

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Getting a handle on rentals

In Tuesday's column, we pointed out that because of its compact form that mixes homes, stores, and businesses within walking and biking distance, Pottstown is the most sustainable municipality in the region.

But at present, we don't have enough productive families and businesses to make our town thrive.

There's a prevalent line of thought that Pottstown's woes are largely because of its high number of rental properties, especially Section 8 subsidized rentals.

We would suggest the problem is not just rentals, per se, but the very low housing prices in Pottstown, which attract a disproportionate number of poor people.

Because federal policy caps the rent it will pay for a voucher, most Section 8 renters locate in low/moderate income areas. There are about 2,500 vouchers countywide, and Norristown has by far the most recipients, about 1,000.

Pottstown comes in second with about 450. With 17 percent of the voucher recipients in Montgomery County and just 3 percent of the county's population, Pottstown has a disproportionate share of vouchers.

On the other hand, less than 10 percent of the borough's renters have Section 8 vouchers.

Thorough inventory

We know this because at long last, the borough has completed a thorough inventory of all the housing in Pottstown. And using a consultant,

it has attempted to calculate the cost of rentals versus homeownership in terms of police, fire, codes and public works services per housing unit.

Detached rental most expensive

The most expensive unit to service is a single family detached rental unit, about two and half times the cost of an owner-occupied home.

Multi-unit least expensive

But surprisingly, the least expensive residential unit to service is not an owner-occupied house, but one in an apartment complex of five units or more. Each of those units costs less than half as much to service as an owner-occupied home.

Systematic inspections

What's most important is the borough now has a handle on all the housing properties in Pottstown and has created a systematic inspection program.

Half rentals not licensed

The most amazing finding from the inventory is that nearly half the rentals in Pottstown — about 2,500 — aren't even licensed!

For years, conscientious landlords have had their units inspected time and again, while scofflaws have avoided inspections altogether. Now that should end.

List of rentals on our Web site

For a list of all rental properties in Pottstown, obtained from the borough, go to our www.pottstowncitizens.org Web site and click on **Pottstown Borough** → **Issues** and scroll down to **Rental Inspections**.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



After 20 years of talking about a systematic rental inspection program without actually doing it, Pottstown has now, for the first time, inventoried all the borough's housing — 5,413 rental units and 4,842 owner-occupied houses plus 450 "short-term" rentals. Now a bi-annual rental inspection program will begin.