Oakland in Poor Fiscal Health
Prior to Pandemic

January 2021

Financial State of Oakland, California

This report shows that Oakland went into the coronavirus pandemic in poor fiscal health, and it will probably come out of the crisis worse. Based upon the city’s fiscal year 2019 audited financial report, Oakland had a Taxpayer Burden™ of $17,000, earning it a “D” grade from Truth in Accounting.

Oakland’s elected officials have repeatedly made financial decisions that have left the city with a debt burden of $2.3 billion. That burden equates to $17,000 for every city taxpayer. Oakland’s financial problems stem mostly from unfunded retirement obligations that have accumulated over the years. Of the $6.5 billion in retirement benefits promised, the city has not funded $1.9 billion in pension and $927.8 million in retiree health care benefits.

Oakland did not have enough money set aside to weather the current pandemic and fluctuations in the market. The city is expected to lose some revenue as a result of the pandemic. The uncertainty surrounding this crisis makes it impossible to determine how much will be needed to maintain government services and benefits, but Oakland’s overall debt will most likely increase.

The data included in this report is derived from the city of Oakland’s 2019 audited Comprehensive Annual Financial Report and retirement plans’ reports. To compare cities’ financial information go to data-z.org.