

City of Hazleton Government Study Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: Tuesday, October 7, 2025

Time 6:00 PM

Location: Southside Fire Station, 525 E. Broad Street, Hazleton

Call to Order

This meeting was called to order at 6:13 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 – Present

Joseph Zeller III – Absent from roll call but arrives during discussion about Mayor Sorace

PEL Consultants Gerald Cross, Senior Research Fellow; Patty Moorhead, Director of Financial and Data Analytics; Fred Reddig, Consultant

Recording Secretary Christine Galuska

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

Approval of Minutes

Approval of September 16, 2025 meeting minutes. Motion made by Cusat, seconded by Bruno. Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Invoices

There were no invoices presented for approval.

Old Business

Presentation by the Pennsylvania Economy League (PEL)

Representatives from PEL delivered a presentation on the Citizens Guide to the Government Study Commission. The guide outlines the responsibilities of the Commission and the Home Rule Charter process.

- The Government Study Commission (GSC) consists of elected members conducting a 9-month study to evaluate Hazleton's current form of government.
- At the end of the study, the Commission must decide either to recommend retaining the current form of government, or draft a Home Rule Charter, which would extend the process by an additional 9 months.
- If a Home Rule Charter is drafted, it would be placed on a referendum ballot for voter approval.

- If approved by voters, a transition period would follow for implementation of new charter.

Without Home Rule: The city may only act within the powers granted by state law.

With Home Rule: The city may act on any matter not prohibited by law.

Public Meetings and Transparency

- Regular GSC meetings will be held on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month at 4:30 PM at City Hall in Conference Room A.
- Meetings are open to the public.
- Agendas and meeting minutes will be made available on the city website.

New Business

Current Commission Activities

The Commission is currently conducting interviews and meetings with current and former mayors, city council members, including the council president and department heads.

Subcommittee Reports

GSC subcommittee held virtual discussions with representatives from other Pennsylvania municipalities that have adopted Home Rule:

Mayor Sorace of Lancaster

- Full Time Mayor
- Lancaster recently implemented a Home Rule Charter
- Home Rule enabled the city to increase the Earned Income Tax (EIT), which was instrumental in funding public safety and public works
- Discussed homelessness and affordable housing issues

Mayor Slaughter of Williamsport

- Full Time Mayor
- Noted the city has seven at-large council members under their current structure

Mayor Coughlin of Nanticoke

- Part-time Mayor
- Discussed term limits, noting that specifics are not defined in their charter which could be an issue

Rescheduling of November Meeting

Due to Election Day falling on Tuesday, November 4, it was proposed that the first meeting in November be rescheduled to Wednesday, November 5 at 4:30 PM in City Hall, Conference Room A. Motion made by Cusat, seconded by Bruno. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comments

David Dominguez inquired about taxation limits and how those would be addressed if a Home Rule Charter were adopted. The committee responded to the question. He also asked whether the city is currently operating with a surplus. It was noted that this question would need to be answered by the City Council.

Orlando Castillo inquired about what specific revenue tools would be made available under the Home Rule Charter. He also asked whether a Home Rule Charter would provide flexibility to create grants for local initiatives. The questions were addressed by the committee.

Lupe Acosta asked if the Citizens Guide to the Government Study Commission presentation materials would be posted on the website and whether it would be available in Spanish. It was confirmed that the guide would be posted online, and it was indicated that translation into Spanish would be considered.

Omar Delacruz asked if the meeting minutes and agendas would be posted online. It was stated that a summary of both the meeting minutes and agendas are currently being posted on the city's website.

Yasandry Cepeda asked whether a Home Rule Charter could help open new opportunities and grants for business owners. The committee responded to the question.

Robert Collado asked whether there is any way to detect if city residents are using addresses outside the city to avoid paying earned income tax. Additionally, he raised concerns regarding small business loan programs. The committee responded to the questions.

Amilcar Arroyo asked how the city could address the ongoing housing issues in Hazleton. The committee responded to the question.

Member Comments

Rossanna Gabriel requested that PEL explain to those in attendance how a Home Rule Charter could benefit the community. PEL responded to the question.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 7: 58 PM by Zeller, seconded by Cusat. The motion carries.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Government Study Commission will take place on Tuesday, October 21, 2025 at 4:30 PM, on the 2nd floor of Hazleton City Hall.