments are subject to state guidelines. Windsor invests its cash in low-risk assets, including the state's short-term investment funds, some mutual and money market funds, or short-term certificates of deposit, which we do not review as aggressive. For these reasons, the town's available cash position remains strong and stable and we expect its liquidity profile to remain very strong over the next two fiscal years.

### **Very strong debt and contingent liability profile**

In our view, Windsor's debt and contingent liability profile is very strong. Total governmental fund debt service is 5.5% of total governmental fund expenditures, and net direct debt is 35.9% of total governmental fund revenue. Overall net

debt is low at 3.0% of market value, and approximately 90.0% of the direct debt is scheduled to be repaid within 10 years, which are in our view positive credit factors.

With this issue, Windsor will have approximately \$44.2 million of total direct debt. In addition, the town's proportionate share of overlapping debt as a member of the Metropolitan District Commission is \$79.3 million. Over the next 12-24 months, Windsor will likely issue \$4 million-\$5 million annually to finance capital projects. Furthermore, it is planning the construction of a new public safety facility, of which phase two would cost an estimated \$7.7 million, as well as upgrades to its existing facility. In 2019, the town could seek an additional \$18.5 million in debt to complete phase 3. However, it has not sought voter approval to issue the additional debt for the new public safety facility. Therefore, due to Windsor's low overall net debt and rapid debt amortization, we do not expect our assessment of the town's debt profile to weaken.

Windsor's combined required pension and actual other postemployment benefits (OPEB) contributions totaled 3.6% of total governmental fund expenditures in 2016. Of that amount, 1.5% represented required contributions to pension obligations, and 2.1% represented OPEB payments. The town made its full annual required pension contribution in 2016.

Windsor administers a defined-benefit pension plan that covers substantially all town employees, except for police, who participate in a state-administered plan, and those eligible for membership in the Connecticut Teachers' Retirement Plan. The funded status of this plan was 88.3% as of the July 1, 2016, valuation; this was based on a 7.25% discount rate. The funded ratio fell below 100% in 2013 due to the lowering of the discount rate to 7.50% from 7.75% along with other actuarial recommended changes. A defined-contribution plan, which management expects will help reduce future pension cost increases, covers all newly hired town employees.

The town's proportionate share of the net pension liability was approximately \$15.4 million as of the most recent actuarial valuation, July 1, 2016. The town contributed \$1 million, or 100% of its actuarially determined contribution (ADC), in fiscal 2016. Historically, the town has funded, and continues to fund, its ADC in full.

Windsor also offers limited OPEB to its retirees in the form of health insurance coverage, which it funds on a pay-as-you-go basis. As of July 1, 2015, the most recent actuarial valuation, the plan was 0.8% funded with an unfunded actuarial accrued liability of \$52.3 million. The town contributed \$2.6 million, or 38.4%, of its annual contribution. Furthermore, it established a trust fund beginning July 1, 2015; Windsor initially deposited \$390,000 into the trust for fiscal 2015, and \$350,000 for fiscal 2016. It expects to deposit \$450,000 in fiscal 2017 and \$550,000 is proposed for fiscal 2018.

### **Very strong institutional framework**

The institutional framework score for Connecticut municipalities is very strong.

## **Outlook**

The stable outlook reflects S&P Global Ratings' view that Windsor will maintain its very strong budgetary flexibility given its historically strong budget performance and very strong management. The town's location and access to the

Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford MSA and very strong underlying economy further support the rating. In addition, we anticipate Windsor will maintain a very strong debt and contingent liability profile. For these reasons, we are unlikely to lower the rating in the next two years. However, if the town is unable to adjust to budgetary pressure and there is a sizeable deterioration in budgetary performance leading to significantly weakened reserves, a negative rating action could follow.

## **Related Research**

- 2016 Update Of Institutional Framework For U.S. Local Governments
- Incorporating GASB 67 And 68: Evaluating Pension/OPEB Obligations Under Standard & Poor's U.S. Local Government GO Criteria, Sept. 2, 2015
- S&P Public Finance Local GO Criteria: How We Adjust Data For Analytic Consistency, Sept. 12, 2013

Certain terms used in this report, particularly certain adjectives used to express our view on rating relevant factors, have specific meanings ascribed to them in our criteria, and should therefore be read in conjunction with such criteria. Please see Ratings Criteria at [www.standardandpoors.com](http://www.standardandpoors.com) for further information. Complete ratings information is available to subscribers of RatingsDirect at [www.globalcreditportal.com](http://www.globalcreditportal.com). All ratings affected by this rating action can be found on the S&P Global Ratings' public website at [www.standardandpoors.com](http://www.standardandpoors.com). Use the Ratings search box located in the left column.

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