

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## York to Pottstown: No panaceas

Before he ran for governor, Tom Wolf worked diligently for years to help revitalize the city of York. Like Pottstown, York was once an industrial powerhouse but has declined over the last 50 years.

York has the same land area as Pottstown but twice as many residents, of whom many are poor.

Unlike Pottstown, York has a number of millionaires like Tom Wolf who have leveraged tens of millions of public and private dollars for economic development to revitalize the city (a few projects are described below).

### Massive layoffs

Despite these efforts, and facing a \$7 million budget deficit in 2015, York Mayor C. Kim Bracey last month announced plans to lay off 46 of 104 police officers and eight firefighters. Twenty-four other city positions will be eliminated.

### Schools in trouble

The City of York School District is also in deep trouble. Because of financial and academic woes, the state secretary of education appointed in 2012 a Recovery Officer to restore financial stability to the district and improve its academic performance.

Last month, the Recovery Officer recommended that the school board appoint a private charter school operator to take over all of York's public schools, a first in Pennsylvania. The board tabled the motion until later this month.

### No lack of effort

For years, York has benefited from a cadre of wealthy businessmen who have invested millions in city revitalization projects.

For example, York boasts a preserved 11-story hotel built in the roaring twenties with two restaurants and a fabulous ballroom.

It has not one but two thriving farmers' markets

downtown in historic buildings.

It has the Strand-Capitol Performing Arts Center, which encompasses two historic theaters.

It has the 236,000 square foot Susquehanna Commerce Center, built a decade ago on a 7-acre brownfield site.

It has a new minor league baseball stadium downtown next to a 9-acre redevelopment zone with millions of dollars invested for retail, office, and residential space.

In addition, numerous factory and warehouse buildings in other areas of the city have been converted into offices, condos, and apartments in recent years, with \$75 million invested in 2012 alone.

### Structural deficit

With all this effort, how can York be in such deep financial trouble? As Mayor Bracey has written, the city is burdened (like Pottstown) with a high percentage of tax exempt properties, a lack of developable land, and above all, spiraling pension and health care costs for its employees.

### No panaceas

York can't develop its way out of its fiscal problems, and neither can Pottstown. There are no panaceas. Only long range thinking and strict financial discipline can prevent Pottstown from inevitably facing budget crises like York's.



Commentary by  
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York City may lay off nearly half its police force in January because of budget woes. Above, York's 2014 Officer of the Year. (York Daily Record)