

Financial state of the city

MILWAUKEE



MONEY
NEEDED TO
PAY BILLS:
\$1.4 BILLION

~~Truth in
Accounting~~

-\$6,800
TAXPAYER
BURDEN

THE FINANCIAL STATE OF MILWAUKEE

Why did Milwaukee's reported pension debt increase by \$94.6 million this year?

Because of a new accounting rule, Milwaukee now has to report its pension debt on its balance sheet. As a result, the city's reported pension debt grew from \$0 in 2014 to \$94.6 million in 2015. However, the city understated the liability by \$258.3 million because the financial report was prepared using an outdated pension valuation.

For years, Truth in Accounting has called for this financial reporting change, and we welcome the shift towards more transparent accounting.

The city's bills exceed its assets	
Assets	\$3,409,425,000
Minus: Capital assets	-\$2,241,723,000
Restricted assets	-\$221,817,000
Assets available to pay bills	\$945,885,000
Minus: Bills	-\$2,343,224,000
Money needed to pay bills	-\$1,397,339,000
Each taxpayer's share of this debt	-\$6,800

Milwaukee has \$3.4 billion in assets, but most of these assets are not available to pay city bills.

The \$2.2 billion of capital assets, such as roads, buildings, and land should not be sold to pay bills. The use of \$221.8 million of the assets is restricted by law or contract.

That leaves \$945.9 million of the city's assets available to pay \$2.3 billion of bills as they come due.

The -\$1.4 billion shortfall represents compensation and other costs incurred in prior years that should have been paid in those years. Instead these costs have been shifted to future taxpayers.



Truth in Accounting is committed to educating and empowering citizens with understandable, reliable, and transparent government financial information.

To be knowledgeable participants in their government and its budget process, citizens need to be provided with truthful and transparent financial information.

Key findings

- Milwaukee has only \$945.9 million available to pay \$2.3 billion worth of bills. Therefore, the city has a -\$1.4 billion financial hole.
- Milwaukee has a taxpayer burden of -\$6,800, which is each taxpayer's share of the city's unfunded debt.
- Despite the new accounting standard, the city still hides most of its pension liability from its balance sheet. Most of the retiree health care liability is also excluded. The city's total hidden debt is \$859.6 million.

The bills Milwaukee has accumulated	
Bonds	\$1,237,252,000
Other liabilities	\$549,438,000
Minus: Debt related to capital assets	-\$772,093,000
Unfunded pension benefits	\$352,931,000
Unfunded retiree health care benefits	\$975,696,000
Bills	\$2,343,224,000

Despite the balanced budget requirement, the city has accumulated bonded debt of \$1.2 billion and other liabilities of \$549.4 million. The calculation of assets available to pay bills does not include capital assets, so \$772.1 million of related debt is removed from the calculation of city bills.

Unfunded employees' retirement benefits represent 57% of city bills. These unfunded liabilities have accumulated because city employees have been promised \$352.9 million of pension benefits and \$975.7 million of retiree health care benefits, but the city has not adequately funded them.

Unless these pension and retiree health care benefits are renegotiated, future taxpayers will be burdened with paying for these benefits without receiving any corresponding government services or benefits.

Data is derived from the city of Milwaukee's December 31, 2015 audited Comprehensive Annual Financial Report and retirement plans' actuarial reports.

Number of taxpayers is based on an estimation of the city's population with a federal tax liability.

www.TruthInAccounting.org

www.StateDataLab.org