

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Holistic thinking needed

It's a vicious downward cycle.

A struggling older borough like Pottstown with high taxes and increasing social service obligations raises taxes to make ends meet.

Businesses respond by migrating to the suburbs along with homeowners who can afford to leave.

Potential new entrepreneurs and middle class homeowners stay away.

Property values decrease, which means the borough and school district continue raising taxes just to maintain the same revenue stream.

That's bad enough. But as the chart below demonstrates, the borough and school district have raised both spending and taxes above the rate of inflation.

We're digging a hole so deep we may never be able to climb out of it.

As the Pottstown School Board interviews candidates for a new superintendent — the first person to be hired from outside the district in more than 50 years — my first priority as a school director is the health of the borough.

We need to recognize our school

district is not an island unto itself. Public schools are but one function of government, along with police and fire protection, water and sewer utilities, street maintenance, and other services.

As much as possible, council and the school board should be acting as one.

The decisions made by one group profoundly affects the other. For example, the most effective way to increase achievement in the Pottstown School District is to attract more middle class families to our town.

We must seek cost-effective ways to do that—like improving the appearance of the borough, especially our downtown and major thoroughfares.

Our most promising initiative has come from our schools superintendent and our borough manager.

Thanks to them, council and the school board have been holding joint meetings three times a year since early in 2012.

Recently we've had some serious discussions about common initiatives like tax and homeownership incentives.

We need to accelerate this process if Pottstown is to survive and thrive.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

| Year | School District Budget | Borough General Fund | Combined Borough School district millage | Real estate Total Assessed Valuation |
|--------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| 2007-8 | \$46,736,459 | \$10,799,337 | 38.3 | \$838,545,347 |
| 2008-9 | \$50,407,795 | \$11,030,280 | 40.9 | \$829,017,802 |
| 2009-10 | \$53,401,543 | \$9,454,266 | 43.6 | \$826,475,792 |
| 2010-11 | \$54,553,223 | \$11,087,903 | 45.8 | \$817,728,017 |
| 2011-12 | \$51,108,049 | \$11,281,525 | 46.8 | \$817,767,813 |
| 2012-13 | \$52,034,797 | \$10,866,858 | 47.4 | \$812,279,226 |
| 2013-14 | \$52,947,845 | \$11,535,878 | 48.3 | \$813,227,426 |
| 2014-15 | \$55,929,737 | \$12,172,548 | 49.6 | \$813,390,719 |
| 2015-16 | \$57,136,928 | \$14,520,039 | 49.6 | \$810,387,119 |
| 2016-17 | ? | \$14,169,984 | ? | \$805,577,279 |
| 10-year change | +22% | +30% | +30% | -4% |
| 10-year inflation | 17.5% | 17.5% | 17.5% | 17.5% |