

What does Buffalo really owe?

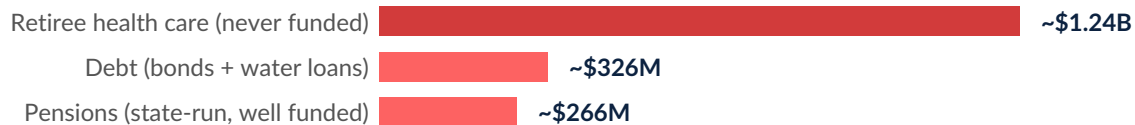
A serious, fixable problem, in the city's own audited numbers (2006–2025). · buffalofinances.org



The picture, in plain English

Buffalo owes about \$1.56 billion more than the money it can spend, straight from the city's own audit. Most of it is health care promised to retirees and never funded; borrowing is a much smaller piece. One cost never reaches the books at all: repairing the roads, water mains, and buildings the city already owns. The audit shows about half their value is used up. It never totals the repair cost, a rough estimate of \$1.7 to \$2.2 billion. Together that is about \$3.5 billion, or roughly \$30,000 per household. Almost none of this is any one administration's doing. It built up over decades, and the city has taken real steps on it lately.

Mostly one thing: what the \$1.56 billion is made of



Debt and pensions combined are still less than half the retiree-health promise.

THE ASK: ONE NUMBER, ONCE A YEAR

Publish a 'cost of good repair' figure every year: what it would take to bring the city's roads, pipes, and buildings back to good condition. A rough first estimate can be built from figures already in the audit. Federal agencies and New York City already publish versions of this number, and Buffalo's new plan to rank road repairs by need is a strong start.

Other places are already measuring this. In 2026, a national study by Investortools put the same repair bill across nearly 2,000 U.S. cities at about \$1 trillion, and urged cities to publish it.

It takes one Council member to request it.

Three questions worth working through together

1. This year's gap was closed with a 19% tax increase and added state aid. How can the next budget rely more on revenue the city controls?
2. What would a realistic, published plan for the \$1.2 billion retiree-health promise look like?
3. Could the city start publishing a yearly 'cost of good repair' number this year?

Do one thing today: A ready-made, five-minute letter to your Council member is waiting at buffalofinances.org (Take Action). Every figure is checkable there under Data & Sources.