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Clarendon Hills Group Takes Up Anti-Home-Rule Cause

Citizens for Clarendon Hills has says the village is using home rule as a "panacea" to avoid difficult fiscal decisions going forward.

By [Joe O'Donnell](#) | [Email the author](#) | January 16, 2012

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Behind a positive research committee, an established referendum, and an informational community meeting, the [Village of Clarendon Hills](#) made clear throughout 2011 its case for home rule.

As 2012 starts, the case against home rule is being made.

On Jan. 9, Citizens for Clarendon Hills circulated a press release outlining the group's anti-home-rule stance. In the release, the newly established organization said home rule is the wrong choice because the village's budget is in decent shape currently and can be maintained with "relatively minor budget changes." Citizens for Clarendon Hills writes that it worries about the village's ability to impose new taxes if home rule is attained with a positive referendum vote on the March 20 primary ballot.

"It's just a group of residents that come from throughout the community and we share this common interest in protecting the future of the village," said Jan Cummings, spokesperson for Citizens for Clarendon Hills. "The village has come to us with this request and it seems like the sky isn't falling at this point, so maybe it's something that we should take a better look at."

Citizens for Clarendon Hills, according to [its website](#), aims to establish tax accountability and prevent government expansion and abuse of power.

"We favor lower taxes, less regulation and smart growth," the website's Who We Are page reads. "We support progressive development tailored to secure the longevity of the Village while preserving its history and sense of community."

Cummings, a Clarendon Hills resident of 42 years who works as a librarian at Notre Dame Parish School and once was the president of the Clarendon Hills Historical Society and village columnist for The Doings, said she trusts Village President Tom Karaba and the current Village Board, but she does not want to see residents lose their right to vote on tax increases via referendum going forward.

"It's not the current Village Board that scares me, it's what could happen in the future," Cummings said. "Once home rule is established, it's very difficult to unravel that and go back to what we already have, which has worked well for 88 years."

Karaba said he expected anti-home-rule groups to surface and has visited the Citizens for Clarendon Hills website. The village president said he doesn't agree with the group's approach to the home rule issue as being solely about tax increases. It's about more than that, he said.

"This referendum is really about whether or not the citizens of Clarendon Hills want to have as much freedom as possible under the Illinois Constitution to govern itself free of the dictates of the Illinois General Assembly," Karaba said.

In October, after village trustees voted unanimously to place the home rule referendum on the March ballot, village staff outlined what the additional powers provided by home rule could be used for in Clarendon Hills at [a community meeting at Prospect School](#).

Village manager Randy Recklaus at the meeting said it will become more and more difficult to maintain adequate fund balances going forward because of increasing costs that are out of the village's control, such as unfunded state mandates, increasing pension obligations, and increasing employee health-benefits expenditures.

Recklaus and his staff said under home rule, the village could do away with the numerous Special Service Areas (SSA) that currently fund infrastructure improvements and replace them with a capital improvements tax that would likely raise the village's portion of a resident's property tax bill by 13 cents per \$100 of their home's Equalized Assessed Valuation (EAV).

The village said a one-percent sales tax increase and a demolition tax—Lake Forest and Evanston have \$10,000 demolition taxes for residential properties—are other revenue-raisers it would explore.

The village's case was reiterated in [a recent press release that announced two more community meetings Jan. 18 and Feb. 15](#).

"If the Village Board does not obtain home rule status, it would likely seek more drastic service and infrastructure maintenance reductions, as well as greater cost sharing with property owners via the SSA property tax program," the release reads. "Home rule offers revenue options beyond property tax increases, which would allow the Village to seek a lower property tax increase in the future than would otherwise be the case."

Karaba said home rule would not hinder transparency, as every revenue-raising measure would have to be publicly discussed and voted on by trustees.

"If we obtain home rule authority, we are going to have even more accountability because it's going to be very, very difficult for this board or any future board to look at revenue enhancement opportunities ... without the public really having an opportunity to look into why the board needs to consider those changes," Karaba said.

According to the Citizens for Clarendon Hills release, though, the village is using home rule as "a panacea to avoid making sometimes difficult, yet necessary budgetary decisions to maintain the Village's strong financial position."

Citizens for Clarendon Hills is so new, Cummings said, it's hard to give a number of supporters beyond the eight-person steering committee. The goal going forward will be to attract a bigger audience.

"We want to educate people as to what home rule is and we want people to vote against it," Cummings said.

That doesn't mean, however, that the group thinks the village is seeking home rule for the wrong reasons.

"[Clarendon Hill] is a little town that has a whole lot of people rooting for it; we just happen to differ on which way to go," Cummings said.

Citizens for Clarendon Hills representatives have been at the downtown Metra station and gone door-to-door to hand out flyers explaining its stance and plans to host an event in the future, though details have not been finalized. The group held a kickoff fundraising event Jan. 7 at a Clarendon Hills residence.

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Tom Wich

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Voice of Clarendon Hills <https://sites.google.com/site/vochbd/>

is another group that has formed to oppose home rule. We feel it is a reckless proposal, which will allow them to raise taxes and fees without a referendum. These are tough economic times and they shouldn't be use to increase taxes. We urge everyone to vote no on home rule 20 March and force them to control the increasing wages, benefits, and pensions.

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Mary

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Home Rule is only one tool that can be used to protect the future of Clarendon Hills. Consolidating services and continuing to cut the budget will be important elements in the financial discussions. As for "tax accountability" the budget process and budget is all transparent and available to review year round. The budget process is at least a six month project starting first with the finance officer and department heads. Then the budget goes to the Finance committee and finally goes to the whole board in a six hour budget workshop. The public is invited to this workshop as well, although no one has bothered to show up.

The arguement that the "sky isn't falling yet" is true but goes to the Leadership theory that it is better to be pro-active than re-active. If anything,

putting Home Rule on the ballot has made for a great debate about our community and the desire to protect what we value.

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[John Jasper](#)

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10:34 am on Tuesday, January 17, 2012

The CH Board of Trustees stated purpose for Home Rule is to be freed of the tax caps established by the State of Illinois. The justification is based on a projected revenue shortfall leading to a financial crisis and impending doom. It's interesting to note that the projection was by the city employees and not a reputable outside firm. In my opinion, it's a "Chicken Little" argument without proper justification or substantiation. I believe Home Rule passage is the issuance of a blank check to be filled out in a fashion somewhat akin to the "Easy Button" as seen on the TV ad. Passage will allow growth in government departments (easy, no problem we will just increase taxes), enhancement of salaries and pensions (easy, no problem we will just increase taxes), implementation of projects via bond issuance (easy, no problem we will just increase taxes) and other financial burdens (easy,...). The board states all proposals and issues will be openly discussed in public meetings. The board doesn't state that, with Home Rule, they are not bound by public opinion and can do as they see fit. The Board states that if we are dissatisfied we can vote them out of office. This action, of course, is well after the fact and after the damage, often irreversible, has been done. I am against Home Rule because I don't want to give up my right to vote, via referendum, on any future issue. I urge everyone to vote against Home Rule.

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