

City of Hazleton Government Study Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: Tuesday, November 18, 2025

Time 4:30 PM

Location: City Hall, Conference Room A, Hazleton

Call to Order

This meeting was called to order at 4:33 PM by Allison Keegan, Chairwoman.

Roll Call

Allison Keegan, Chairperson - Present

Rossanna Gabriel, Vice Chairperson-Present

Philip Bonafair - Present

Thomas Bruno – Present

Jeffrey Cusat - Present

Joseph Yannuzzi – Absent

Joseph Zeller III – Present

PEL Consultant Fred Reddig

Solicitor, Sean Logsdon

Recording Secretary Christine Galuska

Pledge of Allegiance was recited, and moment of silence was observed.

Approval of Minutes

Approval of November 5, 2025 meeting minutes. Motion made by Zeller, seconded by Cusat. Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Invoices

There were no invoices presented for approval.

Old Business

Subcommittee Reports

Mayor Panto of Easton

- Population 30,504
- Annual Budget \$74 million
- Full-time Mayor also serves as the President of Council
- City Council expanded from 5 to 7 members
- Easton employs a City Administrator
- Easton adopted a Home Rule Charter in 2008, which the mayor strongly recommends due to increased flexibility in revenue options and improved ability to manage long-term fiscal challenges.

Report from Jim Perry, President of Hazleton City Council

Council President Jim Perry addressed the Commission, noting his 11 years of service on Hazleton City Council.

- The greatest ongoing challenge for Hazleton is funding essential city services
- Under the current form of government, raising property taxes is viewed as the only reliable mechanism for increasing revenue
- Mr. Perry noted that a Home Rule Charter would provide alternative revenue options such as earned income tax-which could better support quality-of-life services.
- He stated that, from the perspective of City Council, Home Rule may offer the most viable path forward.

PEL Presentation

Fred Redding, consultant from the Pennsylvania Economy League (PEL), delivered an in-depth presentation on the Hazleton Government Study Commission's drafting process for a proposed Home Rule Charter.

Commissioner Statements on Home Rule

Each commissioner present was asked to state their current views regarding whether Hazleton should move from its existing form of government to a Home Rule Charter.

Tom Bruno

Commissioner Bruno expressed that it is "obvious an alternative way to increase revenue besides property taxes is needed." He stated that this is his principal reason for supporting the pursuit of a Home Rule Charter.

Joe Zeller

Commissioner Zeller stated he believes a Home Rule Charter "would benefit the residents of the city and certainly the taxpayers." He further expressed that adopting Home Rule would be in the best interest of the community and that the Commission should move forward with drafting a charter.

Phil Bonafair

Commissioner Bonafair noted that he comes from a non-political background and expressed concern about how to best inform citizens about Home Rule, so they are prepared to make an educated decision when voting. He emphasized the importance of public awareness and outreach. The PEL representative responded by explaining that all commission meetings are open to the public and that citizens' participation is strongly encouraged. He stated that public education will be critical as the process moves forward and that transparency will remain a priority.

Rossanna Gabriel

Commissioner Gabriel stated that a Home Rule Charter provides greater flexibility and accountability compared to the current structure. She noted that Home Rule offers forms of government not otherwise available under the existing framework. Rossanna added that community input should be strongly considered as the process moves forward and stated that the commission could suggest establishing voting districts.

Allison Keegan

Commissioner Keegan highlighted the need for new and sustainable revenue sources, particularly to support essential services such as fire and police. She stressed that under Home Rule; the financial burden may no longer fall solely on taxpayers. She also noted the importance of protecting personnel and

ensuring continuity of operations by having individuals who understand the day-to-day procedures of municipal government.

Jeff Cusat

Commissioner Cusat referenced lessons learned from Act 47, stating it demonstrated that options exist under other forms of government that are not available in the municipality's current structure. He pointed out the potential for additional revenue sources and improved transitional stability for employees under a Home Rule Charter. Jeff expressed his belief that adopting a Home Rule Charter could help secure the municipality's long-term future.

Motion to Proceed to Drafting Phase

Atty. Logsdon proposed a motion to formally vote and submit a proposed Home Rule Charter, as permitted under Government Study Commission Law Section 2921.

- Vote 6-0, Commissioner Joseph Yannuzzi absent
- Motion made by Cusat, Bruno seconded. Motion passed unanimously
This vote officially concludes the Study Phase and initiates the Drafting Phase of the Commission's work.

Next Steps and Deadlines

- The Commission has until mid-August 2026 to complete drafting the new Home Rule Charter.
- Once finalized, the proposed Charter will be submitted for inclusion on the November 2026 ballot.

Public Comments

Chris Mouzon-Financial Business

Owner/Entrepreneur

Introduced himself as relatively new to the area. Expressed revenue appears to be an issue for the community. Suggested that there are alternative methods to raise revenue aside from increasing taxes.

Bob Childs

Asked when there will be a discussion regarding how council members are elected, noting that council members are currently elected at large. The question was addressed.

Amilcar Arroyo

Stated that the commission voted in favor of developing a Home Rule Charter, and he supports that decision. Expressed concern that the Hispanic population is not turning out to vote. Emphasized the need for the community to work together.

Ted Sherrock

Former school board member. Commented that district-based elections can create political challenges due to the influence of local "power brokers." Warned that these dynamics can impact or undermine candidates during elections.

Robert Collado

Stated that he does not believe in disruption. Encouraged residents to join, participate, and be active members of the community.

John Nilles

Expressed support for adopting a Home Rule Charter. Noted that such a change could allow for revenue options such as an Earned Income Tax, which he believes would be beneficial.

Dave Dominguez

Stated that Hazleton is facing challenges and that he does not see strong development opportunities. Shared that many residents feel unheard. Mentioned that many immigrants lack awareness, information, and confidence. Noted in many parts of the world corruption is widespread, which affects trust locally. Mentioned a sister-city with the Dominican Republic was developed.

Member Comments

Allison stated that on December 2nd, the commissioners will discuss the future dates and times of upcoming meetings.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 6:23 PM by Cusat, seconded by Bruno. The motion carries.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Hazleton Government Study Commission will take place on Tuesday, December 2, 2025, at 4:30 PM, on the 2nd floor of Hazleton City Hall.