

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

Pottstown mirrors 'Keystone Principles'

Montgomery County has launched a seven-year, \$105 million program to promote economic development, targeted mostly at its struggling older boroughs. The funds will be awarded as grants and loans for both public and private projects. About half the funding will be designated solely for Pottstown and Norristown.

To receive funding, projects must conform to ten "Keystone Principles" adopted by the Governor's Economic Development Cabinet in 2005. The Keystone Principles, which were created to guide state agency decisions, champion "smart growth" — development that is efficient, sustainable, democratic, and environmentally sound. Among the principles:



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton

- Reuse previously developed sites, including brownfields.
- Rehabilitate historic buildings for contemporary uses.
- Foster the creation of walkable, bikeable neighborhoods that offer healthy lifestyle choices.
- Promote green buildings and infrastructure that use land, energy and materials efficiently.
- Coordinate the provision of housing of all types with the location of jobs, public transit, schools, and other existing infrastructure.

The county's new economic development director, Kenneth Klothen, is especially familiar with the Keystone Principles, because he was co-chairman of the Governor's Economic Development Cabinet when they were adopted.

Few municipalities in southeastern Pennsylvania reflect the Keystone Principles better than Pottstown.

The borough has beautiful, historic houses that people have used and loved for generations. Most are compact and easy to retrofit for energy efficiency.

Pottstown boasts a traditional main

street with a pleasant atmosphere for walking and bicycling. Handsome old buildings have been adaptively reused as a new theater for the performing arts, an art gallery and school, and restaurants, making the downtown a new cultural hub.

Pottstown's interconnected streets link homes, stores, offices and parks in close proximity.

Traditional neighborhoods provide a sense of place, with landmarks like schools and churches.

The easily accessible Schuylkill River Greenway, stretching to Birdsboro and beyond, is one of the finest recreational amenities in the region.

The Montgomery County Community College West Campus offers nearby residents a world of opportunities. It has already expanded from its original building to High Street, using a former warehouse, and will likely expand again within the next few years.

These are assets the suburbs can't match. And because of its efficient design and affordable housing, Pottstown fosters a cost-effective lifestyle.

Unfortunately, the borough has one huge drawback: exorbitant taxation. High taxes don't just impede revitalization, they stop development cold.

Of 500 school districts in Pennsylvania, the Pottstown School District ranks 11th in taxation, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Statistics from the state Department of Community and Economic Development indicate Pottstown Borough taxes are perhaps higher than taxes in 90 percent of the state's municipalities.

No matter how many incentives the county provides, there will be little economic development until the borough and the school district bring costs — and taxation — under control.

Thomas Hylton, a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer and 36-year resident of Pottstown, is Web site editor of Pottstown Citizens for Responsible Government.

Summary

- **The county's new \$105 million economic development program will be based on the "Keystone Principles" for sustainable development.**
- **Pottstown already reflects the Keystone Principles as well or better than any municipality in the region.**
- **But revitalization will not come unless taxes are brought under control.**