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Highmark renews offer to contribute to city, with caveat

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By **SUSAN JONES**

Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey this week said that Highmark Health, parent company of Allegheny Health Network, has once again said it was willing to make a financial contribution to the city if the city's three other large nonprofits — Pitt, UPMC and Carnegie Mellon University — also participate.

The written commitment reiterates what Highmark has said in the past. “*Highmark* is prepared to meet to discuss financial contributions to the city of Pittsburgh, if the large nonprofits — including UPMC — are part of the meeting. Highmark is ready to make a financial commitment as soon as all of the large nonprofits participate in a financial contribution that is proportional, within the city, to its status as a purely public charity.”

Gainey said in a news release and on the KDKA Morning Show that he is “calling on the leaders of the ‘Big 4’ to meet with me before the end of the month to finalize an agreement for predictable, proportional financial support for the core services provided by city government.”

In response, a Pitt spokesman said, “The University of Pittsburgh is a significant, steadfast economic engine for the city and a dedicated community partner, anchor and collaborator. We are proud of the millions of dollars we contribute to the region’s economy every year and we value our longstanding partnerships throughout the city, including our long-term commitments in Greater Hazelwood, Homewood, the Hill District, and Oakland. We look forward to continuing to work together with the city to support and advance our region.”

A UPMC spokesman told the Post-Gazette that, “The city and mayor are aware of UPMC’s ongoing support of various initiatives and have long known they can count on our full participation in programs that are fair and equitable and include the region’s other major nonprofits.”

The city has long sought to get payments from the nonprofits to help boost its budget, either through reclassifying property as non-exempt from taxation or by creating a payment in lieu of taxes program. Neither has gained much traction.

In March 2023, Gainey's administration challenged the tax-exempt status of 26 properties owned by nonprofits, including Pitt's OC parking lot on Allequippa Street. In June 2023, the University said it had received a notice from the county that the OC Lot property had been reclassified as taxable. The University disagreed with this determination, and filed an appeal to the Allegheny County Board of Property Assessment Appeals and Review on July 28, 2023.

The city In March 2024, the city challenged another 104 properties — with more than half owned by UPMC — but only 17 were returned to the tax rolls.

None of the Pitt property's challenged by the Gainey administration has been added to the tax rolls, a University spokesman said.

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