

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

City of Easton Officers' and Employees' PMRS Pension Plan Northampton County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020

March 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 Easton
Northampton County
Easton, PA 18042

We have conducted a compliance audit of the City of Easton Officers' and Employees' PMRS Pension Plan for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020. 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 findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and 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 whether annual employee contributions were calculated, deducted, and deposited into the pension plan in accordance with the plan's governing document and applicable laws and regulations by testing total members' contributions on an annual basis using the rates obtained from the plan's governing document in effect for all years within the period under audit and examining documents evidencing the deposit of these employee contributions into the pension plan.
- We determined whether retirement benefits calculated for plan members who retired and elected to vest during the current audit period represent payments to all (and only) those entitled to receive them and were properly determined and disbursed in accordance with the plan's governing document, applicable laws, and regulations by recalculating the amount of the monthly pension benefits due to the retired individuals and comparing these amounts to supporting documentation evidencing amounts determined and actually paid to the recipients.
- We determined whether the January 1, 2017 and January 1, 2019 actuarial valuation reports were prepared and submitted by March 31, 2018 and 2020, 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 the pension plan is in compliance with Act 205 for distressed municipalities through inquiry of plan officials and evaluation of the recovery remedies implemented during the audit period.

The City of Easton Officers' and Employees' PMRS Pension Plan participates in the Pennsylvania Municipal Retirement System (PMRS), which is an agent multiple-employer public employee retirement system that acts as a common investment and administrative agent for participating municipal pension plans. PMRS issues a separate Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, copies of which are available from the PMRS accounting office. PMRS's 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 Easton Officers' and Employees' PMRS 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.

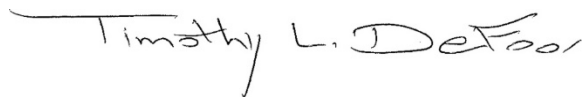
The results of our procedures indicated that, in all significant respects, the City of Easton Officers' and Employees' PMRS Pension Plan was administered in compliance with applicable state laws, regulations, contracts, administrative procedures, and local ordinances and policies, except as noted in the following findings further discussed later in this report:

Finding No. 1 – Incorrect Data On Certification Form AG 385 Resulting In A Net Underpayment Of State Aid

Finding No. 2 – Inadequate Accounting/Reporting Over Activity Of The Pension Plan

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.

The contents of this report were discussed with officials of the City of Easton 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.



Timothy L. DeFoor
Auditor General
February 22, 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 Easton Officers' and Employees' PMRS 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 15 - Pennsylvania Municipal Retirement Law, Act of February 1, 1974
(P.L. 34, No. 15), as amended, 53 P.S. § 881.101 et seq.

The City of Easton Officers' and Employees' PMRS Pension Plan is a single-employer defined benefit pension plan for non-uniformed employees hired after January 1, 1979, locally controlled by the provisions of Article 143 of the city's codified ordinances, and a separately executed plan agreement with the plan custodian, adopted pursuant to Act 15. The plan is also affected by the provisions of collective bargaining agreements between the city and its non-uniformed employees. The plan was established January 1, 1979. Active members are required to contribute 4 percent of compensation to the plan. As of December 31, 2020, the plan had 112 active members, 5 terminated members eligible for vested benefits in the future, and 86 retirees receiving pension benefits.

CITY OF EASTON OFFICERS' AND EMPLOYEES' PMRS PENSION PLAN
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 1 – Incorrect Data On Certification Form AG 385 Resulting In A Net Underpayment Of State Aid

Condition: The city failed to certify 6 eligible firefighters (12 units) and understated payroll by \$123,220 on the Certification Form AG 385 filed in 2020. In addition, the city certified 6 ineligible non-uniformed employees (6 units) and overstated payroll by \$165,533 on the Certification Form AG 385 filed in 2021. The data contained on these certification forms is based on prior calendar year information.

Criteria: Pursuant to Act 205, at Section 402(e)(2), in order to be eligible for certification, an employee must have been employed on a full-time basis for at least six consecutive months and must have been participating in a pension plan during the certification year.

Cause: The referenced firefighters were hired June 28, 2019 and became plan members in 2019 and, therefore, met the eligibility requirement for certification. The referenced non-uniformed employees did not work at least six months in 2019 due to being furloughed. Additionally, the city lacked adequate internal control procedures, such as having another individual review the data certified to ensure compliance with the instructions that accompanied Certification Form AG 385 prior to submission.

Effect: The data submitted on these certification forms is used, in part, to calculate the state aid due to the municipality for distribution to its pension plans. Because the city's state aid allocations were based on unit value, the city received a net underpayment of state aid of \$30,306 as identified below:

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Type of Plan</u> | <u>Units Overstated (Understated)</u> | <u>Unit Value</u> | <u>State Aid Overpayment (Underpayment)</u> |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 2020 | Firemen's | (12) | \$ 4,924 | \$ (59,088) |
| 2021 | O&E - PMRS | 6 | \$ 4,797 | <u>\$ 28,782</u> |
| Net Underpayment of State Aid | | | | <u><u>\$ (30,306)</u></u> |

Although the additional state aid will be allocated to the city, the full amount of the 2020 state aid allocation was not available to be deposited timely and therefore was not available to pay operating expenses or for investment.

CITY OF EASTON OFFICERS' AND EMPLOYEES' PMRS PENSION PLAN
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 1 – (Continued)

Recommendation: We recommend that plan officials establish adequate internal control procedures, such as having at least two people review the data certified, to ensure compliance with the instructions that accompany Certification Form AG 385 to assist them in accurately reporting the required pension data.

Management's Response: Municipal officials agreed with the finding without exception.

Auditor's Conclusion: Compliance will be evaluated during our next audit of the plan.

Finding No. 2 – Inadequate Accounting/Reporting Over Activity Of The Pension Plan

Condition: The municipality's accounting/reporting system did not provide effective control over the transactional activity of the officers' and employees' pension plan during 2020. Municipal officials were unable to furnish annual financial statements or custodial account statements summarizing the financial activity of its pension plan.

Criteria: An adequate system of accounting and record keeping is a prerequisite for sound administration of pension plans. In addition, assets held in a custodial account for the purpose of plan management are to be governed by the terms and provisions of the account contract, provided that the terms and provisions of the contract are within the parameters of all prevailing pension legislation. Although the municipality may contract with a trustee to administer the financial management of the plan, the fiduciary responsibility for the plan remains with the municipality.

Cause: Municipal officials did not maintain a separate detailed accounting of pension plan transactions which, among other things, helps assure the production of proper financial statements to effectively monitor the annual activity of the pension plan. Additionally, municipal officials indicated that the plan's custodian failed to provide copies of the custodial account transaction statements summarizing activity of the pension plan account for the year 2020.

Effect: Although we were able to obtain alternate documentation from the municipality to evidence the propriety of individual transactions tested during performance of the audit, the failure to maintain annual financial and/or account transaction statements prohibits municipal officials from effectively monitoring the plan's financial operations and could lead to undetected errors or improprieties in account transactions.

CITY OF EASTON OFFICERS' AND EMPLOYEES' PMRS PENSION PLAN
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding No. 2 – (Continued)

Recommendation: We recommend that municipal officials establish and maintain a financial accounting and reporting system that allows the municipality to effectively monitor the plan's financial operations, even in the absence of statements from the plan custodian. Municipal officials should refer to the Auditor General's Bulletin No. 2-88 entitled "Preparation, Maintenance and Auditability of Financial Records," for further guidance in establishing adequate accounting and record-keeping procedures. In addition, we recommend that municipal officials contact the plan custodian and obtain annual financial statements of the custodial account for its pension plan for the years 2020 and 2021 to ensure the accuracy and propriety of the transaction activity.

Management's Response: At our exit conference held on February 7, 2022, management indicated that they would provide a written response to this finding within 10 days; however, no response has been received.

Auditor's Conclusion: It was noted that the plan custodian recently went through a substantial upgrade to the plan administration software and implemented a new accounting system. The modernization process, along with the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in unforeseen delays in the year-end reporting process for financial statements and GASB 68 reports. In addition, the custodian has taken active measures to resolve these issues and anticipates distribution of the 2020 reports and statements for their plans the last week of March and completion of the 2020 financial reporting this summer. Finally, the custodian expects 2021 financial reports to be distributed before the end of 2022. Compliance with the finding recommendation will be evaluated during our next audit of the plan.

CITY OF EASTON OFFICERS' AND EMPLOYEES' PMRS 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, 2015, 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) |
| 01-01-15 | \$ 20,366,862 | \$ 20,625,183 | \$ 258,321 | 98.7% |
| 01-01-17 | 22,329,668 | 22,848,993 | 519,325 | 97.7% |
| 01-01-19 | 25,457,486 | 25,701,853 | 244,367 | 99.0% |

CITY OF EASTON OFFICERS' AND EMPLOYEES' PMRS 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 EASTON OFFICERS' AND EMPLOYEES' PMRS PENSION PLAN
 SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION
 (UNAUDITED)

SCHEDULE OF CONTRIBUTIONS

| <u>Year Ended December 31</u> | <u>Actuarially Determined Contribution</u> | <u>Actual Contributions</u> | <u>Contribution Deficiency (Excess)</u> | <u>Covered- Employee Payroll</u> | <u>Contributions as a Percentage of Covered- Employee Payroll</u> |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2014 | \$ 302,232 | \$ 314,675 | \$ (12,443) | \$6,261,571 | 5.03% |
| 2015 | 405,659 | 405,999 | (340) | 6,194,675 | 6.55% |
| 2016 | 391,711 | 393,678 | (1,967) | 6,565,031 | 6.00% |
| 2017 | 446,855 | 468,631 | (21,776) | 6,982,208 | 6.71% |
| 2018 | 464,594 | 464,774 | (180) | 7,141,603 | 6.51% |
| 2019 | 499,689 | 499,889 | (200) | 7,250,159 | 6.89% |
| 2020 | 504,317 | 504,317 | - | * | |

* Due to the timing of this audit, covered-employee payroll for 2020 was not provided in this schedule.

CITY OF EASTON OFFICERS' AND EMPLOYEES' PMRS 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, 2019 |
| Actuarial cost method | Entry age normal |
| Amortization method | Level dollar for plan bases and an average for Aggregate Gain/Loss, 10% of surplus is credited against aggregate cost where applicable. |
| Remaining amortization period | 5 years |
| Asset valuation method | The Actuarial Value of Assets equal the sum of all audited reserve funds as of the valuation date, including Member, Municipal, Retired, Disability, and DROP Reserves, when applicable, and a one year administration expense reserve, plus the portion of any additional investment income to be distributed as excess interest, based on PMRS Policy Statement 05-2. This asset valuation is based on the unique legislative structure of PMRS and the administrative rules adopted by the PMRS Board in conjunction with Pennsylvania Municipal Retirement Law. ¹ |

Actuarial assumptions:

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Investment rate of return * | 5.25%, compounded annually, net of investment and administration expenses. |
| Projected salary increases * | 2.8%-7.05% |
| * Includes inflation at | 2.8% |
| Cost-of-living adjustments | 2.8% per year, subject to plan limitations. |

¹ The administrative rules adopted by the PMRS Board, which are not subject to comply with Actuarial Standards of Practice (ASOP), when defining the Actuarial Value of Assets (AVA), does not necessarily meet the requirement of ASOP 44 Selection and Use of Asset Valuation Methods for Pension Valuations. The AVA provided within this report follow the Pennsylvania Municipal Retirement Law and the PMRS policy statement.

CITY OF EASTON OFFICERS' AND EMPLOYEES' PMRS PENSION PLAN
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Tom W. Wolf
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Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

The Honorable Salvatore J. Panto, Jr.
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Mr. Richard Cardamone, CPA, CGMA
Pennsylvania Municipal Retirement System

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