

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Sustainability for Pottstown

Last year, Pottstown Council and the Pottstown School Board jointly authorized the development of a sustainability plan for Pottstown.

Two steering committee meetings were held earlier this year, and a meeting of 20 “stakeholders,” major Pottstown property owners and non-profits, is scheduled for early June to brainstorm sustainability ideas.

Of course, if planning equaled doing, Pottstown would already be one of the best places on earth.

We’ve done a slew of plans in recent decades — comprehensive plans, economic development plans, urban renewal plans, park plans, and others.

So what’s different now?

Climate change

As the world begins to recognize the reality of climate change and the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, people are rediscovering the merits of older towns like Pottstown.

Because of their multi-story buildings and compact form, traditional towns consume far less energy, per capita, than the suburbs. They’re perfect for walking and biking, and they have a historic character post-war suburbs can’t match.

Downtowns gaining population

That’s why downtowns all across the country are gaining population after decades of decline.

Philadelphia — especially the downtown — has been growing since 2007, adding thousands of college-educated residents.

Millions of dollars have been invested for rehabilitated buildings, new construction, trees, and bike lanes.

As Harvard economist Edward Glaeser says, “the most successful economic development policy is to attract and retain smart people and then get out of their way.”

Catching the wave

As a perfect mini-city, with a wide variety of dwelling units, a traditional downtown, offices and manufacturing areas, and a greenway connection, Pottstown can catch the wave by going green.

The Cheltenham model

Cheltenham Township, at the far

eastern end of Montgomery County, is the first and only municipality in the county to complete a community-wide sustainability plan. County planners Jon Leshner, who helped create Cheltenham’s plan, and Donna Fabry will help facilitate the process in Pottstown.

What are some of the elements of Cheltenham’s plan?

Energy

Maximize energy efficiency and minimize energy demand.

Mobility

Minimize vehicle travel and make it desirable to walk and bike.

Ecological Stewardship

Protect the health and diversity of Cheltenham’s habitats, waterways and soils.

Sustainable development

Promote building and land use that respects the natural environment.

Water Management

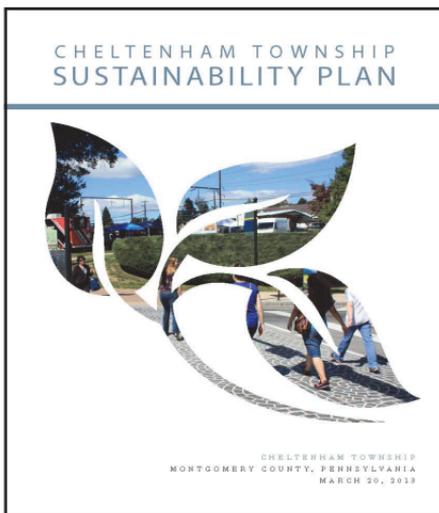
Increase the natural absorption of stormwater by removing excess impervious surface and increasing trees and vegetation.

Pottstown can do the same

Pottstown has about 9,300 households. We only need to attract a few hundred new “smart people” over the next decade to transform our town. Focusing on sustainability is the way.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



Cheltenham has Montgomery County’s only comprehensive sustainability plan. Pottstown will be the second community to create one.