

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Can we act for the common good?

Last week, at our meeting of the Pottstown School Board, I proposed holding off spending \$277,000 for improvements to our athletic fields until we evaluate the school district's long-term finances.

I was on the losing end of a 6-3 vote to spend the money now.

Third highest taxes

Pottstown has the third highest tax effort in the state — more than 99 percent of the 500 school districts in the Commonwealth.

Meanwhile, the total assessed value of Pottstown's real estate is lower than it was two decades ago, when the county last reassessed.

Education spending comes first

Our taxation is exorbitant because the school board has a long history of spending beyond the community's ability to pay. Per pupil, we spend more than two-thirds of the districts in the state, and we simply can't afford it.

And the reason given is, "We have to put the education of our children first."

Silo thinking

This is known as "silo" thinking. "Whatever I'm doing is more important than everything else." But the people who are footing the bill, the residents and property owners of Pottstown, have their own priorities.

Priority 1— Potable Water

The most important service local government provides is potable water. Ten percent of the world's population doesn't have access to drinkable water. In Pottstown, residents of all ages take ample clean water for granted. (If children were really our top priority, we'd fluoridate the water.)

Priority 2—Sewers

About a third of the world's population doesn't have access to a toilet. Young and old in Pottstown thankfully have access to toilets and drains for wastewater.

Priority 3— Public Safety

Pottstown residents are concerned about safety. Our residents and taxpayers gladly pay for police and other first responders because we want to feel secure in our homes

and on the streets.

Priority 4—Sanitation

Have you ever seen photos of New York or Philadelphia when the sanitation workers have gone on strike? Bags of garbage piled everywhere. Sanitation affects everyone.

Priority 5—Streets

Very few Pottstown taxpayers live at home all day. They need to go places. Our streets and sidewalks aren't the greatest, but they're much better than the rutted, washboard roads you find in third-world countries.

Priority 6—Public Education

I suggest that for most Pottstown residents — with or without children in public schools — education is their sixth local government priority, certainly not their first.

Many of our residents, including the majority of our school board and council members, came to Pottstown as adults. They attended school somewhere else.

Likewise, many of our local graduates leave Pottstown for jobs or college and never come back.

Pottstown public schools are very important, of course, but they are not the "end-all" and "be-all" that our teachers and administrators — few of whom actually live in Pottstown — think they are.

Unfortunately, the school board is slowly choking the life out of this community because of "silo" thinking — and the inability to get spending under control.

Tom Hylton is a member of the Pottstown School Board. However, the views expressed are his alone and not the board's.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

Silo thinking will eventually put Pottstown under water.

