

Reporter

Keep Home Rule In Downers Grove

Cut to the chase.

That phrase means jettisoning all the clutter that surrounds a given issue or situation and focusing instead on the core elements. The torrid debate over the future of home rule in Downers Grove is the poster child for clutter, so cutting to the chase here is much easier said than done.

But we'll give it a shot. In essence, Downers Grove residents would be foolish to rescind home rule through a referendum on the March 21 ballot. A succession of village officials elected since 1970, when a revised Illinois Constitution automatically granted home rule to every municipality with more than 25,000 residents, has made effective use of the broader self-government initiative.

Even the harshest critics of the current mayor and Village Council, when asked directly to identify a single instance of direct abuse of home rule powers, cannot comply.

Instead, proponents of repeal point to a demand they made before the Village Council last May for creating the home rule "crisis" that now exists. This small group of residents, elected by and accountable to no one, wanted the Village Council to secure permission from voters before taking on any project or contract valued at \$1 million or more.

If denied, group members said, they would renew their once-failed effort to put home rule repeal on the ballot -- and they were true to their word.

That's when the clutter started showing up. Above all else, proponents of repeal seem bent on punishing the Village Council and mayor for not going along with their idea of having a referendum for any project over \$1 million. If that punishment includes relinquishing a privilege that has benefited residents for more than three decades, that is a payable price to them. In taking a populist approach by stressing the power of the ballot box for positive change, those who back repeal are cynically looking for high-minded cover to mask their apparent intention: knocking the current office-holders down a peg for indifference to their cause.

The irony is the fact that the ballot box offers a prime opportunity to inflict stiff punishment on elected representatives -- voting them out of office.

In our view, no sound basis exists to strip Downers Grove municipal government of home rule authority. No DuPage County community has done so since 1981. The issue would not have come up now, absent a political vendetta doggedly pursued by a tiny fraction of the village's population.

We are not thrilled with every action taken by the current mayor and Village Council -- but dumping home rule does nothing to brighten the future of Downers Grove and in fact, does just the opposite.

We urge residents to vote no on the home rule referendum question.