

Opinion: City officials should have known San Bernardino was on the ropes

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San Bernardino appears poised to become the third California city to file for bankruptcy protection so far this year.

Citing the ongoing economic downturn, lack of recovery in the housing market and state funding take-aways, the City Council voted Tuesday to file Chapter 9. Without filing for bankruptcy, officials said, the city probably could not meet its Aug. 15 payroll.

In recent weeks, the cities of Stockton and Mammoth Lakes made similar moves.

If San Bernardino's decision seems sudden, however, it's really not.

The city has been struggling to reinvent itself for years and has been particularly hard hit by the recession. At the same time, city leaders have spent too much time politicking and feuding and obviously not enough time scrutinizing the city's finances.

Were they surprised when Acting City Manager Andrea Travis-Miller and Finance Director Jason Simpson reported to the council only two weeks ago that San Bernardino has a \$45 million budget deficit?

City Attorney James Penman said at the meeting Tuesday that for 13 of the past 16 years, the council had been given falsified budget documents – showing the city in the black when it was actually in the red. Did they just discover this?

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