Curb appeal counts

Recently, I listed the three main impediments to the revitalization of Pottstown:
1. High taxes
2. Reputation of school district
3. Perception of crime

But there is a fourth factor, less talked about, but equally important: the appearance of our streets.

When someone is thinking of living in Pottstown or buying a business here, the first thing he does is drive around to see what we look like.

Newcomers are most likely to judge the borough on its downtown and its main thoroughfares.

That’s why, in 1998, civic groups advocated for building a new borough hall near High and Hanover Streets rather than keeping it on a small lot at King and Penn streets, where it was located from 1924 to 1999. The new site is far more visible.

Our current borough hall and the adjacent Smith Family Plaza not only make up a grand civic space, they project a positive image of our town.

The borough’s most magnificent building, Pottstown Middle School, doesn’t have nearly the same impact because it’s located on a side street.

The appearance of Beech Street, a major thoroughfare, will benefit substantially from the ongoing conversion of the former Fecera’s warehouse into an arts center and apartments.

Tomorrow, in a project called Rock the Block, a number of civic groups will kick off a campaign to spruce up the exteriors of houses along the 300 and 400 blocks of Chestnut, Walnut and Beech streets. Improving these residential neighborhoods is important.

Likewise, the Hill School’s new effort to revitalize its surrounding neighborhood, called Hobart’s Run, will also contribute to the well-being of the town.

But the most important area of Pottstown, by far, is our downtown. This is our display window to the world, the place by which we are judged.

Beyond the downtown, people are most likely to form their impression of Pottstown from High Street and other streets which generate the most traffic.

When these streets are marred with dead trees and stumps, boarded up buildings, and trash, it turns people away rather than encourages them to move here.

We should concentrate our resources on improving the appearance on these streets first.

Commentary by Tom Hylton

Pottstown’s major travel routes are shown in purple:
- High Street
- King Street
- Charlotte Street
- Beech Street
- Hanover Street
- Wilson Street

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