

COMPLIANCE AUDIT

West Hazleton Borough Firemen's Pension Plan Luzerne County, Pennsylvania For the Period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2022

July 2023



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 Borough Council
West Hazleton Borough
Luzerne County
West Hazleton, PA 18202

We have conducted a compliance audit of the West Hazleton Borough Firemen's Pension Plan for the period January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2022. 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.

West Hazleton Borough contracted with an independent certified public accounting firm for annual audits of its basic financial statements for the years ending December 31, 2019, 2020, and 2021, which are available at the borough's offices. Those financial statements were not audited by us and, accordingly, we express no opinion or other form of assurance on them.

Borough officials are responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that the West Hazleton Borough Firemen's 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.

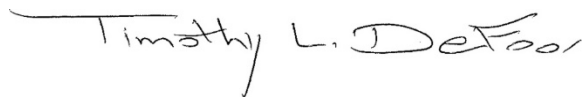
The results of our procedures indicated that, in all significant respects, the West Hazleton Borough Firemen's Pension Plan was administered in compliance with applicable state laws, regulations, contracts, administrative procedures, and local ordinances and policies.

As previously noted, the objective of our audit of the West Hazleton Borough Firemen’s Pension Plan was to determine compliance with applicable state laws, regulations, contracts, administrative procedures, and local ordinances and policies. Among several provisions relating to municipal pension plans, Act 205 provides for the implementation of a distress recovery program. Three levels of distress have been established:

<u>Level</u>	<u>Indication</u>	<u>Funding Criteria</u>
I	Minimal distress	70-89%
II	Moderate distress	50-69%
III	Severe distress	Less than 50%

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 42.6% as of January 1, 2021, which is the most recent data available. Based on this information, and the funding status of the borough’s police and non-uniformed pension plans, the Municipal Pension Reporting Program issued notification that the borough is currently in Level II moderate distress status.** We encourage borough officials to monitor the funding of the firemen’s pension plan to ensure its long-term financial stability.

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



Timothy L. DeFoor
Auditor General
May 26, 2023

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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 West Hazleton Borough Firemen's 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.

The West Hazleton Borough Firemen's Pension Plan is a single-employer defined benefit pension plan locally controlled by the provisions of Ordinance No. 25 of 1976, as amended. The plan was established September 6, 1976. Active members are not required to contribute to the plan. As of December 31, 2022, the plan had no active members, no terminated members eligible for vested benefits in the future, and one retiree receiving pension benefits.

WEST HAZLETON BOROUGH FIREMEN'S 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	\$ 265,139	\$ 478,251	\$ 213,112	55.4%
01-01-19	220,516	451,653	231,137	48.8%
01-01-21	181,001	424,454	243,453	42.6%

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 five-year averaging period subject to a maximum of 120 percent and a minimum of 80 percent of the market value of assets. 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.

WEST HAZLETON BOROUGH FIREMEN'S 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.

WEST HAZLETON BOROUGH FIREMEN'S 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*
2013	\$ 14,400	\$ 14,400	\$ -		\$ -
2014	14,853	14,853	-	\$ -	-
2015	24,469	24,469	-	-	-
2016	24,619	24,619	-	-	-
2017	28,606	28,606	-	-	-
2018	31,956	31,956	-	-	-
2019	31,806	31,806	-	-	-
2020	31,906	31,906	-	-	-
2021	34,080	34,080	-	-	-
2022	34,080	34,080	-	-	-

* 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 years prior to 2014. In addition, there have been no active employees since 2011.

WEST HAZLETON BOROUGH FIREMEN'S 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
Remaining amortization period	14 years
Asset valuation method	5-year smoothing - the actuarial value of assets will be limited to a maximum of 120% and a minimum of 80% of the fair market value of assets.
Actuarial assumptions:	
Investment rate of return	7.0%
Projected salary increases	5.0%

WEST HAZLETON BOROUGH FIREMEN'S PENSION PLAN
REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST

This report was initially distributed to the following:

The Honorable Joshua D. Shapiro
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

The Honorable John Chura
Mayor

Mr. James Schweitzer
Council President

Ms. Anny Morel
Borough Manager

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