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Many colleges in Boston aren't paying the amount the city seeks for municipal services.

By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE STAFF JULY 21, 2015

Boston's wealthiest colleges are failing to pay the city the full amounts it seeks to help cover the cost of municipal services, according to data released Tuesday, prompting city officials to say they hope more schools will comply with the requests going forward.

Under a four-year-old program, the city asks nonprofits with more than \$15 million worth of tax-exempt property in Boston to write checks twice a year to help offset the cost of police and fire protection, snow removal, and other services. The payments are voluntary contributions in lieu of taxes.

Of the 19 colleges the city asked for payment, data show, 13 paid less than what was requested during fiscal 2015, which concluded at the end of June.

Among the eight colleges with the most valuable tax-exempt property holdings, Northeastern University and Emmanuel College paid 13 percent of what the city requested; Emerson College paid 19 percent; Boston College, 23 percent; Harvard, 44 percent; Wentworth Institute of Technology, half; and Suffolk University, just over half.

The largest request was for more than \$7 million from Boston University, which anted up 86 percent of the city's request, or more than \$6 million.



After criticism, Northeastern agrees to partial payment

NU fell well short of paying the full amount the city requested for municipal services, saying giving more would be unfair.

2014: Many colleges not paying Boston in full for services

Among smaller schools, Wheelock and Fisher colleges, for the fourth straight year, each paid nothing; the New England Conservatory paid just 11 percent of what it was asked for; Simmons College paid 28 percent; and the Berklee College of Music, about half.

But several schools paid the full amounts, including: Tufts University, \$491,400; MCPHS, \$341,148; and Showa Boston Institute, \$110,581.

Meanwhile, the other major nonprofit group that the city asks for payments in lieu of taxes — medical institutions — for the most part provided the requested amounts, as they have done in past years. Of those 16 medical institutions, 11 paid requested amounts during fiscal 2015.

“The City of Boston appreciates all of the contributions to the PILOT program, in particular the nonprofit hospitals that continue their high level of support,” said a statement from Bonnie McGilpin, a spokeswoman for Mayor Martin J. Walsh.

“We will continue to work with our nonprofit partners to explore ways to improve the PILOT program, and in particular will seek to engage our colleges and universities to encourage greater participation.”

For decades, Boston typically negotiated payments case by case with nonprofits when the organizations built a new facility or acquired new property. But starting with fiscal 2012, the city established a structured system and began to incrementally increase the amounts requested of each institution with the goal that, by fiscal 2016, each nonprofit will be asked to contribute 25 percent of the property tax bill they would owe if not exempt.

Institutions can fulfill up to half of the city’s requested amount through a “community benefits credit” by demonstrating they provide at least that amount through services that uniquely benefit Boston residents.

The rules were drafted by a task force that featured representatives from an assortment of nonprofits, including BU president Robert A. Brown and Wentworth president Zorica Pantic.

Pantic said Tuesday that the task force had emphasized that the program be voluntary. She said that some larger schools believe they should be given more credit for the community benefits they provide.

“We all understand the city needs some funding and we want to help,” said Pantic. But, she added, “some schools feel they are doing more than the guidelines say they can apply to their community benefits.”

Several schools, which either paid their requested amount in full or came close to doing so, said the city’s expectations are reasonable.

Other colleges that paid less than their requested amount pointed to benefits they already provide to the city. Not only are they major employers that help boost the local economy, they also host free public events for neighbors, provide thousands of dollars in scholarships to city high school students, and run an array of afterschool and summer programming for youths.

Some also pay for their own services, such as campus police patrols and snow removal.

Northeastern University came under fire last year for initially contributing nothing during fiscal 2014, prompting the college to make a retroactive payment. But the amount was still far less than what the city requested, and in letters accompanying that payment and a subsequent payment the school made for fiscal 2015, the university said that it does not believe the amount the city requested or the formula the city uses to calculate the amounts it requests are fair.

Northeastern spokeswoman Renata Nyul said Tuesday the university “will continue to work with Mayor Walsh on this important issue.”

Boston College said that since the early 1990s it has made an annual payment to the city for municipal fire protection services, but otherwise it does not participate in the PILOT program.

“As a Jesuit, Catholic university, we believe that the best way we can assist the City of Boston is through the more than \$30 million in community benefits that we provide to the city,” spokesman Jack Dunn said.

Boston nonprofits' payments in lieu of taxes

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. The payments are voluntary contributions, in lieu of taxes.

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Nonprofit	Type	Would owe, if taxable	Requested FY15	Paid FY15	% paid FY15
Boston University	College	\$62,005,769		\$7,033,134	86%
Mass General Hospital	Medical	\$55,457,390		\$6,032,850	100%
Harvard University	College	\$47,400,687		\$5,108,572	44%
Northeastern University	College	\$40,189,716		\$3,385,752	13%
Brigham and Women's Hosp.	Medical	\$24,661,812		\$2,727,322	100%
Beth Israel Deaconess	Medical	\$25,239,552		\$2,510,795	100%

Boston College	College	\$16,333,792	\$1,439,371	\$326,646	23%
Tufts Medical Center	Medical	\$12,448,421	\$1,380,426	\$1,018,053	74%

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DATA: City of Boston

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