

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

Well-built schools can last indefinitely

Enrollments at Pottstown's five elementary schools have remained stable for 20 years, and they are projected to increase modestly in the next five years.

The only way Pottstown can close an elementary school is to enlarge other schools.

As I noted last week, the least expensive such option, proposed in 2008 by architects Crabtree Rohrbaugh, called for enlarging three schools and closing two others at a cost of \$39 million. This option required increasing class sizes in grades K-5.

A much less expensive option, currently under consideration by the district's Neighborhood Schools Committee, calls for putting energy efficient windows in the Edgewood and Rupert schools and replacing the current inefficient heating systems at all five elementary schools with geothermal heat pumps. This could be accomplished for about \$8 million — less than one-quarter of the cost of full renovations, and it would ex-

tend the life of Pottstown's elementary schools for at least 20 years.

Some board members don't want to invest money in the district's 1927 Rupert School because it's more than 80 years old. But a well-constructed brick building like Rupert can last indefinitely with good maintenance. And Rupert is ideally located in the heart of a vibrant neighborhood.

Consider the former Jefferson Elementary School, which is four years older than Rupert. The district sold the building in 2001 to Pennrose Properties, which converted it into senior apartments. If Jefferson can be converted into apartments for elderly people who are cooking and sleeping in the building, why can't Rupert continue to be used as a school?

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
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Summary

- Like the 1927 Rupert Elementary School, the 1923 former Jefferson Elementary School at Beech and Warren streets, above, is a load-bearing masonry building that can last indefinitely with good maintenance.
- In 2002, the Jefferson School was converted into 46 senior apartments by Pennrose Properties. The developer installed historically compatible, high performance replacement windows as part of the renovations.