

Minutes
City of Bradford Government Study Commission (GSC)
Monday, January 19, 2026 @ 4:00pm
Meeting Location

- Pledge of Allegiance
- Call to Order
- Minutes approved from December 22 , 2026 meeting
- Motion to accept by James Tingley, seconded by Lyle Stewart

James Evans addressed Ben Kafferlin from Kafferlin Strategies with introductions of the Committee Members.

Kafferlin Strategies: Ben Kafferlin gave his opening statement to the committee: I was a 2-term county commissioner over in Warren County and my partner Lisa who was at the time of my county administrator and I decided to break away a couple years ago I didn't run for reelection and really it was because both of us had this deep seated desire to see small town communities flourish and so we started this management consulting company I guess they should say the company's been older than that but we revived the company to speak solely to the heart of developing operational excellence in small local governments in Pennsylvania because we want to see those small town communities thrive

Member Evans: The GSC members introduced themselves to Ben Kafferlin-Kafferlin Strategies, and his associates. Ben then introduced his team as follows:

Nicole Hemninger-Sr. Consultant, From Blair County, “ I'm Clearfield County girl, I was chief clerk and county administrator for Blair County for 4 1/2 years and for that the assistant county administrator, so I have a lot of county experience. I'm excited for the projects that we're doing but I'm most proud of our company because most of our employees have sat in one of your seats whether they were council folks or whether they were secretary treasurers, managers, that sort of thing so I bring that management to the table.”

Chelsea Puff-Sr. Consultant, (attended via Teams) “I'm Center County, I love central PA and I especially love local governments and helping them to thrive. My background is in planning and community engagement, so we make our way through this scope of work and hopefully through this project with you. You'll see that influence in our communication with everyone and with you. With your community, city staff, we want everyone to have a very clear understanding of what home rule is what this process looks like and how it could benefit your community.”

Ben Kafferlin-“at Kafferlin Strategies we have a big team of people that help with the management and the consulting side. Chelsea and I introduced ourselves we've also got a couple of other people that would be involved in this project including Seth Higgins who's an MPA and he's he was the chief clerk in Elk County and was on Saint Mary's council for a few years and Jason who is the manager in Greenville which is a Home Rule community so he's intricately involved in in all of the intricacies of the day-to-day operations. One thing I want to highlight here is that most of us are actually from Warren County so kind of right nearby and almost all of us have management experience in city governments of either optional plan, charters or home rule communities. So, while our team has not actually set up a home rule charter, but Debbie has done many, but what we have done, we've sat in Eric seat and like lived the other side of it. I think the two together are going to be a very nice pairing.

Debbie Grass-owner at Grass Root Solutions. “I have a passion for local government, I especially love working with third class cities, from my perspective are the most complex and have the most layers and more challenges may be done than some of the others. I do have some experience with writing home rule charters, amending home rule charters. I worked with the city of New Castle which happens to be my hometown, and we worked with them to write a charter which was ultimately approved. The next step to be taken is to pull together the administrative code and sometimes updating employee manuals to actually match everything that's approved. I think home rule is the way to go for Third Class Cities. I think that it gives ultimately the residents and the councils and the community the ability to design something that works for everyone, and it can be customized to provide the greatest flexibility and the best environment for local government. I have worked in local government, as a City Manager, and also worked with DCED. I had the pleasure of working with the wonderful staff at the Pennsylvania Community Economic Development Governors Center for a few years again I've worked with the City of Johnstown, we've written the charter for Beaver Falls. We just recently amended the charter for the city of Farrell, and they had three questions on the ballots at all times with her and working with them then to update the charter and also their administrative code so pleased to be here happy to do this work again have a passion for local government and our customers so funding to answer any questions at all about the process.”

Ben Kafferlin – “I think as I've already kind of jumped to think that we're a great team to do this for you especially because of our proximity care for local government experience in managing similar sized cities between and of experience with the home rule charter. The procedures which can be very complex, and you don't want to mess it up so together I think we could really be fantastic team for you.” He asked the committee if they had any questions.

Question and answer portion:

Member Roy Pedersen: “when you say, “public selling” does that mean everyone, as in the whole community?”

Answer: Deb Grass: Part of what we have you do is to shape their message that they want to deliver to the communities. Often times we've gone with the Commission to do some public meetings that have been set up so that if there are questions, we can help answer them. Often times on the website we'll post questions and the questions and answers so that people know exactly what the charter contains. One of the things that has to be done before the charter can be put on the ballot is what's called a "final report", we have the commissions draft that report to really highlight those things in the charter that are most important and that you want residents to know. We've put together marketing pieces that were distributed and they totally assisted the Commission. It is necessary to make sure that everybody in the community at least understands what's contained in the charter and whether or not they're supportive of it.

Member Jim Tingley: "As a consulting firm, if we go through the process, in other words, if we come up with a vote that says, yes, we're going to explore this and put a charter together, that when you folks come into the picture, but that process doesn't start until we as a group are have a consensus that we want to move forward. Is that your understanding?" (asking fellow committee members) They all agreed. "Okay, we keep the conversation going, as if this is a done deal but it is not, we are going to do our due diligence To make sure it's the right thing to do, if we decide that as a group then we will move forward.

Answer: Teri Cunkle: "They're going to commit and help you and give you all the options, they will take a non-biased position, to walk you through that part of it as well too. They're not going to shove everything down your throat, they will help you pull your reports together and they're going to help you evaluate everything.

Chelsea Puff: "If you look at the timeline, (Slide #17) it shows that decision point on the project, but it'll give you a feel for kind of what happens before we reach that decision point, that intersection or crossroad and then what happens afterwards. So in this initial part we're just giving you information, education , doing interviews and helping you see that there are alternatives for you. We're going to explore all sorts of options for you and with you something for you then there are steps we would go through and then goes out to the community, to make sure they understand it to be approved. As Debbie had mentioned then you know we helped to start cracking the administrative code and all of the pieces that you need after the charter passes so it is sort of a multi layered process that can be resurrected it various points and that first decision point is after you receive all of that education do the interviews and feel really informed about the best path forward for your community.

Ben Kafferlin: Highlight your concern there that you're pushing you to home rule charter yeah and I will say that it will probably feel like that because we're essentially giving you the alternative to the status quo and so how would you know your status quo is. We are going to kind of play devil's advocate. For home rule charter so that you have something to compare it to. It

will probably feel like we're supportive of it and generally we are, because for the communities we think it is better.

Member Stewart: Then you mentioned something about prosperity, that's why we're all here. How are you going to help us, and help this community prosper?

Answer: Ben Kafferlin: The home rule charter first of all allows you a lot more flexibility and how you structure your government and as a part of that. We wanna talk to you about prioritization most of the communities we go into just kind of pass their budgets and keep with their current form of government without changing it a whole lot year over year incremental increases here and there, but we would like to propose as a fundamental discussion about what the priorities are in this community. The kind of conversation I think we want to have with you is how do you get to a place of prosperity of human flourishing maybe the words that I used and matching your form of government and ultimately probably the powers and authorities and budgeting that goes with that.

Committee Member Martin: Once a community decides to go down this road to put home rule on the ballot what's the batting average how many times does it get voted in?

Answer: Terri Cunkle: When we did the public presentations, one of the things that we noted was you compare apples to apples, so when you look at their class cities, there are 52 third class cities and out of those 52, 27 of them are home rule. So, when you look at that you know you've got half of your third-class cities have transitioned into home rule. When you're looking at an average I have to say that that goes with the Commission themselves on the success first of all it's up to the Commission once they decide to go out and do the public education. Education is so important, Unless you really work in government you really don't know what's going on because there's so many wheels and so many laws that you have to follow. I would say that probably 3 out of four are successful.

Member Evans: As Terri transitions out of her role in working with us and if we move forward with you, who would be meeting with us? Would we be meeting with the same person? How many of those would be in person versus via zoom?

Answer: Ben Kafferlin: So, you have two meetings a month, we're guaranteeing that almost always I would be here and Debbie, Jason, and Chelsea would all be available on computer but certainly I would be in the same point of contact that all the things would flow through, and I would get them to the right person. We also have a wide network of a legal team we work with as well.

Member Salerno: I believe you all said that you all sat in a position whether it was City Council, county, or city manager, but has anybody actually sat through the process of transitioning to home rule and experiencing a Commission coming to them as the city administrator?

Answer: Chelsea Puff: Yes, Jason has.

That portion of interview with Kafferlin is over and continued to the rest of the meeting.

Dates were selected with Warren, St. Marys and Franklin interviews.

Warren- Feb 9th @7pm,
Feb 23rd @ 5pm
Feb 26th @7pm

St. Marys-Feb 23rd @ 3:30pm
Feb 26th @ 5pm

Franklin-Feb 23rd or 26th (whatever St. Marys don't take) or Feb 26th @ 3:30pm

- Budget/Finance Committee, Procedural Committee: was waiting until after the Kafferlin presentation.
- **Member Jim Tingley** stated that there is a Facebook page called Bradford GSC. Questions can be asked by the public, and the committee can make posts. It will be monitored closely.
- **Public Comments:** Mr. Jim Goridano-Like to make any comments Mr. Giordano hi totally open to either way this could go listening to that gentleman with his proposal it sounds like you're already going to write the home rule I think that's a bad decision by his own words he would probably go home.

Member Evans: Right now, we remain open-minded and remember the decision to as to whether we proceed or not is up to the seven people sitting up front and if indeed we don't go with home rule it ends pretty quickly. If we do then a charter is written and then it's up to the voters of the city of Bradford to determine if we go on that route or not. We're going to be very open-minded, and I appreciate you bringing that up Mr. Giordano, thank you."

Member Kloss: We might not be able to answer this but what is your concern do you have any particular questions that we can try to answer?

Mr. Giordano: There's so much misinformation as we all know and I came here to try to learn and make an intelligent decision which I'm hoping for and sound like all you are.

The committee urged Mr. Giordano to come back.

Meeting adjourned at 4:57 pm, on a motion by Jim Tingley seconded by Tom Shay.

Next Regular Meeting, Monday February 2, 2026 @ 4:00pm