

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

Goal for 2010: living within our means

The recent vote of Pottstown Borough Council to increase taxes nearly 10 percent is the latest episode in a saga going back a decade or more.

The cost of government at all levels is increasing much faster than people's incomes. We cannot allow this trend to continue.

After adjusting for inflation, the income of the average American family is less than it was ten years ago. Likewise, inflation-adjusted housing prices are no higher than they were a decade ago.

What has risen is debt — at all levels. At the federal level, in just one year, our national debt has risen 31 percent, and we will soon see unprecedented demands on Social Security and Medicare as the Baby Boomer generation retires.

In Pennsylvania, our school districts face an astronomical 500 percent increase in payments to the state pension system over the next three years.

Meanwhile, families are struggling to pay off debt they accumulated using the value of their homes as collateral. With plunging property values, many people now owe more on their mortgages than their houses are worth.

Meanwhile, for the first time in more than three decades, there will be no Social Security cost-of-living increase this year.

The residents of Pottstown are particularly hard hit, because we have many elderly residents and many who get by on low and moderate incomes.

Therefore, most of us are already living in modest circumstances. Most Pottstown houses are older and placed close together — certainly not on acre or half-acre lots. Few houses have two-car garages or interi-

ors with three or four bathrooms.

About half our housing was built prior to World War II. We have older kitchens, smaller bathrooms, and lots of apartments carved out of what had been single family homes. Most of our "newer" housing was built in the 1950s and 1960s, without the spacious family rooms and cathedral ceilings so common to suburban McMansions.

We don't have the latest cars and electronic gadgetry.

But that doesn't mean we don't enjoy a high quality of life. Our historic housing and other buildings have beauty and character you can't find in newly developing townships.

We have a traditional main street with a pleasant atmosphere for walking and bicycling

Our interconnected streets link homes, stores, offices and parks. Traditional neighborhoods provide a sense of place, with landmarks like schools and churches.

We have wonderful green spaces that are easily accessible, like our greenway along the Schuylkill River.

Our problem is high taxation. Although our residents have learned to live modestly, our government has not.

Here in Pottstown, our administrators, council, and school board have to set priorities, just as our residents do, and figure out what is a necessity and what is a luxury we cannot afford.

If we can't get taxation under control, we can't survive as a community, no matter how modestly we live in our individual households.

This column expresses the personal views of Tom Hylton and does not represent the views of any public or private organization with which he is affiliated.



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton

Summary

- **For the most part, Pottstown residents are people of modest means, living in modest housing.**
- **Our residents recognize that a good quality of life is not dependent on the size or newness of your house, or how many material possessions you can accumulate.**
- **Now we need to extend that philosophy to our borough and school district, because we cannot survive as a community unless we get taxation under control.**