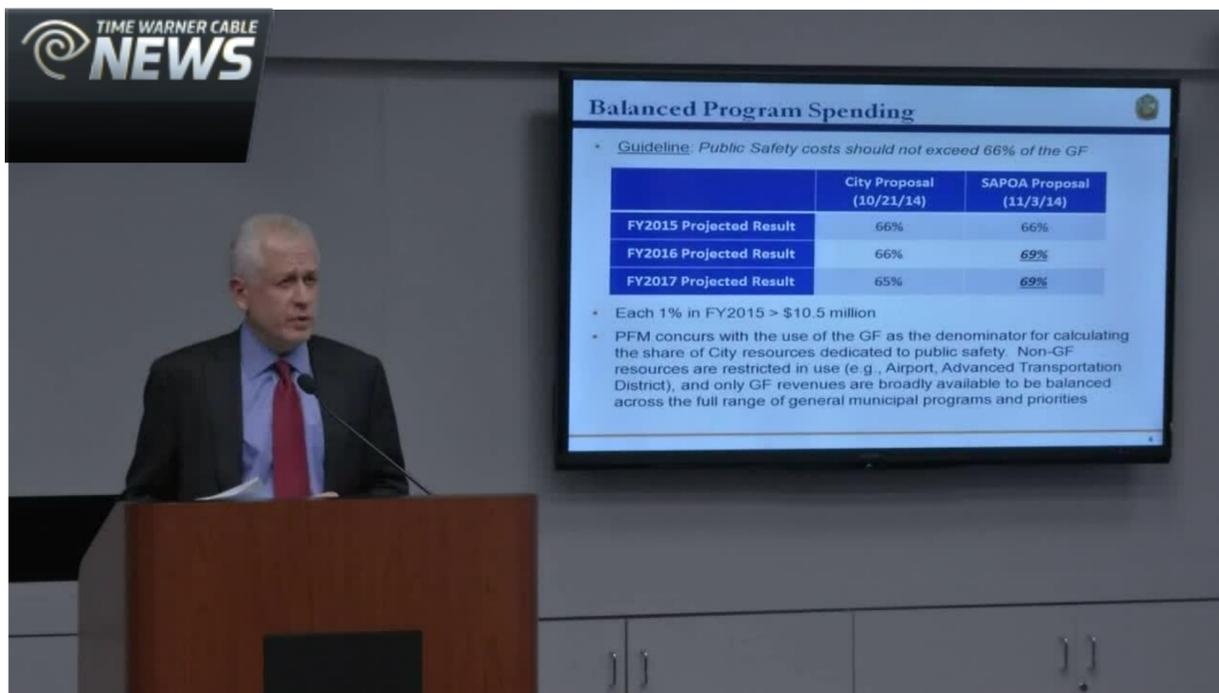


# Auditors: City Can't Afford Rising Public Safety Costs

By John Salazar  
Thursday, January 29, 2015 at 08:36 AM CST



Two independent auditors weighed in on the ongoing labor contract discussions between the City of San Antonio and public safety unions. Health care costs have been a major sticking point in the negotiations.

One auditor says the union's latest proposal would cost the city \$1.1 million this year, but over the next three years the cost would balloon to \$76 million --far outside what the city wants to spend.

"The city does have quite a bit of money that they can allocate for fire and police, just how much they are willing to do that for?" San Antonio Police Officers Association President Mike Helle said. "They reduced the amount of revenue that was coming in the city. They had a little less conservative input regarding that. If I lower the ceiling, I can make anything climb exponentially."

An independent auditor says the city's proposal to fund public safety would result in a budget shortfall of at least \$1 million this year, but that's a modest number compared to the city's overall spending.

"A million dollars is a lot of money, but it's all within the context of a \$2 billion budget," San Antonio Mayor Ivy Taylor said. "It's a gap we could potentially close."

Moving forward over the next three years, the report estimates the city's proposal would cost \$28.5 million, which is affordable under the city council's own policy guidelines, but the police union says it's not enough.

The longer negotiations drag on with no resolution in sight, the more the city's credit rating could take a hit. A second auditor emphasized the need to keep the city's perfect credit score.

Moody's Credit rating recently assigned a "negative outlook" on the city, which potentially could drop San Antonio's score from AAA to AA status. The auditor said that drop could cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars in higher interest rates.

"If you have high interest rate, you're paying more on monthly basis that's going to pay down the interest as opposed to pay down the principle," City Manager Sheryl Sculley said.

It's now time to get back to the negotiation table for both sides. The next meeting is scheduled for Feb. 2, the first of four scheduled meetings.

Also on Wednesday, city officials temporarily tabled discussing its lawsuit filed against the police union. The lawsuit seeks to get rid of a 10-year evergreen cause in the previous contract that favors police.