

News | updated: 12/27/2016 1:16 PM

Batavia group seeks vote to remove home rule



The Batavia Government Center. Some Batavia residents want a referendum on whether the city should retain its home-rule status.

John Starks | Staff Photographer, February 2015



Susan Sarkauskas

Should Batavia retain its home-rule status, along with the powers that come along with that?

Some residents think voters should decide, and are trying to get a referendum on the April 4 ballot.

[Batavians for Responsible Government](#)

(<https://b4rg.org/2016/12/15/referendum-to-remove-home-rule/>) is asking for a binding vote on the question, "Shall the City of Batavia cease to be a home-rule unit?"

Its website says it needs 1,200 signatures to get the referendum on the ballot. It is asking people to solicit signatures, and turn the petition sheets to BRG founder Sylvia Keppel by Dec. 31. The sheets are available at b4rg.org.

The group has until Jan. 3 to submit the petition to the city clerk.

Keppel frequently attends city council and Batavia school board meetings, commenting, often critically, on financial matters.

She started the petition drive about a week ago.

Removing home rule would "give citizens more control over their government," she said. Home rule gives "too much power to the government and not enough to the people," she said.

Batavia gained home-rule authority automatically in 2009, when its population passed 25,000.

Home-rule status gives municipalities more powers to regulate, license, tax and borrow without seeking voters' approval. For example, home-rule municipalities are not subject to the state's property-tax increase limit law.

Batavia has used its home-rule powers to tax gasoline sales. That tax is due to increase a penny a gallon, to 3 cents, in February.

It was also able to put a 2 percent tax on the sale of alcoholic beverages. And it increased the city's sales tax, directing the money to the city's electrical utility fund. Starting in July, however, that money will be put in the general fund.

The city is also talking about creating a stormwater utility and charging a fee to fund it. A non-home-rule town would have to get a state law passed to charge such a fee, according to the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

Since 2010, the property tax levy has gone from \$6.1 million to as high as \$6.7 million in 2012, then down, ending at \$6.36 million in 2016, according to levy reports from the Kane County clerk.

The jump in 2012 was about 7.3 percent. At the time, cities without home rule were limited to increases of no more than 1.5 percent over the previous year's levy, except for amounts brought in by new property that entered the tax rolls.



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