

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Residency incentive to be offered

Last week, the Pottstown School Board policy committee recommended a proposal to offer professional staff a five-year, \$10,000 forgivable loan to buy a home in Pottstown.

The money can be used toward a down payment, closing costs, and renovations for a first-time Pottstown home-buyer.

If the staff member lives in the home for at least five years, the loan will be forgiven. If the staff member moves or leaves the district prior to five years, a prorated portion of the loan must be paid back.

At present, the board intends to limit the incentive to candidates for current administrative openings. Later, after we work out the details, we plan to extend the offer to teachers through the Foundation for Pottstown Education.

We recognize that teachers and other staff can live wherever they want. At present, just 15 percent of our teachers and other professional staff live in the borough.

But we believe teachers and administrators are far more likely to understand and appreciate our students and our families if they live among us.

Our professional staff have among the best-paying jobs in Pottstown, and they could help us immensely if they own homes here.

They will also be helping the planet, because walking and bicycling are much more environmentally friendly than driving cars for every activity.

Maryland

Maryland, which has done more than any other state to promote this idea, calls it, "Live near your work." The state government, cities like Baltimore, and em-

ployers like Johns Hopkins University and Morgan State University offer employees incentives to buy houses near their work.

Allentown

Last summer, nine Allentown businesses began offering \$10,000 forgivable loans to employees who live in a designated section of the downtown.

In October, the offer was extended to Allentown policemen. A police spokesman noted Allentown officers are expected to develop relationships with residents of the community they patrol. "What better way to do that than live in the neighborhood they police?"

At the joint meeting of the Pottstown School Board and Pottstown Council on June 21, we will discuss extending the forgivable loan to Pottstown police officers and other first responders.

Borough Manager Mark Flanders has already indicated support for the idea.

Local Realtor Matt Green and the Hill School's Twila Fisher hope to enlist local employers, like Dana Corp. and Pottstown Memorial Medical Center, to make the same offer to their workers.

It's a great way for our community to make the most of its resources.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



This Queen Anne home on Hanover Street is one of several on the market within easy walking distance of the Pottstown School District administration building.