

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

Pottstown ripe for 'smart growth'

Sixty years of building low density, sprawling development may be coming to an end. If so, Pottstown is perfectly designed and located to capture the development of the future — “smart growth.”

Smart growth is the name given to development that conserves land by using smaller lot sizes and placing houses, stores and workplaces in close proximity. It promotes walking, bicycling and mass transit.

In a series of public workshops earlier this year, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) noted that traffic congestion in the Route 422 corridor has increased dramatically in the last two decades and will continue to escalate.

DVRPC forecasts that if present development patterns continue, 18,000 acres of farmland will be consumed in the next 20 years, and the increased vehicle traffic will bring about “total failure of Route 422 and portions of Route 23.” Said one DVRPC engineer, “You’re either stuck in traffic or, as traffic gets worse, you’re stuck in your house.”

The downsides to sprawl go beyond the loss of farmland and increased time sitting in traffic. Excessive driving requires enormous amounts of gasoline, which makes America dependent on foreign oil. Emissions from cars are a leading cause of air pollution, ground water contamination and global warming.

Car accidents are the No. 1 cause of death and serious injury for Americans ages 3 to 33, and a leading cause of death for Americans of all ages. Obesity has skyrocketed in recent decades, in part because people spend more time sitting in cars and less time walking.

Recognizing the need for a new development pattern, the Governor’s Economic Development Cabinet adopted in 2005 ten “Keystone Principles” for smart growth to guide state agency investment decisions.

Among the principles:

- Reuse previously developed sites, including brownfields.
- Rehabilitate historic buildings for

contemporary uses.

- Foster the creation of walkable, bikeable neighborhoods that offer healthy lifestyle choices.

- Coordinate the provision of housing close to the location of jobs, public transit, schools, and other existing infrastructure.

Earlier this year, Montgomery County adopted the Keystone Principles as the foundation of its new seven year, \$105 million economic development program for Pottstown, Norristown, and other struggling towns.

On Monday, a panel of experts from ULI — the Urban Land Institute — will visit Pottstown to help us revitalize and enhance our quality of life.

ULI is a strong proponent of smart growth. For more than a decade, ULI has published literature and conducted seminars endorsing smart growth as a way to protect the environment, preserve open space, build community character, and reduce our cost of living. Its monthly magazine has described scores of communities across the country that have used smart growth principles to create great places to live and work.

In its two previous visits to Pottstown, in 1976 and 1989, ULI panels have urged Pottstown to retain and build on assets that today make our town ripe for sustainable development.

For example, the borough has beautiful, historic buildings 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.

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

As a growing number of people seek a less car-dependent, more cost-effective lifestyle, Pottstown will become more attractive for new housing and businesses. The ULI, we hope, can help show us the way.



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton

Summary

- **As sprawling development becomes ever less sustainable, traditional towns like Pottstown — with a mixture of houses, stores, and workplaces in close proximity — provide an attractive model for future growth.**
- **To read the ULI studies of Pottstown, go to www.pottstowncitizens.org. Click on “Pottstown Borough Government” and then click on “strategic plans.”**