

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Put it in writing!

Disgraced entertainer Bill Cosby now knows the importance of putting things in writing.

Last week in Montgomery County Court, former District Attorney Bruce Castor testified he agreed in 2005 never to prosecute Cosby for an alleged sexual assault the year before in Cosby's Cheltenham Township home.

But Judge Steven O'Neill ruled that a new district attorney could now prosecute Cosby because the 2005 agreement was never put in writing.

Put it in writing! How critically important!

We know what happened 5,000 years ago because the ancient Sumerians figured out how to make records with a writing system known as cuneiform. Before then, we can only "guess" at human history by examining old bones and other fragments that have survived the centuries.

American jurisprudence is based on the 4,400-word Constitution adopted in 1788 (and later brief amendments). Hundreds of court cases have been determined on the basis of a single sentence.

Base decisions on writing

What does this have to do with Pottstown? As one of nine school board members, I am supposed to exercise oversight on the spending of \$57 million this year. Pottstown Council oversees another \$57 million of taxpayer dollars.

Time and again, we are asked to make million-dollar decisions based on somebody's oral presentation. This is very poor governance.

As auto magnate Lee Iacocca noted in his autobiography:

The discipline of writing something down is the first step toward making it happen. In conversation, you can get away with all kinds of nonsense, often without realizing it. But there's something about putting your thoughts on paper that forces you to get down to specifics. That way, it's harder to deceive yourself — or anybody else.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

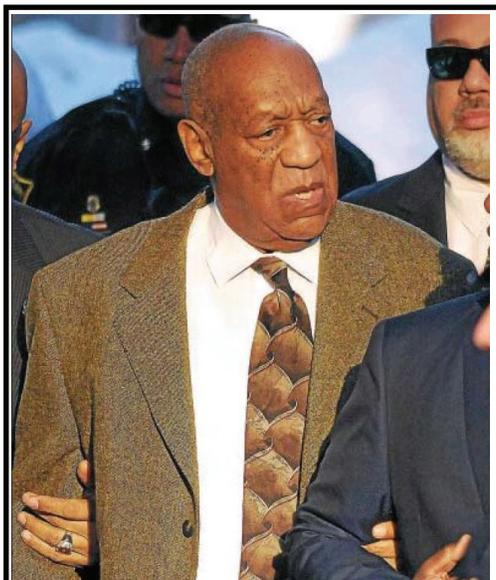
Here's a current example. In April 2015, a presentation was made to the Pottstown School Board by the borough's economic development director, Steve Bamford, about LERTA — the Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance law. A LERTA ordinance allows local governments and school districts to defer taxes for property improvements for up to 10 years.

The Pennsylvania legislature authorized LERTAs nearly 40 years ago. Cities like Easton, Bethlehem, Lancaster and York have had them for years. So do boroughs like Wyomissing and Phoenixville. There are different ways of doing them.

Written analysis needed

But we have not been provided any written analysis of various options from Bamford, which we've asked for time and again. If we can't even do that, how can we successfully carry out a LERTA, no matter how it's structured?

Put it in writing!



Both Bill Cosby and former District Attorney Bruce Castor say there was an agreement 11 years ago not to prosecute Cosby in a sexual assault case, but the agreement was thrown out because it wasn't put in writing.