

A very important election for the residents of West Deer is coming up on May 15th from 7:00am to 8:00pm. The reason this election is so important is that it contains three referendum questions that could possibly change two articles of the governing document of the Township: the Township Home Rule Charter.

Allegheny County frames the questions for the ballots, and the Board of Supervisors, the Home Rule Charter Commission, and the Township Manager are concerned that the questions could easily confuse voters. Question #3 is fairly straight-forward, but the first Questions #1 and #2 can be quite confusing. This article is therefore intended to simplify the questions so that you are properly informed – and understand the questions and what they mean – before going to the polls.

How is everything right now, without these questions being passed?

- The first two questions address the number of Township supervisors, and where they would come from within the Township. The Township currently has seven supervisors elected from anywhere in the Township, known as “at-large” candidates. They can live all across the Township, or they could live on the same exact street. At-large means from anywhere.
- The third question addresses the operation and procedure of the Board of Supervisors. The Charter was drafted in 1974. The internet, websites, email, etc. was not around then, so the Charter currently requires “written” communication (letters) and hard copies of agendas, minutes, etc. to be available for inspection. It also requires residents to bring a signed petition of 200 residents in order to have their concern heard by the Board of Supervisors.

Question #1

What you will see on the ballot

**WEST DEER TOWNSHIP
PROPOSED HOME RULE CHARTER AMENDMENT
SPECIAL ELECTION QUESTION #1**

Shall Article III of the West Deer Township Home Rule Charter be amended to reduce the number of Township Supervisors from seven to five members, and to establish four representative districts with one at-large position, effective the first day of January 2020, as more fully described in West Deer Ordinance No. 419?

What the question means in normal language

Do you want the number of supervisors reduced from seven members to five members, and do you want four equal districts created in the Township so that only people from that district can vote for that district’s candidates – while still being able to elect one at-large supervisor from anywhere in the Township – so that you are guaranteed representation where you live?

What are the “pros” of voting for this question?

- Less supervisors could mean less battling and more efficient action in the Township
- It is easier to find five candidates than seven, and the standard number of supervisors in townships state-wide is either three or five members
- Each area of the Township has a district with its own supervisor that must live in that district, which would ensure the residents of that district always have a voice
- Smaller districts would encourage some people to run that otherwise would not run for office (i.e., “Why should I run? We all know the people from Anytown always win.”)
- The fifth supervisor, who is at-large, could still be an impartial vote for the interests of the Township as a whole
- Other successful municipalities have a similar mix of district and at-large representatives

What are the “cons” of voting for this question?

- We are used to seven supervisors and at-large representation, and have done it that way for decades
- Seven supervisors could mean more positive discussion, too
- If no one from the almost 3,000 residents in each district decides not to run, it could leave a vacant position that would have to be filled by an appointment process.
- Two good candidates could be from one district, meaning one would have to lose (unless they also ran for the at-large position)

Question #2

What you will see on the ballot

**WEST DEER TOWNSHIP
PROPOSED HOME RULE CHARTER AMENDMENT
SPECIAL ELECTION QUESTION #2**

Shall Article III of the West Deer Township Home Rule Charter be amended to reduce the number of at-large Township Supervisors from seven to five members, effective the first day of January 2020, as more fully described in West Deer Ordinance No. 419?

What the question means in normal language

Do you want the number of supervisors reduced from seven members to five members, but still be able to vote for those five members no matter where they live in the Township?

What are the “pros” of voting for this question?

- Less supervisors could mean less battling and more efficient action in the Township
- It is easier to find five candidates than seven, and the standard number of supervisors in townships state-wide is either three or five members

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Rule Ballot Questions Explained



- We are used to at-large representation, so people understand it
- The likelihood of not getting enough candidates to run is diminished

What are the “cons” of voting for this question?

- We are used to seven supervisors and have done it that way for decades
- Seven supervisors could mean more positive discussion, too
- With at-large seats comes the possibility that a majority of supervisors will come from one specific geographic area in the Township at the expense of other areas
- Decreases candidate interest and participation.

Question #3

What you will see on the ballot

**WEST DEER TOWNSHIP
PROPOSED HOME RULE CHARTER AMENDMENT
SPECIAL ELECTION QUESTION #3**

Shall Article IV of the West Deer Township Home Rule Charter be amended to allow for modern forms of electronic communication and public participation, as more fully described in West Deer Ordinance No. 421?

What the question means in normal language

Are you okay with:

- The Board of Supervisors calling special meetings by a using something that can be verified (emails, letters, etc.) instead of limiting it to written requests only?
- Minutes, agendas, etc. being posted electronically (on our website, etc.) in addition to being able to be viewed in the Township office?
- No votes taking place during business meetings without the public being notified first?
- Removing the requirement that residents get a petition with 200 signatures to be heard by the Board, and formally replacing it with the practice we have been using of just having residents call the office to be registered to speak?

What are the “pros” of voting for this question?

- Supervisors can request a special meeting via email, text, etc. instead of only by a written letter, which will save time and still hold the supervisors accountable
- Residents can view minutes, agendas, etc. any time of the day or night at their own convenience instead of being limited to making a trip to the Township Building only during business hours
- Board members can discuss matters that come up unexpectedly, but cannot vote on those issues without the public being given a chance to offer input first
- Residents can be heard by the Board simply by making a phone call instead of having to go door-to-door to collect 200 signatures

- The Charter becomes more “future proof” if technology changes even more

What are the “cons” of voting for this question?

- There are none. This question simply enhances transparency and removes obstacles that keep our residents from having their voices heard.

Some questions folks may have (even after reading this article)

What if I want to keep the current system of having seven supervisors being elected at large?

If you want to keep things as they have been, simply vote “No” to questions #1 and #2. This is important. If you do not want things to change, you have to vote “No” to both questions.

What is the difference between Questions #1 and #2 again?

Again, these questions can be misleading. The way the County has Question #2 printed makes it sound like you are voting on the same exact thing you did in Question #1: the reduction of supervisors from seven to five. However, as shown above, the first question is a reduction with the creation of districts, and the second question is a reduction while keeping the at-large system in place (no districts). That is the difference.

What if both Questions #1 and #2 pass?

If both questions pass, the question with the most number of “Yes” votes wins. So if you like the idea of having five supervisors instead of seven, choose the question with the representation method you prefer. If you have no preference, and only want the reduction, you are free to vote “Yes” to both.

What district would I be in if the district option passes?

Districts are only created after the Township voters pass the referendum, so there is no way to know that now. However, the districts are objectively created by County and State laws/agencies, and are based on the number of registered voters in each area. They will therefore be equal, and will be somewhat similar to our current voting districts.

What if I have more questions, or if I don’t understand this?

Please go to the Township website at www.westdeertownship.com. There will be a link to the complete ordinances themselves there, and the old Charter is able to be viewed there as well.

We want you, the resident, to be informed and to be comfortable when you walk in to vote in May. Information will be available at the election sites, as well, but our website has the detailed information you need before then.

And, as always, please feel free to contact Township Manager Daniel Mator at 724.265.3680 or via email at dmator@westdeer-township.com. He and the staff are ready to answer any questions you may have.