

City of Hazleton Government Study Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday, July 29, 2026

Time 5:00 PM

Location: Hazleton City Hall, Conference Room A

Call to Order

This meeting was called to order at 5:00PM by Allison Keegan, Chairwoman

Roll Call

Allison Keegan, Chairperson -Present

Rossanna Gabriel, Vice Chairperson - Present

Philip Bonafair - Present

Thomas Bruno – Present

Jeffrey Cusat – Absent

Joseph Yannuzzi –Present

Joseph Zeller III –Present

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

Solicitor Sean Logsdon

Recording Secretary Christine Galuska

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

Approval of Minutes

Approval of July 15, 2026, meeting minutes. Motion made by Zeller, seconded by Gabriel. Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Invoices

Approved the Standard Speaker public notices for the June 24 additional meeting and July 15 Public Hearing at a cost of \$121.55, and the July 29 additional meeting at a cost of \$77.90. Motion made by Bruno, seconded by Yannuzzi. Motion passed unanimously.

Courtesy of the Floor (On Agenda Items Only)

David Dominguez-David questioned the proposed Charter's designation of English as the official language, noting that no language has been formally established and referencing a 2006 City lawsuit. He suggested "language accessible" instead. He also questioned statements at a Water Authority meeting regarding a potential Homestead Act benefit, stating that such benefits cannot be guaranteed and that any tax increases could offset potential savings. For these reasons, he stated that he would vote no on the charter at this time. David also addressed the public in Spanish.

Solicitor Logsdon-The Solicitor stated that English would be the official language for conducting City business, referencing the 2006 matter. He explained that the Charter, documents, and forms would be in English, with the ability to provide mechanisms for interpretation and translation services.

Regarding the Homestead Exemption, the Solicitor explained that the provision was included because City Council could potentially dissolve or sell the Water Authority in the future. Since the Water Authority's value exceeds the applicable amount, any such sale would require a vote of the City's residents rather than Council action alone.

Dr. Robert Childs-Robert provided Allison with a paragraph regarding the designation of English as the official language of the City and asked that the Commission take it into consideration.

Vice-Chairwoman Rossanna Gabriel questioned why English language is included in the Charter. She noted that, even though it does not state that the City prohibits Spanish translation of official documents, it also does not require such translation. She expressed concern that Spanish-speaking residents could be confused as to whether English applies to the entire City or only to City Hall.

Old Business

Vice-Chairwoman Rossanna Gabriel questioned Article 505, Essential Personnel, and its relocation from Section 503e. It was explained that it was moved because the previous section referred to the wrong employees. Article 505 provides due process protections comparable to union employees for essential employees only, while allowing termination for cause. She also asked what protections are in place for a new Mayor regarding current employees.

During discussion of the Final Report and proposed Home Rule Charter, PEL Consultant Gerald Cross stated that the Charter could be amended through late August; however, the Charter must be submitted to the County by August 4, 2026 to be placed on the November ballot.

New Business

Chairwoman Allison Keegan called for a motion to approve placing the question of whether to adopt the proposed Hazleton Home Rule Charter on the ballot for the November 3, 2026 General Election. Motion was made by Bruno and seconded by Zeller. All commissioners present voted in favor, and the motion was approved.

Commissioner Jeffrey Cusat was absent at the time of signing but supported placement of the Charter on the ballot and signed the Final Report on July 30, 2026. The signed Final Report was emailed and hand delivered to the Luzerne County Board of Elections on July 31, 2026.

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, August 5, to discuss the citizens' comments and questions regarding the proposed Home Rule Charter. The Government Study Commission will review the feedback received and continue its discussion of the proposed charter.

Public Comments

Ted Sherrock stated that he remembered when the City was controlled by “power brokers.” He thanked the Commissioners for their time, energy, and effort. He stated that he would urge residents to vote yes, noting that the Charter would allow the City to govern itself. Mr. Sherrock stated that, although English is designated as the official language, not all nationalities are complaining about the provision.

Hazleton Fire Chief Donald Leshko asked about the Public Safety Director position, including whether the position could be held by the Fire or Police Chief and whether both Chiefs would be considered essential employees. The questions were answered.

David Dominguez referenced Article 7, Taxpayer Protection, and requested confirmation that taxes cannot be increased by more than 7%, the budget must be balanced, and a majority plus one vote is required to make a change. It was confirmed that 4 votes are required.

Member Comments

Commissioner Mayor Joe Yannuzzi reminded everyone that voting will take place in November and encouraged residents not to make up their minds now, but to keep an open mind until November.

Commissioner/Councilman Tom Bruno reminded everyone that there is no perfect document and that amendments can still be made. He encouraged everyone to compare the proposed Charter with what is currently in place, stating that he believes in the proposed Charter.

PEL Consultants

PEL Consultants reminded the Commissioners that it is their responsibility to educate the public, develop an informational program, and present it to the citizens.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 6:48 PM by Zeller, seconded by Yannuzzi. The motion carries.

Next Meeting

The Hazleton Government Study Commission Public Hearing meeting will take place on Wednesday, August 5, 2026 at 5:00 PM, on the 2nd floor in Council Chambers.