



HAZLETON CITY GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSION

Understanding Hazleton's Proposed Home Rule Charter

July 15, 2026

What Is a Home Rule Charter?

Preamble

A Home Rule Charter is Hazleton's own local constitution. Once adopted, it lets the City govern itself under Pennsylvania law, rather than under the default state code written for every municipality.

“The people of Hazleton adopt this Charter to secure the fullest measure of local self-government, and to commit the City to ethical leadership and a government that serves the public interest.”

Fourteen articles follow, each covering one part of how the new city government would work.

- **Responsive**
Government that answers to residents; citizen petition
- **Accountable**
Clear lines of responsibility; modern city government structure.
- **Transparent**
Open budgets, open meetings
- **Fiscally Responsible**
Budget limits built into the Charter

Setting Up City Government

General Powers

I

Confirms Hazleton's authority to govern itself broadly under Pennsylvania home rule law, and directs the City to protect residential neighborhoods.

City Council

II

Five members, elected at large to staggered four-year terms, serve as the City's legislative body.

Mayor

III

One elected Chief Executive Officer responsible for day-to-day operations, prepares the budget, and appoints department directors.

ARTICLES IV – VI

Legal Counsel, Staff, and Lawmaking

Office of Law

IV

A City Solicitor, recommended for appointment by the Mayor with a majority vote by Council, serves as the City's independent legal advisor.

Appointed Officials

V

Professional directors run city departments based on qualifications and experience, not political affiliation.

Ordinances and Resolutions

VI

Major laws require two public readings, public notice, and a recorded vote before taking effect.

ARTICLES VII – IX

Budget, Contracts, and Audits

Budget and Finance

VII

Requires a balanced annual budget for all funds with an extended public review period, a multi-year capital plan, mid-year and monthly reporting, and caps General Fund tax revenue growth at 7% per year.

Contracts

VIII

Divides contract authority: the Mayor handles routine agreements, Council approves the larger or multi-year ones.

Independent Audits

IX

An outside certified public accountant audits all city finances every year. Council may engage special auditors.

ARTICLES X – XII

Citizen Voice and Oversight

Authorities, Boards, and Commissions

X

Resident volunteers, nominated by the Mayor and confirmed by Council, help run specific city programs.

Citizens' Petition and Referendum

XI

Residents can petition Council directly; take certain questions to the ballot for a public vote; repeal certain ordinances.

Accountability, Conduct, and Ethics

XII

All officials and employees remain subject to Pennsylvania's ethics law, with room for stronger local rules.

ARTICLES XIII – XIV

Filling In the Details

Administrative Code



The Mayor and Council must adopt a detailed operations code within 18 months of the Charter taking effect.

Transition



Manages the handover to the new government, protecting current employees and phasing in Council elections.

What Happens Next

Path to the November 2026 Referendum

AUG 4, 2026	Submit Charter Question	Study Commission submits the Final Report and ballot question to the Luzerne County Election Board.
SEPT - NOV 2026	Public Outreach	Community forums, presentations, and distribution of plain-language materials (English and Spanish).
SEPT 1, 2026	Last Day to Amend	Final deadline for the Study Commission to make changes to the Charter language.
NOV 3, 2026	Election Day	Hazleton voters decide whether to adopt the Home Rule Charter.
JAN 1, 2027	Charter Takes Effect	If approved, the new Charter government begins, with transition provisions phasing in through 2029.



Questions & Involvement

Your voice matters between now and November.

- Read the full Charter
- Attend a Study Commission meeting
- Submit a question or comment

Thank you.

The Charter by the Numbers

A quick-reference summary for residents

14

Charter articles

5

City Council seats

7%

Taxpayer Protection
Annual General Fund
tax revenue growth cap

Jan 1, 2027

Proposed effective date

Note: the 7% cap applies to General Fund tax revenue only — not fees, grants, or one-time revenue sources.



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