

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

City of Connellsville Firefighters' Pension Plan Fayette County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021

November 2022



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General

Timothy L. DeFoor • Auditor General



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**TIMOTHY L. DEFOOR
AUDITOR GENERAL**

The Honorable Mayor and City Council
City of Connellsville
Fayette County
Connellsville, PA 15425

We have conducted a compliance audit of the City of Connellsville Firefighters' Pension Plan for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021. We also evaluated compliance with some requirements subsequent to that period when possible. The audit was conducted pursuant to authority derived from the Municipal Pension Plan Funding Standard and Recovery Act (Act 205 of 1984, as amended, 53 P.S. § 895.402(j)), which requires the Auditor General, as deemed necessary, to audit every municipality which receives general municipal pension system state aid and every municipal pension plan and fund in which general municipal pension system state aid is deposited. The audit was not conducted, nor was it required to be, in accordance with Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. We planned and performed the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our conclusions based on our audit objective.

The objective of the audit was to determine if the pension plan was administered in compliance with applicable state laws, regulations, contracts, administrative procedures, and local ordinances and policies.

Our audit was limited to the areas related to the objective identified above. To determine whether the pension plan was administered in compliance with applicable state laws, regulations, contracts, administrative procedures, and local ordinances and policies, our methodology included the following:

- We determined whether state aid was properly determined and deposited in accordance with Act 205 requirements by verifying the annual deposit date of state aid and determining whether deposits were made within 30 days of receipt for all years within the period under audit.

- We determined whether annual employer contributions were calculated and deposited in accordance with the plan's governing document and applicable laws and regulations by examining the municipality's calculation of the plan's annual financial requirements and minimum municipal obligation (MMO) and comparing these calculated amounts to amounts actually budgeted and deposited into the pension plan as evidenced by supporting documentation.
- We determined that there were no employee contributions required by the plan's governing document and applicable laws and regulations for the years covered by our audit period.
- We determined that there were no benefit calculations prepared for the years covered by our audit period.
- We determined whether the January 1, 2019 and January 1, 2021 actuarial valuation reports were prepared and submitted by March 31, 2020 and 2022, respectively, in accordance with Act 205 and whether selected information provided on these reports is accurate, complete, and in accordance with plan provisions to ensure compliance for participation in the state aid program by comparing selected information to supporting source documentation.
- We determined whether all annual special ad hoc postretirement reimbursements received by the municipality were authorized and appropriately deposited in accordance with Act 147 by tracing information to supporting documentation maintained by plan officials.

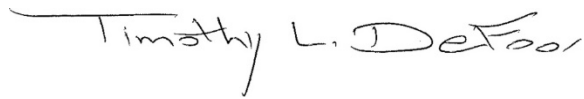
The City of Connellsville contracted with an independent certified public accounting firm for annual audits of its basic financial statements which are available at the city's offices. Those financial statements were not audited by us and, accordingly, we express no opinion or other form of assurance on them.

City officials are responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that the City of Connellsville Firefighters' Pension Plan is administered in compliance with applicable state laws, regulations, contracts, administrative procedures, and local ordinances and policies. As previously described, we tested transactions, interviewed selected officials, and performed procedures to the extent necessary to provide reasonable assurance of detecting instances of noncompliance with legal and regulatory requirements or noncompliance with provisions of contracts, administrative procedures, and local ordinances and policies that are significant within the context of the audit objective.

The results of our procedures indicated that, in all significant respects, the City of Connellsville Firefighters' Pension Plan was administered in compliance with applicable state laws, regulations, contracts, administrative procedures, and local ordinances and policies.

The accompanying supplementary information is presented for purposes of additional analysis. We did not audit the information or conclude on it and, accordingly, express no form of assurance on it. However, we are extremely concerned about the funded status of the plan contained in the schedule of funding progress included in this report which indicates **the plan's funded ratio is 56.9% as of January 1, 2021**, which is the most recent data available. We encourage city officials to monitor the funding of the firefighters' pension plan to ensure its long-term financial stability.

The contents of this report were discussed with officials of the City of Connellsville and, where appropriate, their responses have been included in the report. We would like to thank city officials for the cooperation extended to us during the conduct of the audit.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy L. DeFoor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left of the first letter.

Timothy L. DeFoor
Auditor General
November 16, 2022

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BACKGROUND

On December 18, 1984, the Pennsylvania Legislature adopted the Municipal Pension Plan Funding Standard and Recovery Act (P.L. 1005, No. 205, as amended, 53 P.S. § 895.101 et seq.). The Act established mandatory actuarial reporting and funding requirements and a uniform basis for the distribution of state aid to Pennsylvania's public pension plans.

Annual state aid allocations are provided from a 2 percent foreign (out-of-state) casualty insurance premium tax, a portion of the foreign (out-of-state) fire insurance tax designated for paid firefighters and any investment income earned on the collection of these taxes. Generally, municipal pension plans established prior to December 18, 1984, are eligible for state aid. For municipal pension plans established after that date, the sponsoring municipality must fund the plan for three plan years before it becomes eligible for state aid. In accordance with Act 205, a municipality's annual state aid allocation cannot exceed its actual pension costs.

In addition to Act 205, the City of Connellsville Firefighters' Pension Plan is also governed by implementing regulations published at Title 16, Part IV of the Pennsylvania Code and applicable provisions of various other state statutes including, but not limited to, the following:

Act 67 - The Third Class City Code, Act of November 24, 2015 (P.L. 242, No. 67), as amended, 11 Pa. C.S. § 10101 et seq.

Act 147 - Special Ad Hoc Municipal Police and Firefighter Postretirement Adjustment Act, Act of December 14, 1988 (P.L. 1192, No. 147), as amended, 53 P.S. § 896.101 et seq.

The City of Connellsville Firefighters' Pension Plan is a single-employer defined benefit pension plan locally controlled by the provisions of Ordinance No. 1413, as amended, adopted pursuant to Act 67. The plan was established January 1, 1960. As previously disclosed, after the November 2014 election, the city adopted Ordinance No. 1516 which in part, disbanded the city's paid fire department and replaced it with the service of a volunteer fire department. Effective December 31, 2014, the last full-time, active firefighter vested his benefit and the plan no longer has any active members. As of December 31, 2021, the plan had one terminated member eligible for vested benefits in the future and eight retirees receiving pension benefits.

CITY OF CONNELLSVILLE FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION PLAN
STATUS OF PRIOR FINDING

Status Of Prior Audit Recommendation

· Unauthorized Vested Pension Benefit

As previously disclosed in our prior audit reports covering the periods January 1, 2014 to December 31, 2015, and January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2018, based on a referendum authorized by the city during 2014, city voters elected to eliminate its paid fire department and replace it with the service of volunteer fire department. At that time, there was one remaining active firefighter. Through arbitration, a settlement was reached to provide the firefighter with a vested pension benefit payable at the age of 55 and will become payable as of April 1, 2025. At the time of this agreement, the plan's governing documents did not provide for a vested pension benefit.

Based on the settlement reached through arbitration, the city is contractually obligated to pay a benefit to the terminated member in excess of what is authorized by the Third Class City Code. Since the city received state aid based on unit value during the current audit period and therefore did not receive any excess state aid attributable to the excess benefits provided, the finding will not be repeated in subsequent audit reports. It was further disclosed that the Department would continue to monitor the effect of the excess pension benefits on the city's state aid allocations during future audits of the plan.

During the current audit period, the city again received its state aid based on unit value and therefore did not receive any excess state aid attributable to the excess benefits provided. The Department will continue to monitor the effect of the excess pension benefits of the city's state aid allocations during future audits of the plan.

CITY OF CONNELLSVILLE FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION PLAN
 SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION
 (UNAUDITED)

SCHEDULE OF FUNDING PROGRESS

Historical trend information about the plan is presented herewith as supplementary information. It is intended to help users assess the plan's funding status on a going-concern basis, assess progress made in accumulating assets to pay benefits when due, and make comparisons with other state and local government retirement systems.

The actuarial information is required by Act 205 biennially. The historical information, beginning as of January 1, 2017, is as follows:

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Actuarial Valuation Date	Actuarial Value of Assets (a)	Actuarial Accrued Liability (AAL) - Entry Age (b)	Unfunded (Assets in Excess of) Actuarial Accrued Liability (b) - (a)	Funded Ratio (a)/(b)
01-01-17	\$ 1,066,476	\$ 1,666,546	\$ 600,070	64.0%
01-01-19	890,832	1,627,063	736,231	54.8%
01-01-21	904,921	1,588,810	683,889	56.9%

Note: The market values of the plan's assets at 01-01-17, 01-01-19, and 01-01-21 have been adjusted to reflect the smoothing of gains and/or losses over a four-year averaging period. This method will lower contributions in years of less than expected returns and increase contributions in years of greater than expected returns. The net effect over long periods of time is to have less variance in contribution levels from year to year.

CITY OF CONNELLSVILLE FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION PLAN
SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION
(UNAUDITED)

The comparability of trend information is affected by changes in actuarial assumptions, benefit provisions, actuarial funding methods, accounting policies, and other changes. Those changes usually affect trends in contribution requirements and in ratios that use the actuarial accrued liability as a factor.

Analysis of the dollar amount of the actuarial value of assets, actuarial accrued liability, and unfunded (assets in excess of) actuarial accrued liability in isolation can be misleading. Expressing the actuarial value of assets as a percentage of the actuarial accrued liability (Column 4) provides one indication of the plan's funding status on a going-concern basis. Analysis of this percentage, over time, indicates whether the system is becoming financially stronger or weaker. Generally, the greater this percentage, the stronger the plan.

CITY OF CONNELLSVILLE FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION PLAN
 SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION
 (UNAUDITED)

SCHEDULE OF CONTRIBUTIONS

Year Ended December 31	Actuarially Determined Contribution	Actual Contributions	Contribution Deficiency (Excess)	Covered- Employee Payroll *	Contributions as a Percentage of Covered- Employee Payroll
2012	\$ 89,774	\$ 68,517	\$ 21,257	\$ 54,246	126.3%
2013	70,609	70,609	-	-	
2014	101,398	101,398	-	54,969	18.5%
2015	76,900	76,900	-	-	
2016	25,955	25,955	-	-	
2017	34,171	34,171	-	-	
2018	43,106	43,106	-	-	
2019	90,053	90,053	-	-	
2020	90,053	90,053	-	-	
2021	109,014	109,014	-	-	

* Due to GASB Statement No. 67, *Financial Reporting for Pension Plans*, being implemented only recently, the amount of Covered-Employee Payroll was not provided for odd years prior to 2014. Furthermore, as noted earlier in this report, the city in part, disbanded the City's paid fire department and replaced it with the service of a volunteer fire department. Effective December 31, 2014, the last active, full-time, paid firefighter vested his pension benefit and the plan no longer has any active members and/or related payroll.

CITY OF CONNELLSVILLE FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION PLAN
SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION
NOTES TO SUPPLEMENTARY SCHEDULES
(UNAUDITED)

The information presented in the supplementary schedules was determined as part of the actuarial valuation at the date indicated. Additional information as of the latest actuarial valuation date follows:

Actuarial valuation date	January 1, 2021
Actuarial cost method	Entry age normal
Amortization method	Level dollar, closed
Remaining amortization period	3 years
Asset valuation method	Fair value, 4-year smoothing
Actuarial assumptions:	
Investment rate of return	6.75%

CITY OF CONNELLSVILLE FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION PLAN
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Tom W. Wolf
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

The Honorable Greg Lincoln
Mayor

Mr. Robert Topper, Jr.
Councilman

Mr. Vernon E. Ohler
City Clerk

This report is a matter of public record and is available online at www.PaAuditor.gov. Media questions about the report can be directed to the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General, Office of Communications, 229 Finance Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120; via email to: news@PaAuditor.gov.