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Tempers flare in Windsor Residents attend Q&A session, vent frustrations

JULIE STROMBERG *For The York Dispatch*

MARKETPLACE



Last night's rain did not stop Windsor Township residents from attending an informational session about the home rule form of government.

"This is the largest group that I have spoken to in a long time," said Ken Johnson of the Governor's Center for Local Government Services.

Members of The Windsor Township Home Rule Committee, reacting to frustration over what they consider to be a rapid rate of development, submitted a petition in August. Voters will decide on Nov. 8 if a governmental study committee should be formed to investigate a possible switch to home rule.

The township's board of supervisors brought in Johnson to offer an objective presentation on the home rule form of government. According to its Web site, the goal of the Governor's Center for Local Government Services is to serve as the principal advocate for local governments throughout the state.

"All municipalities have weaknesses and strengths when it comes to government," Johnson said. "As of now, 70 are under home rule, including Philadelphia. Many others have considered it."

Johnson made it clear that because the municipal planning code -- which governs land use -- is a statewide law, changing to home rule will not alter the fact that municipalities cannot override the state.

Disagreement: Some residents are not convinced that switching to home rule is the best option. According to a document passed out to attendees by committee candidates John R. W. Stewart and H. Burnell Sprenkle, "home rule will provide no more citizen participation than our present form of government."

Others disagree.

Wendy Bryant-Bray, a member of the Windsor Township Home Rule Committee, said residents owe it to themselves to consider a change.

During the question-and-answer session after the presentation, emotions ran high on both sides. Instead of making inquiries regarding the intricacies of home rule, many residents used the forum to state their feelings. Some stated disappointment with the current supervisors, while others expressed the feeling that home rule allows for more resident participation. Other residents said they believed a change to home rule is not necessary.

Informational meeting: Johnson struggled to keep the session from becoming a war of words by reminding everyone of the purpose of the meeting -- to provide basic information and understanding of what home rule entails.

"My point is that the form of government might not be what's driving you," he said. "But you have to consider what is driving you to consider changing the current form of government."

In response to the widespread disagreement in the room, Johnson made one thing clear about home rule.

"If you think it is going to solve all your problems, it won't. It is not a panacea."

Nine residents have filed as candidates to serve on the seven-person home-rule committee. If the referendum passes and the seven committee members are selected, the group will have nine months to draft a charter. Voters in Windsor Township will then decide whether to adopt the home rule charter.

-- Reach Julie Stromberg at 854-1575 or news@yorkdispatch.com.

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