

Audit finds \$17 million in unpaid Long Beach parking tickets

The city has failed to collect the money because antiquated software means staff time is consumed with 'manual processes, research and reconciliations,' the report says. The mayor vows action.

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Long Beach has failed to collect \$17.6 million in unpaid parking tickets because of an outdated software program and lack of staff, an audit released Thursday shows.

"We cannot afford to ignore the problem any longer," said City Auditor Laura Doud, who announced the findings at a Thursday morning news conference with Mayor Bob Foster. "We must act swiftly and make needed investment to update our outdated system to be more efficient in our collection efforts and to use city resources better."

The audit, which covered 2009 through 2011, was conducted to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the city's parking citation collection efforts and related software system. About 345,000 citations are processed each year in Long Beach, generating millions in revenue for the seventh-largest city in the state.

But for the last few years, parking ticket revenue has declined. In 2011, the city generated more than \$13 million in revenue, down from \$15 million in 2009.

Of the \$17.6 million in unpaid parking tickets, most are three years old or less, the report said.

The audit said staff time is consumed with "manual processes, research and reconciliations" because the system is antiquated and lacks "basic functionality."

The city adopted a new system in 2000, but the database was never cleansed to eliminate old, incorrect or uncollectable citations — which "slowed the system considerably," according to the audit.

In addition, the system is not linked with the state Department of Motor Vehicles, so when a motorist's information changes, the city is often unaware and the tickets remain unpaid.

Although the city has tried to improve the data, the audit found that "the problems with the software are so severe that incremental improvements will never result in the city being able to adequately manage parking citations."

Auditors have recommended that the city improve oversight of the collection process and update its software program — matters the City Council will discuss at its next meeting.

"We are working together to actively look for solutions for Long Beach," Foster said. "If we can successfully collect even a portion of the unpaid fines, it would be a great gain."