

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Hill School funds police cars

Earlier this month, Pottstown Council president Dan Weand appointed an ad hoc committee to seek ways to cut the borough budget and reduce a tentative 12 percent tax hike scheduled to go into effect Feb. 15.

The assessed value of Pottstown's taxable real estate plunged last year as the county granted 217 assessment reductions. The greatest loss was Pottstown Hospital, assessed at \$23.5 million, which gained tax-exempt status when it was sold in October to the non-profit Tower Health System.

But the medical center is not Pottstown's most valuable property. With an assessed valuation of nearly \$43 million, The Hill School is worth almost twice as much as the hospital.

The school avoids an annual \$2.2 million real estate tax bill because of the tax-exempt status of its campus.

Ironically, the school serves a mostly affluent population, while the lion's share of Pottstown tax dollars support the Pottstown School District, which serves a student population that is 67 percent low income and minority.

The Hill School trustees recognize Pottstown's physical and financial decline. In fact, a school white paper identified Pottstown as its No. 1 problem recruiting students and faculty.

Two years ago, the school identified an area lining the perimeter of the campus comprising about 600 mostly residential parcels, plus Edgewood Cemetery, it calls Hobart's Run.

The school hired a community organizer to help improve the neighborhood's appearance and livability.

In response to the borough's latest fiscal crisis, The Hill School announced the school will donate \$200,000 over the next two years to the borough to buy police cars.

"The school believes the contribution will support the work of our out-

standing police department and fulfill an immediate and vital need in the borough," said Hill headmaster Zack Lehman. "Community policing and crime prevention is not only essential to Pottstown's overall safety, but it plays a critical role in ongoing economic development efforts throughout the town."

Pottstown's recently retired borough manager, Mark Flanders, said the borough had reached out to the Hill School to buy police cars. Flanders, who was Pottstown's police chief before becoming borough manager, would naturally see police cars as the borough's most pressing need.

But the perception of crime in Pottstown is far worse than reality. In fact, Pottstown is safer than the suburbs, where people do a lot more driving and are more exposed to car accidents. Twice as many people are killed by cars in Montgomery County than by criminals.

Our obsession with crime sadly reinforces the negative perception of Pottstown as "dangerous," which is simply not true.



Commentary by  
Thomas Hylton

**HILL SCHOOL FAST FACTS:**  
**100+ acre campus (tax exempt)**  
**520 students, co-ed**  
**28 states**  
**23 foreign countries**  
**Day tuition: \$39,170**  
**Boarding tuition: \$56,775**  
**Endowment: \$162 million**

Pottstown's Tax Base	
Year	Total assessments valuation
1998	\$816,841,351
2018	\$772,000,000



**FUNDING POLICE CARS — The Hill School will donate \$100,000 to Pottstown Borough this year and another \$100,000 in 2019 to buy police cars.**