

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Annex: best building to sell

The Pottstown School District's administrative annex building, across the street from Franklin Elementary School, ought to be sold or leased for offices.

The school board recently voted to have it appraised.

It is one of the loveliest buildings in Pottstown, located in one of the borough's best neighborhoods.

The neo-colonial structure was built in 1959 as the Irene Boyer retirement home for elderly women.

But after the home closed, the Northstar Property Group purchased an option on the building in 2001 with plans to convert it into a home for 36 troubled girls.

To avoid that possibility, the school district paid Northstar \$250,000 to abandon its plans and bought the building itself for \$400,000.

In 2002, the district spent \$1.3 million to convert it into offices — the administrative annex — for the district's pupil services staff.

But there was always plenty of room for pupil services in the central administration building at Beech and Penn streets. In 2011, as a cost-cutting move, pupil services moved back to the main administration building.

Part of the annex building was then rented to Buxmont Academy,

and part was rented to Montgomery County Head Start. Other parts of the building are used for storage.

But last year, Head Start moved into the former Edgewood Elementary School. There is plenty of room at Edgewood for Buxmont Academy classes, as well.

Edgewood a keeper

Some have suggested the district should sell Edgewood. But it is only appraised at \$1.2 million, far below its replacement value of perhaps \$8 to \$10 million, not including the land. Edgewood is in good condition, and some of us on the school board never wanted to close it as an elementary school in the first place.

We might need it in the future.

Meanwhile, rent from Head Start more than pays for operating and maintaining the building.

The district has no use for the annex building, despite its first class office space in a great location, with plenty of off-street parking.

As an existing non-residential building, it can be approved for offices under Pottstown's zoning ordinance as a conditional use.

Our solicitor assures us we can place a deed restriction on the building assuring that it can only be used for offices by a tax-paying entity.

Selling the building and putting it back on the tax rolls is a win-win for the community.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



The Pottstown School District annex building at Franklin and Grace streets