



The

March 2015

PERA *graph*

Newsletter of the General Plan of the Public Employees Retirement Association of Minnesota

Assets over \$17 billion

Offices in St. Paul, Duluth & Mankato

Active membership of 140,000

Three past trustees return to PERA Board

Lori Volz, executive director of finance and operations for the Albert Lea School District, joins returning trustees Paul Bourgeois and Thomas Stanley as General/Correctional Fund representatives on PERA's Board of Trustees.

Volz, in her first run for a PERA board seat, was the top vote-getter in this January's General/Correctional

election with 13,954 votes cast, while Bourgeois received 13,100 votes and there were 11,324 votes for Stanley.

Bourgeois is executive director of finance and operations for the Minnetonka School District, while Stanley is senior attorney in the Civil Division in the St. Louis County

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Vanek retires as director of PERA

After 40 years of service, and 18 years as its executive director, Mary Most Vanek retired from PERA January 27. David DeJonge, PERA's assistant executive director and director of finance, will guide the Association for the next few months as the Board of Trustees searches for a new agency head.

Vanek was appointed to lead PERA in 1997 following a nationwide search. Prior to assuming the director's position, she was manager of the Association's Member and Legislative Services Division. During her 40-year career she worked in nearly every department of the Association.

Hired in 1975 by O. M. "Mike" Ousdigian, the Association's first director, Vanek would assume the reins at PERA 22 years later, the sixth director in the agency's 84 year history.

State Auditor Rebecca Otto said Vanek was leaving the Association "in a great position" to meet the challenges facing it in the future. Board Chair Don Rambow said, "Mary's intangible and personal qualities have helped evolve and define what PERA represents today."

The PERA Board has retained the services of EFL Associates, an executive

search firm, to assist in seeking a new director. It is hoped a replacement can assume the position in April or May.

Pension funds seek permanent 8 percent earnings assumption

PERA and the Minnesota State Retirement System are seeking a law change that would make our current, temporary, assumption of what our assets can earn on a long-term basis permanent.

For years, state law specified an earnings assumption of 8.5 percent for the pension funds. That assumption was lowered to 8 percent for a period of five years beginning with Fiscal Year 2013. During that time the funds were charged with investigating what a reasonable assumption should be.

"Over the long term, the State Board of Investment, has met or bested our previous assumption, noted David DeJonge, PERA's interim director. During the last 30 years our earnings have averaged 10 percent. "Still," he said, "the last recession has resulted in pension plans nationwide lowering their expectations for long-term asset growth. The move to a permanent 8 percent assumption seems prudent at this time."



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President's Message



Don Rambow

Board Directory

PERA's trustees invite you to notify them personally of any concerns you have regarding the policies or operations of the Association.

Don Rambow
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Cities Representative
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Board Vice President
School Board Representative
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Rebecca Otto
State Auditor
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Retiree/Disabiltant
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Ramsey Co. Sheriff's Department
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651-266-9311

Thomas Stanley
General Membership Representative
St. Louis Co. Attorney's Office
100 N. Fifth Ave. W.
Duluth, MN 55802
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Lori Volz
General Membership Representative
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211 W. Richway Drive
Albert Lea, MN 56007
507-379-4809

Lawrence J. Ward
Annuitant Representative
3221 Old Highway 8
Minneapolis, MN 55418
651-354-2006

Making the most of every retirement dollar

At PERA we have a fiduciary responsibility to be good stewards of your retirement funds. There are many facets to that responsibility—ensuring the funds are administered responsibly, ethically, and efficiently, that our investments are prudent as well as profitable, and that benefits are calculated accurately and paid promptly.

An often overlooked aspect of that responsibility is that the benefits we provide should also make the most of every dollar invested in the Association by you and your employer. That's why we are such strong advocates of our defined benefit (DB) structure. Traditional pension plans like PERA simply provide more bang for the buck when it comes to funding retirement benefits.

That's borne out by a recent study conducted by the National Institute on Retirement Security (NIRS). Entitled *Still a Better Bang for the Buck*, the report is a continuation of the work first carried out by the Institute in 2008. The two studies found that a typical large defined benefit plan like PERA provides a given level of retirement benefit at about half the cost of a defined contribution (DC) plan, like a 401(k). Even when compared to an "ideal" defined contribution plan modeled with generous assumptions, the traditional pension plan still provides the same level of benefits while costing 29 percent less.

The DB advantage

One significant advantage of traditional DB pension plans is that they provide benefits that cannot be outlived. The study found that annuitizing a defined contribution plan account balance at retirement only showed a modest decrease in the plan's funding requirements, based on historical average interest rates used by insur-

ance companies. At today's interest rates, the cost is actually higher.

Then there is the economy of scale. DB plans, with their billions of dollars in assets, can, and often do, cut a better deal on investment fees than the individual participant in a DC plan. Since all participants' contributions are invested the same in a DB plan, administrative costs are also lower. They also have the advantage of professional investment management.

Speaking of investments, DB plans can also maintain an optimal investment diversification year after year because there is no need to invest more conservatively in later years, as a prudent individual investor must. For every aging member of a DB plan approaching retirement, there is generally a younger replacement just waiting to be hired. Thus, a DB plan can sustain a reasonably aggressive portfolio over decades.

Finally, with thousands of participants, DB plans need only maintain sufficient funds to provide benefits for the average life expectancies of participants. On the other hand, a DC participant must accumulate extra funds to cover the eventuality he or she lives beyond the norm—money that could have been spent elsewhere.

The bottom line for the study was that, "for a given level of retirement income, a typical individually directed DC plan costs 91 percent more—almost twice as much—as a typical DB plan."

Thus, the next time you hear of someone advocating that public employees move to a 401(k)-type plan, keep in mind that they are also promoting a retirement plan that, on average, is going to give participants significantly lower benefits for the same level of contributions.

Don Rambow
President, PERA Board of Trustees

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SBI posts 18.6 percent return for FY14

For the second year in a row, the State Board of investment (SBI) posted double-digit returns for the state's pension funds. Last year's 14.2 percent showing was followed by an 18.6 percent return for Fiscal Year 2014. Over the past 10 years, the SBI has averaged an 8.4 percent return on its investments—approximately 10 percent over the past 30 years.

Responsibility for the Association's investments resides with the SBI, which also handles investment duties for the Minnesota State Retirement System and the Teachers Retirement Association. Approximately 45 percent of PERA's assets are invested in domestic stocks, 15 percent in international stocks, 18 percent in bonds and 20 percent in alternative assets. A small amount of cash reserves are maintained for the payment of benefits as they come due.

"This year's outstanding showing by SBI was led by a nearly 26 percent return for domestic stock investments," noted David DeJonge, PERA's interim executive director and manager of finance. "The investment returns of the last two years have gone far to stabilize the funding ratios of our retirement funds." PERA, like many retirement systems, smooths investment returns over five years to compensate for the short-term volatility of the markets. (The funding ratios of PERA's three major retirement plans are listed in the column to the right.)

The General Fund

The General Fund, which covers over 90 percent of the Association's membership, saw its assets grow by 15 percent during the year, ending Fiscal Year 2014 at \$17.4 billion, compared to \$15.1 billion a year earlier. The fund represents 67 percent of the Association's \$26.2 billion total assets. (Note: While the *Minneapolis Employees Retirement Fund* is a division of the General Fund, it is accounted for separately in PERA's annual financial report.)

Income

This past year, PERA's members and their employers contributed \$717 million to the General Fund. That was in addition to \$2.8 billion in investment income for the Fund. Overall, the Fund had combined revenues of \$3.48 billion for the year.

Expenses

As is true every year, payments to retirees, survivors and disabled members make up the bulk of PERA's expenses. These payments totaled \$1.11 billion during the year, representing 95 percent of the General Fund's total expenses.

Refunds of \$38.3 million represented 4 percent of the Association's outlays, while administrative and other expenses totaled \$9.9 million.

The bottom line

With revenues of \$3.48 billion and expenses of \$1.16 billion in the fiscal year, PERA's General Fund realized a net gain of \$2.3 billion during the year. That compares to growth of \$1.5 billion the year before.

Below is the financial status of the various funds administered by PERA.

(Figures used are in \$ millions.)

General Retirement Fund

(Coordinated and Basic Members)

Fiscal Year	2013	2014
Revenues	\$2,604	\$3,478
Expenses	<u>(1,097)</u>	<u>(1,158)</u>
Change in Fund Balance	\$1,507	\$2,320
Total Assets Held	\$15,085	\$17,405

Public Employees Police and Fire Fund

Fiscal Year	2013	2014
Revenues	\$1,009	\$1,381
Expenses	<u>(434)</u>	<u>(455)</u>
Change in Fund Balance	\$575	\$926
Total Assets Held	\$6,347	\$7,273

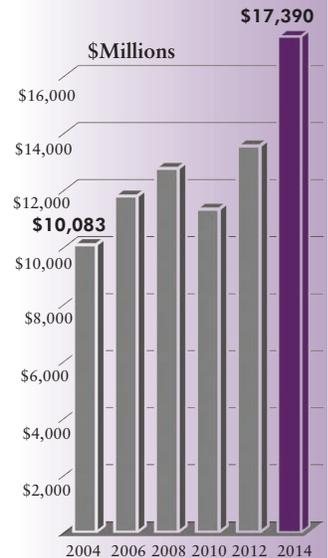
Public Employees Correctional Fund

Fiscal Year	2013	2014
Revenues	\$68	\$94
Expenses	<u>(7)</u>	<u>(8)</u>
Change in Fund Balance	\$61	\$86
Total Assets Held	\$367	\$453

Minneapolis Employees Retirement Fund

Fiscal Year	2013	2014
Revenues	\$164	\$202
Expenses	<u>(138)</u>	<u>(135)</u>
Change in Fund Balance	\$26	\$67
Total Assets Held	\$869	\$936

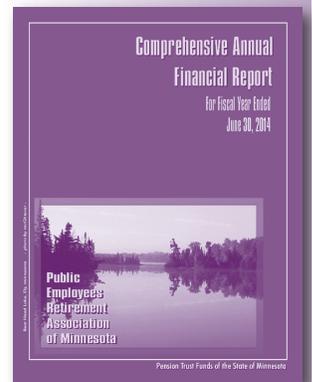
General Fund Investments



Over the past 10 years the General Fund has grown by over \$7 billion, despite the market slide in Fiscal Years 2008 and 2009.

Funding Ratios (Actuarial)

	Fiscal Year 2014
General Fund	73.5%
Police & Fire	80.1%
Correctional	96.2%



You can view PERA's annual financial report on line at our web site, www.mnpera.org.



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Election

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Attorney's Office. Both are in their second terms on the Board.

Ross Arneson also returns to PERA's Board, but this time as the retiree, survivor and disabilitant representative, having received 12,953 votes in the election. Recently retired from the Blue Earth County Attorney's Office, Arneson was previously a General Fund representative, having served four terms in that position. He defeated Marion Conwell, Rogers, and Gene VanOverbeke, Eagan, for the post.

Running unopposed for the Police and Fire seat on PERA's Board was David Metusalem. He is a 28-year veteran of the Ramsey County Sheriff's Department. The P&F spot was vacant at the time of the election, following the May retirement of Bruce Jensen.

2015 PERA Election Results

General/Correctional Fund

Lori Volz	13,954	Elected
Paul Bourgeois	13,100	Elected
Thomas Stanley	11,324	Elected
Thomas Rupp	10,561	
Clinton Schumacher	10,377	
John Carlson	9,997	

Retirees/Survivors/Disabilitants

Ross Arneson	12,953	Elected
Gene VanOverbeke	6,681	
Marion Conwell	6,563	

Police & Fire Fund

David Metusalem	22,837	Elected
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