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Councilor calls on NU to make good on voluntary payments

By **Matt Rocheleau**

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SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Boston City Councilor Josh Zakim's district encompasses Northeastern's campus in the Fenway and Mission Hill neighborhoods.


Boston City Councilor Josh Zakim said Tuesday expressed disappointment at Northeastern University's failure to pay the city in fiscal 2014 to help cover the costs of municipal services.

Zakim, whose district encompasses Northeastern's campus in the Fenway and Mission Hill neighborhoods, called the college's inaction "symptomatic of an institution that insists on being a bad neighbor."

Northeastern, meanwhile, said Tuesday that it is in discussions with Mayor Martin J. Walsh about its voluntary contributions to Boston, in lieu of taxes.

The Globe reported on Monday that most colleges in Boston have failed to pay the city the full amount sought to help pay for municipal services, while a majority of hospitals met the recommended amounts.

Under a three-year-old program, the city asks nonprofits with more than \$15 million worth of tax-exempt property to write checks twice a year to help offset the cost of police and fire protection, snow removal, and other services.



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Northeastern, which was asked for \$2.5 million this past fiscal year, gave nothing, even though it paid \$886,000 in each of the previous two years and \$30,000 in fiscal 2011, according to city data.

Fifteen of the 19 colleges, including the city's wealthiest universities, did not pay amounts requested by the city during fiscal 2014, which concluded at the end of June. In explaining their sub-par payments, many colleges cited the benefits they already provide to the city.

On Tuesday, Northeastern said it pays \$2.1 million every year in property taxes to the city. Those taxes are paid voluntarily because the school acquired property that was on the tax rolls and decided to keep paying the taxes, campus officials said.

Those payments, however, do not count toward what the city requests through the PILOT program, the officials said in a statement.

Northeastern also said it provides \$12 million annually in financial aid to Boston students, and another \$16

million a year through an array of other community benefits, including educational and youth development programs it runs and thousands of hours of community service that Northeastern students, faculty, and staff contribute.

The school said it has committed to spend \$15 million to improve Carter Playground, a city-owned park near the campus and officials also noted the university has its own police force, handles its own snow removal, also does extensive trash removal throughout the year.

Zakim called on the university to make amends by paying the city what it is asking for this year.

“I stand ready and willing to work together with Northeastern to find ways to repair its relationship with the City of Boston and its residents. Full participation in the PILOT program would be a positive start,” he said.

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