

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Budget breakthrough

Recently, the borough published a revised budget for 2016. The numbers didn't change much, but now they are accompanied by a clear, comprehensive narration that explains how local government functions and where the money goes.

It may not be glamorous, but the new budget will be an invaluable guide to making the most of borough resources.

It's a credit to borough manager Mark Flanders and finance director Janice Lee.

As Flanders writes in the introduction, the budget "serves as a meaningful reference and roadmap for staff, the borough's elected officials, appointed legislative bodies, and the citizens of the Borough of Pottstown."

Government 101

There is a table of contents and a helpful glossary of terms and acronyms used in the budget.

The budget highlights initiatives the borough is undertaking in 2016, such as paving 5 miles of streets in 2016, considerably more than in previous years.

Pottstown Borough manages 21 separate funds, each of which is identified and explained.

There is an organization chart showing the number of employees and the hierarchy of each department.

The budget also contains an explanation of basic accounting principles.

Departments

The budget is organized by department. A description is given of each department, the work performed, and a checklist of tasks completed going back two years.

This provides an interesting perspective. For example, the borough administration processed 460 right-to-know requests in 2015,

more than twice as many as in 2013.

There were twice as many traffic accidents in 2015 as in 2013, and police issued almost three times as many traffic citations in 2015 as in 2013.

Taxes versus fees

While some funds are supported with tax dollars, the trash fund is supported by a fee, and the water and sewer funds are covered by ratepayers. This means the people who directly benefit from these services pay for them.

Pay as you go

The budget explains the borough's intention to pay off its debt as soon as possible, and try to fund new capital expenses through existing revenues rather than borrowing.

Long range plans

The budget also contains financial forecasts until the year 2020, with two scenarios considered. As I interpret them, there will be large deficits unless we get spending under control.

Helpful statistics

The budget concludes with demographic information such as Pottstown's median income, housing costs, and historical assessment data.

Display on website

Now the revised budget needs to be prominently displayed on the borough website.

And let's hope the school district can do as well with its upcoming 2016-2017 budget.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

