

Winnetka Report:

Published by the Council of the Village of Winnetka

March 2005



Home Rule Referendum

On Tuesday, April 5, Winnetka voters will be asked the following question:

**Shall the Village of Winnetka become a home rule unit pursuant to
Article VII, Section 6 of the Illinois Constitution?**

Because we believe that your vote should be an informed one, commonly asked questions about Home Rule are addressed below.

What is “Home Rule”?

Under the 1970 Illinois Constitution, Home Rule shifts decision-making from the State level (Springfield) to the local level (Winnetka) enabling communities to find local solutions to local problems, unless prohibited by the State.

Often Home Rule communities are exempted from complying with requirements mandated by State legislation.

By voting “Yes” on April 5, Winnetka would be able to make any decision pertaining to our Village government that is not prohibited by the Illinois Constitution, State law, or court decisions. Winnetkans, not legislators in Springfield, would decide what is right for our Village.

A “No” vote would mean that Winnetka would remain a non-Home Rule community. The State Legislature would continue to determine what the Village may and may not do. The powers granted by the State to non-Home Rule municipalities apply in a “one size fits all” manner without taking into account local issues.

Why is Winnetka considering Home Rule?

Home Rule would provide the Village with additional flexibility and local control over the character of our community. It would enhance the Village’s ability to maintain the integrity of its zoning ordinance and to diversify its revenue base, which could reduce dependency on property taxes.

Under Home Rule, Winnetka would be less vulnerable to the actions of the State Legislature and, therefore, more in control of its destiny.

How does a community become Home Rule?

Municipalities with populations over 25,000 are automatically granted Home Rule status, while smaller communities must have a referendum to let its voters decide if they want their community to attain Home Rule status. Among Illinois communities having Home Rule, more than half attained Home Rule status by voter approval of a Home Rule referendum, such as the one on the April 5 ballot.

What nearby communities are Home Rule?

Buffalo Grove	Highland Park	Lincolnwood	Park Ridge
Deerfield	Glenview	Mettawa	Skokie
Des Plaines	Lake Forest	Niles	Wheeling
Evanston	Lincolnshire	Northbrook	Wilmette

The latest neighboring municipality to adopt Home Rule status was **Lake Forest**, which approved a referendum on the November 2, 2004 ballot by a 60 percent majority of the voters.

Over 70 percent of Illinois’ 12.5 million citizens live in Home Rule communities.

What are the immediate benefits of Home Rule?

Home Rule would allow us to:

❖ **Protect our Property Values.**

Home Rule status would preserve the authority of Winnetka’s Zoning Ordinance, which has been eroded by the State in recent years. The Zoning Ordinance is the Village’s primary tool to protect and enhance property values. Home Rule status also strengthens the Village’s opposition to any attempt by the State to supersede our zoning laws.

❖ **Continue our tradition of being fiscally prudent.**

Home Rule provides the Village with increased financial flexibility to meet its financial needs and decrease its dependency on property taxes. It is important to note that **the Village only receives 14.6 percent of your total property tax bill, and property taxes account for less than one-third of all Village revenues.**

The Village does **NOT** need Home Rule powers to balance its budget since it could raise any needed funds by increasing utility rates and authorizing new fees.

The Village has a long tradition of being fiscally prudent. It has reduced its number of full time employees, reduced overtime expenses, and has **NOT** authorized any early retirement options. While there are no “caps” on utility rates, the Village’s electric rates are 10 percent less today than five years ago, and water rates have been increasing less than the rate of inflation.

❖ **Preserve and enhance our community’s character.**

Home Rule gives the Village additional tools to 1) control teardown contractors, thereby reducing their impact on neighborhoods, 2) revitalize the commercial districts, and 3) streamline zoning and building permit processes.

What are the potential disadvantages of Home Rule?

Home Rule gives local government greater discretion to generate revenues through issuing bonds and increasing taxes.

Home Rule permits greater control over local decision-making without the State Legislature’s oversight.

Will property taxes increase under Home Rule?

Based on the research of Professor James Banovetz, widely regarded as the foremost expert on Home Rule in Illinois, there is no evidence that Home Rule municipalities have higher or faster growing property taxes than comparable non-Home Rule municipalities. In fact, Home Rule status is often used to shift the tax burden from property taxes to other revenue sources and to non-residents, thereby diversifying the revenue base and reducing the burden on property owners.

If the Home Rule referendum is approved, does that mean the Village will adopt a real estate transfer tax?

No. A real estate transfer tax can only be enacted if voters approve it in a separate referendum in the future.

How does Home Rule affect School District 36, Park District, New Trier High School and Library District funding?

Home Rule for the Village has **NO** effect on the taxing ability of any of these separate governmental units.

Doesn't Home Rule give a lot of authority to a handful of people?

Home Rule gives Village Councils, as the elected representatives, additional authority to address local issues and problems. The Village's governance is designed to prevent the concentration of power in a handful of people and to assure that policy decisions reflect the wishes of Winnetkans.

Council members serve a two-year term with a long-established tradition of a two-term limit. If residents view the Village Council as not being fiscally prudent or responsive to the wishes of the community, they can easily vote to change the Council membership and leadership as **50 percent of the Council members are elected each and every year.**

Also, Winnetka has a long-standing tradition of resident involvement in local issues and Village Council responsiveness to resident input. This culture of community-based decision-making was recently exemplified by the decision to retain the elevators at the Elm Street train station instead of installing ramps.

Finally, the Illinois Constitution provides the ultimate safeguard against the possible abuse of Home Rule power by allowing voters to rescind Home Rule status through a referendum. No city has voted to rescind home rule status in the last 22 years.

If the Village becomes Home Rule, will it still be required to comply with the Freedom of Information Act and the Open Meetings Act?

Yes. These laws apply to Home Rule municipalities.

Where can I get more information about Home Rule?

Saturday Morning Home Rule Forums at Village Hall

Residents are invited to discuss all aspects of Home Rule with Village officials during any of two sessions to be held Saturday mornings in March and the first Saturday morning in April. These forums will be held at Village Hall, 510 Green Bay Road, and will have the following one hour format:

10:00 - 10:25 a.m.	Home Rule PowerPoint Presentation
10:25 - 11:00 a.m.	Discussion and Questions
11:00 - 11:25 a.m.	Home Rule PowerPoint Presentation
11:25 - 12:00 noon	Discussion and Questions

Saturday Morning Dates: March 19, 26, and April 2.

Also, the Village’s web site, www.villageofwinnetka.org, has a comprehensive collection of Home Rule information, or you can enter “Home Rule Illinois” in any Internet search engine to obtain additional information about Home Rule.

VILLAGE TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Manager/Finance Offices	847-501-6000	Police/Fire/Paramedics Emergency...911
Public Works Office	847-716-3568	Police (Non-Emergency)
Water & Electric Office.....	847-716-3558	Fire (Non-Emergency)
Electric & Water Billing Services	847-446-9550	Electric or Water Outages
Community Development Department.....	847-716-3576	Refuse & Recycling Collection

Village Web Page: www.villageofwinnetka.org

Council Meetings are held on the first and third Tuesday of the month in the Winnetka Village Hall Council Chamber, beginning at 7:30 p.m.
Complete Council Meeting Agenda packets are available at the Winnetka Public Library Reference Desk and on the Village Web Page

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