

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

Pottstown is a great place for seniors

This year's most positive development may be Pottstown Council's unanimous vote to support a proposed senior housing project on the site of the former Lincoln Underwear Factory on South Evans Street near the Schuylkill River.

If the Maryland-based Pirhl development group is able to obtain tax credits from the state, it will build a 50- to 60-unit apartment building for low- to moderate-income seniors.

The \$11 million building, to be owned and operated by Pirhl, will generate \$60,000 or more in local real estate taxes. In addition, Pirhl has agreed to pay Pottstown Borough the appraised value for the lot — \$470,000 for 1.5 acres.

As a member of the Pottstown School Board, I heartily endorse projects that generate tax revenue without bringing any more children into the district. Depending on how you figure it, each student costs our district from \$11,000 to \$17,000 annually to educate.

That's why Manatawny Village, the 55-and-older housing development off Manatawny Street, is so helpful to Pottstown's bottom line. Manatawny Village has added millions of dollars to our tax base in recent years without adding any more students to our schools.

Another advantage: Senior housing projects are virtually crime-free.

Regardless of income levels, we don't have to worry about muggings, house-breakings, or gangs of seniors hanging out on street corners getting into trouble.

Low- and moderate-income seniors don't create a burden for Pottstown taxpayers. They receive Social Security — modest but reliable income — and Medicare benefits from the federal government.

Seniors are more likely than younger people to patronize the Pottstown Memorial Medical Center, which is Pottstown's biggest employer and pays more real estate taxes than any other entity in the borough.

Because many low- and moderate-income seniors don't have cars, they are also more likely to walk downtown and patronize our stores.

For example, my mother lived in an apartment next door to us for the last five years of her life, dying at 92. Her income consisted of \$12,000 from Social Security and a \$3,000 pension from the Red Cross.

When we fixed up her apartment, we bought our paint, tiles, and carpet from Rich Ranieri and a sofa from Lastick's.

She bought all her groceries and prescription medicines in Pottstown. She attended church here. Even her foot doctor and hairdresser were downtown, and she could

walk to her appointments.

In her last year of life, when she had a number of medical emergencies, we appreciated the fast and highly professional service from Goodwill Ambulance.

Along with a walkable downtown — with stores, restaurants, churches, a greenway and a fine library — Pottstown's top-notch medical facilities are a major attraction to retirees, which is the fastest growing segment of our society.

About a third of America's population is over 50, accounting for half the nation's disposable income. As couples age, they look to downsize their housing and move places where they can walk to some of their destinations.

Because of their attractions for the elderly, towns like Pottstown are now known as "naturally occurring retirement communities." It's a trend we should encourage.

The concern that there might be a better use for the Lincoln Underwear tract is misplaced.

Conshohocken enjoys the most successful riverfront development in Montgomery County. And it all started in 1982 with a \$2 million, 40-unit brick housing complex for low- and moderate-income residents.

Senior housing can work for us.



Commentary by
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Summary

- **Thanks to its walkable downtown, greenway, and top-notch medical facilities, Pottstown is a "naturally occurring retirement community."**
- **Seniors are "crime-free." They don't have children to be schooled, and even low-income seniors can rely on Social Security. They are a good fit for Pottstown.**