

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Hill School takes some early steps

For years, The Hill School has recognized its major handicap recruiting students and faculty is not the school itself, but Pottstown.

Unlike its peer institutions located in idyllic villages, the Hill School abuts a low and moderate income neighborhood in an older industrial town.

Early in 2016, The Hill School announced an initiative to revitalize the neighborhood surrounding the school campus.

The targeted area, called "Hobart's Run," consists of about 600 mostly residential parcels, plus Edgewood Cemetery, lining the perimeter of the campus.

The initiative's most visible improvement thus far is the care of Edgewood Cemetery, which had been neglected for years.

The Hill School's director of security, Randy Doaty, organized a committee to formally take possession of the cemetery, and several anonymous donors, some affiliated with The Hill School, have covered the cost of lawn mowing.

At their January meeting, Hill trustees decided to incorporate Hobart's Run into a separate IRS-recognized non-profit, which could then engage in real estate activities and apply for government and non-profit funding.

As part of a \$175 million fundraising campaign for campus improvements, The Hill School plans to earmark \$5 million to endow and underwrite Hobart's Run initiatives.

Once established, such a fund would generate perhaps \$250,000 annually for neighborhood improvements.

Considering The Hill School's tax-exempt status spares it from paying \$2.3 million annually in real estate taxes, the school should aim higher — perhaps \$500,000 to \$1 million annually — for the revitalization of

Pottstown.

And limiting its efforts to just The Hill's adjacent neighborhood is not likely to succeed. True revitalization will require targeting the area from the Manatawny Creek east to the campus, including the downtown.

Thus far, the Hobart's Run initiative has been a public relations coup, garnering lots of positive press for the school and Pottstown.

In April, the school sponsored a well-attended investor's conference featuring panels of Pottstown residential and commercial investors who touted the borough as a great place to do business.

When asked about Pottstown's top assets, they noted:

- Geography, close to Route 422 and Route 100.
- The community college, great for workforce development.
- The Schuylkill River Greenway and Heritage Area.
- High Street, with lots of parking available.
- Ample developable industrial land.
- The Hill School.
- Great real estate values.

The conference was highlighted in three newspapers, including the Philadelphia Inquirer. This kind of coverage is gold for Pottstown.

And that is the best contribution The Hill School has made to date.

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



Hobart's Run area consists of about 600 mostly residential parcels, plus Edgewood Cemetery, located around the perimeter of The Hill School



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



Gov. Tom Wolf, a Hill School graduate, was kickoff speaker at a recent investors' conference sponsored by The Hill School.