



Home Rule Basics

City of Lancaster Home Rule Study Commission

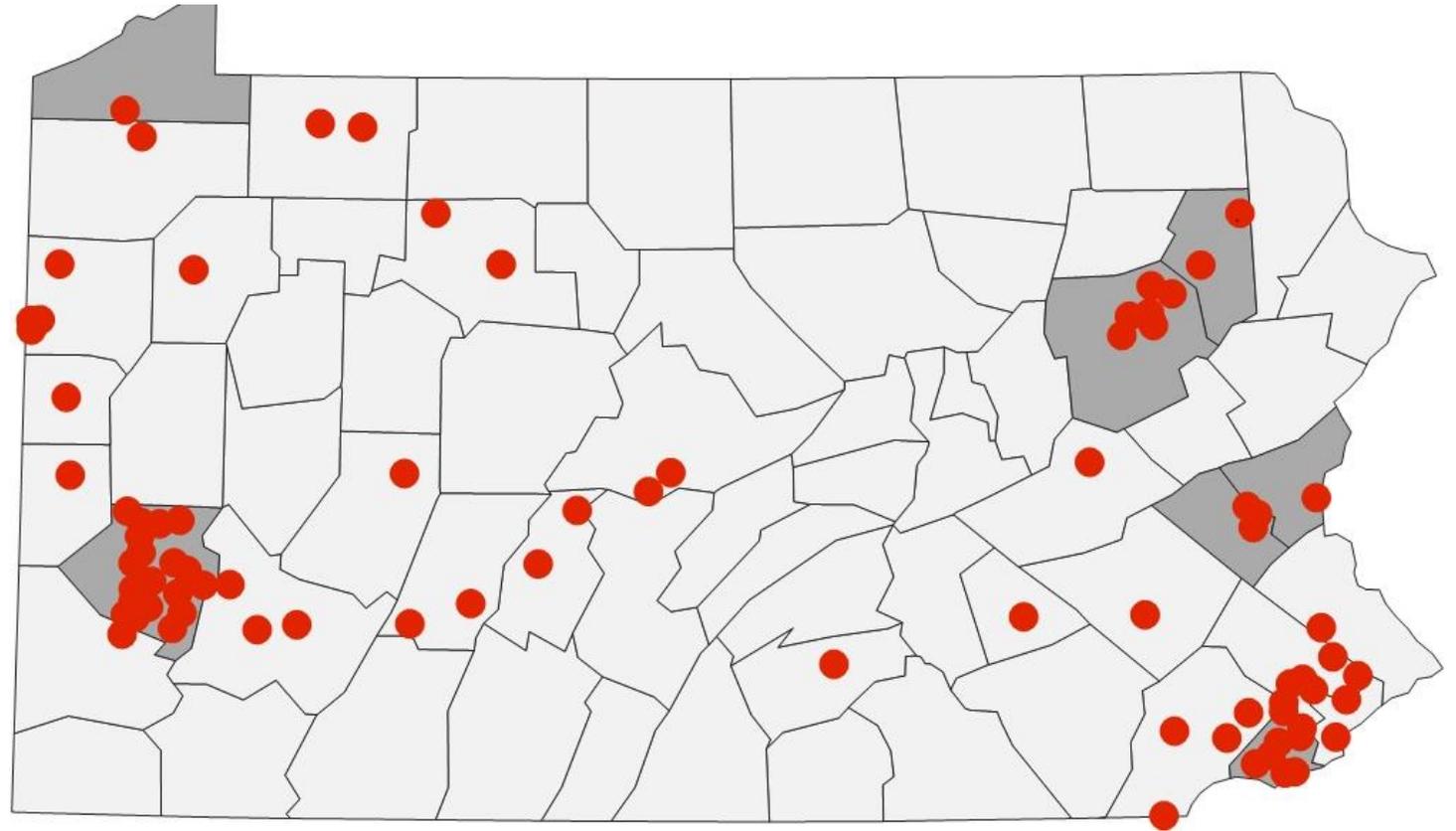


Home Rule Basics

- A home rule charter serves as the City’s “constitution.”
- Literally: *Make the Rules at Home*
- Home Rule transfers the basic authority to act in municipal affairs from state law to a locally drafted and adopted charter through election by municipal voters.

Home Rule Municipalities in PA

- There are 82 cities, townships and boroughs in the Commonwealth with home rule charters.
- 26 of 53 third class cities like Lancaster are home rule.





Why do some municipalities consider Home Rule?

- Flexibility in Taxation
- Flexibility in Representation
- Checks and Balances/Improve Accountability
- Separate Legislative and Executive Functions
- Improve Fiscal Procedures and Controls
- Professional Administration
- Residual Powers: Write Own Administrative Code
- Increase Citizen Participation: Initiative and Referendum
- Improve Flexibility and Responsiveness

Who is the Home Rule Study Commission?

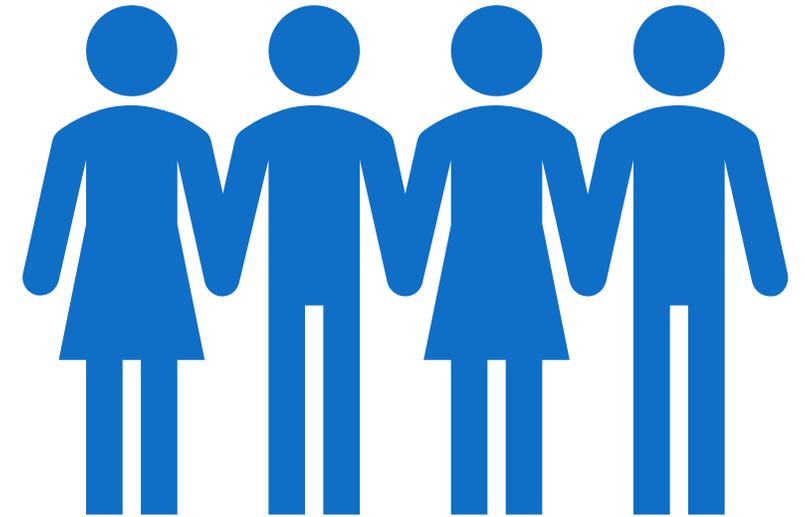
- Nine City residents elected temporarily by fellow City residents in spring 2023.
- The commission's charge is to consider home rule for the City of Lancaster.
- Commissioners are independent and non-partisan.



Photo: Tim Stuhldreher | One United Lancaster.

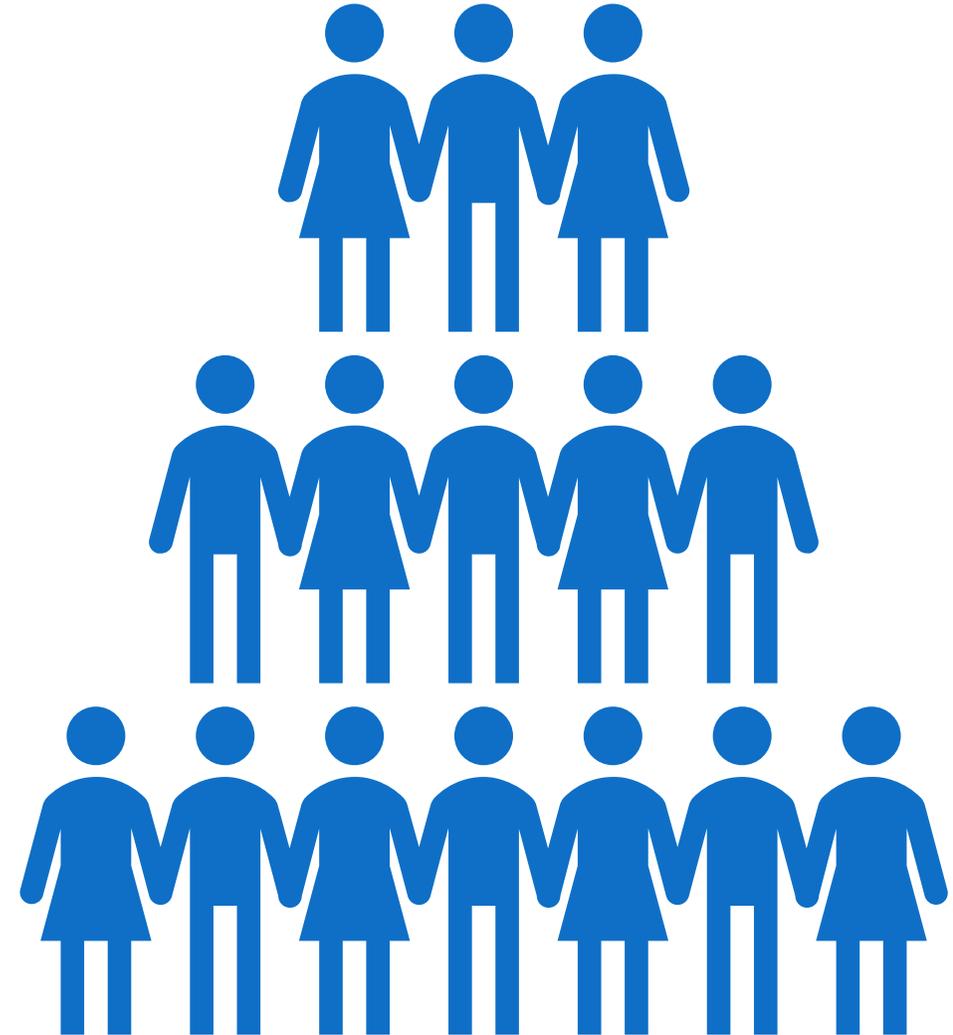
What work has the Home Rule Study Commission completed?

- Studied the current and alternative forms of City government for six months.
- Voted in January to draft a home rule charter.
- Commission members cited different reasons for their vote including to:
 - Improve public participation
 - Strengthen financial procedures
 - Consider a code of conduct
 - Choose local control over state control



Home Rule Charter: Commission Next Steps

- Draft a proposed home rule charter
- Complete charter by mid-summer
- Gather community feedback and educate the public on the draft home rule charter's content.
- Proposed charter to be placed on Nov. 5 GENERAL ELECTION BALLOT.
- ***City of Lancaster Voters Make the Ultimate Decision on Approval***





Home Rule Charter Basic Components

- A general grant of powers to the municipality.
- The basic organization of the government.
- Specification of critical legislation and administrative procedures.
- Provision for citizen participation and reservation of specific powers to voters.
- Mandates for desirable administrative practices.
- General provisions such as transition procedures and the effective date.

Some Home Rule Charter Limitations

- Arbitration/Labor Relations
- Boundary Change Law
- Election Code
- Ethics Law
- Sunshine Law
- Open Records Law
- Vehicle Code
- Regulation of Utilities
- Eminent Domain
- Zoning
- PA Municipalities Planning Code
- Tort Claims
- *And more*

Background on Taxes: the Need for Flexibility

- Cities rely on a mix of taxes authorized 60 or more years ago.
- All taxes are capped or at a flat rate.
- These taxes have not kept up with inflation.
- As a result, cities are limited in their ability to raise additional revenue in the face of rising expenditure.

Background on Taxes: Increased Overall Tax Flexibility

- Home rule *is not* the cure all for outdated state tax laws, but it does permit more flexibility than municipal codes.
- Increased tax flexibility would allow the City to consider increases to other revenue sources like earned income **to ensure balance and avoid overburdening any one group.**
- Home rule lifts state caps on municipal tax rates like earned income.
- **Home rule does not set tax rates; tax rates are set every year by elected officials.**
- Home rule *does not* allow a municipality to create new taxes.
- Home rule *does not* permit the City to levy a commuter wage tax or tax non-profits.

Potential Benefits of Earned Income Tax Flexibility

- The earned income tax is not paid by those retired or not earning wages.
- For these same people, increases in property taxes trigger concerns over ever-rising property taxes.
- Businesses that usually have the most valuable taxable property also do not pay earned income tax.
- Renters directly pay their earned income tax instead of paying property taxes indirectly through rent increases.
- Higher costs from increased property taxes affect housing affordability.

Flexibility Needed to Maintain Existing Service Levels

- Lancaster is a full-service community
- Police and Fire provide 24/7 services for approximately 60,000 residents and 30,000 commuters in 7.3 square miles
- Public safety accounts for approximately 60 percent of the City's General Fund budget
- More flexible revenue options are needed to keep up with inflation and maintain public safety services to ensure public health, safety and welfare



Myth vs. Reality

- *Myth: the home rule charter will raise my taxes*
- Reality: a home rule charter does not set tax rates; it provides local flexibility on the mix of taxes appropriate to the local tax base.
- *Myth: the home rule charter will give the City freedom to tax whatever they like.*
- Reality: the City cannot invent new taxes.
- *Myth: the home rule charter will give the City freedom to raise taxes however high they like.*
- Reality: the commission can place limits in the charter on revenue growth from tax increases.



In Progress Now: Draft Charter Articles

- Substantially complete Articles: preamble, mayor, city council, controller, solicitor, appointed officials, fiscal procedures
- In progress: ethics board, citizen participation & voter referendum
- Notable changes:
 - Budget & Finance
 - Budget process starts earlier - more time for council review and citizen feedback
 - Mandated quarterly budget reporting
 - Citizen Referendum
 - Creating opportunities for citizens to request city council agenda items or special meetings of city council
 - Creating a process for referendum to pass or revoke an ordinance
 - Ethics Board
 - educate city elected officials, staff and the public on the state ethics act
 - investigate complaints of wrongdoing against these rules
 - enforce the rules

How can the public get involved?

- **Read the Home Rule web page on the City's web site.**
 - Numerous education materials on home rule.
 - Ask questions in the Feedback section.
- **Watch or attend a commission or committee meeting**
 - Meeting dates are posted on the web page.
 - Meetings provide two opportunities for public comment.
 - Meeting agendas, minutes, and other materials are also posted.
- **Participate in upcoming information sessions and public hearings**
 - July 29 Information Session, City Council Chambers
 - July 31 Information Session, virtual
 - August 6 Information Session, City Council Chambers
 - August 8 Public Hearing, City Council Chambers
- **Stay tuned for more events and information as the process continues!**

Lancaster City Home Rule Website:

<https://www.cityoflancasterpa.gov/home-rule/>.

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HOME RULE STUDY COMMISSION

HOME RULE STUDY COMMISSION

On May 16, 2023, Lancaster City voters decided to form a Home Rule Study Commission to determine if a home rule charter would better serve the City of Lancaster. On January 27, 2024, by a vote of 7-1, the Home Rule Study Commission voted to move forward with drafting a home rule charter for the City of Lancaster.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE HOME RULE STUDY COMMISSION?

COMMISSION MEMBERS
 Brian Adams, Chair
 Peter Barber
 Darlene Byrd
 Maxine Cook
 Tony Dastra
 Elizabeth Elias
 Carl Feldman

HOME RULE STUDY COMMISSION RESOURCES

Regular Meeting Agendas	Regular Meeting Minutes	Meeting Materials	Home Rule Resources
Ethics Subcommittee Agendas	Finance Subcommittee Agendas	Preamble Subcommittee Agendas	Public Engagement Subcommittee Agendas

UPCOMING EVENTS

APR 4 2024 HOME RULE STUDY COMMISSION – ETHICS COMMITTEE MEETING 7:00 PM to 8:00 PM City Hall – Polite Council Chambers	APR 11 2024 HOME RULE STUDY COMMISSION – PREAMBLE COMMITTEE MEETING 5:00 PM to 6:00 PM Two Dudes Painting Company
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HOW TO PARTICIPATE

MEETING SCHEDULE	WATCH MEETINGS
SEND FEEDBACK	

FROM THE ADMINISTRATION

The Sorace Administration is recommending Home Rule as a solution to help build a stronger, more equitable Lancaster. By adopting Home Rule, Lancaster could have more tools to control expenses and provide for other ways to raise revenues besides property taxes. [Learn More](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [It's Not 1965 Anymore](#) (PDF)
PA Economy League
- [Home Rule in Pennsylvania Presentation](#)
Feb. 1, 2023
- [Norma de Autonomía \[Home Rule\] en PA Presentación](#)
1 de Febrero 2023 (en Español)
- [Home Rule in PA Presentation to Council](#)
Feb. 1, 2023 (Video)

PRESS COVERAGE

- [LNP | LancasterOnline](#)
- [One United Lancaster](#)

HOME RULE INTRODUCTION PRESENTATION



Home Rule Neighborhood Meeting Presentation
 FEBRUARY & MARCH 2023
 Watch on [YouTube](#)

UPDATES FROM THE HOME RULE STUDY COMMISSION – FINANCE

Interested community members can subscribe to updates from the Home Rule Study Commission, including meeting summaries, meeting calendars, and ways to submit feedback. *Your email address will only be used to send updates and will never be shared or used for other purposes.*

SUBSCRIBE FOR UPDATES FROM THE HOME RULE STUDY COMMISSION

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CITY OF LANCASTER HOME RULE STUDY COMMISSION

What is Home Rule?

Home Rule = Make the Rules at Home

- A home rule charter serves as the city's "constitution".
- Home Rule means that Lancaster City will have basic authority to act in municipal affairs.
- The power to act is transferred from the state to the local government.

Commission members mentioned various reasons for their votes to draft a charter, including:

- Improving public participation
- Strengthening financial procedures
- Considering a code of conduct
- Taking back control from state government

Commission Next Steps

- Draft a proposed home rule charter
- Complete charter by mid summer
- Gather community feedback and educate the public
- Lancaster city voters make the ultimate decision on charter approval

Home Rule Commission Meetings

Home Rule Study Commission meetings are open to the public and are usually held at City Hall (Polite Council Chambers) at 7:00PM (be sure to check the website, as this schedule may change.)

- April 11 & 25
- May 9 & 23
- June 6 & 20
- July 2 & 18
- Aug 1 & 15 & 29
- Sept 12 & 26
- Oct 10 & 24

How To Participate

- Attend or watch Home Rule Commission Meetings (*tune in online at cityoflanasterpa.gov/home-rule*)
- Send feedback to cityoflanasterpa.gov/hrfeedback (or scan the QR code below)
- Learn more at cityoflanasterpa.gov/home-rule

Send your feedback to the Commission!

Scan here or visit
cityoflanasterpa.gov/hrfeedback to send your
feedback to the Home Rule Study Commission!



Home Rule Recap

- A home rule charter serves as a municipality's "constitution" rather than state code.
- A proposed home rule charter is being drafted now by the Home Rule Study Commission.
- Completion anticipated mid-summer.
- The commission will conduct public engagement on the charter.
- City of Lancaster residents vote on the proposed home rule charter at the Nov. 5 General Election.
- Questions?

