



ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

SYRACUSE CITY AUDITOR
ALEXANDER MARION, MPA



MARCH 29, 2024

Contents

I.	Message from the City Auditor	2
II.	2024 Audits Completed To Date	3
III.	Ongoing Audits and Reports	5
IV.	Planned Audits and Reports	6
V.	Special Projects	7



Office of the Syracuse City Auditor

Hon. Alexander Marion, MPA, City Auditor

Kyle Madden, Deputy City Auditor

Michael Guckert, Auditor III

Deborah Somers, Auditor I

Message from the City Auditor

March 29, 2024

In accordance with Section 5-104 of the Charter of the City of Syracuse, I am pleased to present this annual report on behalf of the Department of Audit and the Office of the City Auditor.

New leadership in the Department of Audit has meant a new commitment to strong oversight of the decisions the City is making today and better insight into the decisions the City will make tomorrow. Our office is committed to ensuring the people of Syracuse receive the greatest value for all their limited resources, including their tax dollars, infrastructure, human capital, facilities, and the community at large.



This report will primarily focus on the first three months of the new administration of the Department of Audit which began on January 1, 2024. In that time, two reports have been issued which provide a number of recommendations. Several reports are currently in progress, with others planned in the coming months. We are confident that, with new leadership and adequate staff resources, our office will be able to accomplish our charter mandated responsibility of auditing every City department each year, and producing reports that lead to meaningful improvements in municipal administration.

Prior Administration

The previous City Auditor completed one report between April and December 2023. That report investigated the Parking Violations Bureau.

Additionally, the previous City Auditor worked with an outside consultant, Matrix Consulting Group, to investigate police staffing with the goal of producing a final staffing report. The work on that report is ongoing and we will provide a more comprehensive update later in this annual report.

Working smarter, collaboratively, and thoughtfully, the new leadership in the City Auditor's office is living up to its mission to provide greater value for the City of Syracuse and we look forward to continuing to grow our work on this mission this year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alexander Marion". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Alexander Marion, MPA
Syracuse City Auditor

2024 Completed Reports (To Date)

[AIM Higher](#)

Analysis of NYS AIM funding on the City of Syracuse with recommendations for state action on improvements and increases to the funding formula.

Potential Revenue Generation: Up to \$30 million annually

The City of Syracuse receives \$71 million each year in unrestricted aid from New York State. This program is known as Aid and Incentives for Municipalities (AIM). This is crucial unrestricted funding that the City relies on to fund basic operations.

When the AIM funding program began in 2006, municipalities were promised annual increases – no less than 2.5%, and up to 7.5% if communities met certain benchmarks. The program was frozen by then-Governor Andrew Cuomo in the FY 2011-12 budget year, resulting in the City of Syracuse receiving a flat amount of roughly \$71 million annually each year since.



AIM funding once paid for over 65% of core city operations – defined as police, fire, DPW, and water. Now, that funding barely covers 40% of those operations. The City’s budget has increased just over 22% in the intervening decade. That’s not profligate spending – that’s the basic costs of running a modern American city. Since FY 2006, when the AIM program was created, the state budget has ballooned over 217%.

The report offered a series of recommendations for how the state of New York can improve the AIM funding program, including indexing AIM to inflation, revamping the formula to increase AIM aid based on needs and new incentive targets, and creating a cost-sharing program between the state and municipalities for basic services.

Since the report was issued, Senator Rachel May – the Chair of the Senate’s committee on Upstate Cities – has introduced legislation, the “AIM Higher Act”, to rewrite the AIM funding formula and increase aid to localities based on the percentage of tax-exempt and state-owned properties, infrastructure improvements, and housing construction.

Park at Your Own Risk

Analysis of 2023 city-issued parking violations with recommendations for improving operations and increasing revenue.

Potential Revenue Generation: Up to \$5 million annually

This report examined parking tickets issued by the City of Syracuse in 2023. Parking is a major business in the City, with more than 62,000 parking violations issued and millions of dollars in meter, garage, and ticket revenue collected last year alone.



Our report uncovered Parking Checkers issued more than 60% of their tickets before 12:00 pm; the administration has since committed to hiring a supervisor for Parking Checkers to ensure tickets are written equitably throughout the day. This improvement will increase the number of violations issued which will translate to additional ticket revenue. It will also ensure more compliance with metered parking payments. This change alone could see ticket revenue increase by several million dollars.

An additional revenue-generating recommendation from that report is to levy a new license fee on private parking garages and lots. Currently, garages are subject to a \$300 annual registration fee; lots are not subject to any fees or registration. An annual registration fee based on parking spaces would generate tremendous new revenue.



2024 Ongoing Audits and Reports

Police Staffing Study (with Matrix Consulting Group)

Anticipated completion: May 2024

In 2022, the Common Council approved \$300,000 in funding for an outside consultant, supervised by the Office of the City Auditor, to perform a study on police staffing. After an RFP process, Matrix Consulting Group was selected as the vendor.

That study, currently in draft form, is expected to be completed by May 2024. It is anticipated that more than 90 recommendations will be provided to more efficiently and effectively allocate police staffing. Upon completion, it will be presented to the Syracuse Common Council.

Our office will issue a companion report to the Matrix study which will highlight areas of interest and focus on priorities and implementation.

Audit of the City's Licensing and Permitting Operation

Anticipated completion: May 2024

Potential Revenue Generation: \$350,000 annually

The Office of the City Auditor is conducting an audit of the city's permitting and licensing functions, as mandated by the City Charter in Sections 5-501, 5-503, and 5-808. This audit examines the organizational structure of the Central Permit Office and its co-located licensing functions, compliance with law and local ordinances, enforcement practices, and revenue tracking. We believe improvements in the licensing and permitting process have the potential to generate up to \$350,000 in new revenue for the City annually.

Paving and Road Repairs Data Analysis

Anticipated Completion: April 2024

Spring construction season is almost underway in the City of Syracuse, and the Department of Audit is performing a recap of the 2023 completed road projects and an analysis of planned 2024 road reconstruction projects. The report will examine how the city decides what roads they repair, what conditions result in a decline in road quality, and how equitably the City is performing these projects.

2024 Planned Reports and Audits

The following are projects the Office of the City Auditor has planned for 2024. These cover multiple city departments and functions and are part of the City Auditor’s charter-defined mission to take on projects at their discretion to improve municipal administration. Additionally, several of the below referenced projects are statutorily required. This list is by no means comprehensive, and the office reserves the right to begin new projects throughout the year.

2024-25 Proposed Budget Analysis

Anticipated completion: April 2024

The Office of the City Auditor will be providing a public report which analyzes the Mayor’s 2024-25 budget proposal.

Fair Labor Practices Review (“Ban the Box”) Audit

Anticipated completion: Q4 2024

In accordance with the Syracuse Fair Labor Practices Act, the Office of the City Auditor will complete an audit of compliance with our “Ban the Box” ordinance to ensure vendors are aware of the law, vendors are fully compliant, and the City is taking enforcement action where necessary. An audit of this function, while legally mandated, has not been completed since 2020.

Living Wage Ordinance Audit

Anticipated completion: Q3 2024

In accordance with the Living Wage Ordinance, the Office of the City Auditor will complete an audit of the city’s Living Wage Ordinance to ensure all eligible vendors are compliant and the City is taking enforcement action where necessary. An audit of this function, while legally mandated, has not been completed since 2016. The Department of Audit expects to issue recommendations to modernize the ordinance and reconstitute the Living Wage Advisory Committee.

Cash Management and Investment Policy Audit

Anticipate completion: Q3 2024

In accordance with the Syracuse City Charter Subsection 5-501 and Subsection 5-503 and the City of Syracuse Investment Policy, the Office of the City Auditor will perform a review of the City’s cash management and investment policies. This report will review how the city disburses money across its various bank accounts, how the city uses investment vehicles like CDs to hold money, and the soundness of the existing investment policy.

Special Projects

Since taking office, City Auditor Alexander Marion has made working on policy matters across levels of government and with the community a priority.

SurgeLink

The Office of the City Auditor has begun working collaboratively with the administration on ways to create a permanent funding stream for the SurgeLink internet program. This program, currently in a pilot phase, provides more than 600 Syracuse residents subsidized internet access in their homes. The pilot phase of the program can take up to 2,500 customers. With the sunset of its major funding source – the federal Affordable Connectivity Program – the City needs to find a reliable stream of revenue for the pilot area, as well as future expansions of subsidized internet.

Community Engagement

Another priority of the new City Auditor's office is engaging the community. To better inform our process, we must understand what is most important to stakeholders – the people of Syracuse we are privileged to serve every day. Since taking office, City Auditor Alexander Marion has been to more than 35 community meetings and events and looks forward to attending many more. The office has also launched its first-ever social media presence and looks forward to connecting with neighbors on X (Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.



Internal Administration

As much as our recommendations pertain to improving operations across City government, the Office of the City Auditor makes its internal management a priority. We have deployed a new set of audit management policies, based on stringent standards that come from the Government Accountability Office and the Comptroller General of the United States. These policies inform our audit process, as well as during the execution of our daily management. Additionally, we have created and implemented an ethics and confidentiality policy for the Department of Audit, where any potential conflicts of interest are formally identified and disclosed as part of the auditing process.



Syracuse City Auditor

233 E. Washington Street • City Hall Room 433

Syracuse, New York 13202

(315) 448-8477

audit@syr.gov • @SyracuseAuditor



Hon. Alexander Marion, MPA

Syracuse City Auditor