

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Park or pavement?

Last month, Pottstown Council authorized the borough solicitor to prepare an agreement to acquire a .78-acre tract of contaminated land at 860 Cross Street, across the street from 2-acre Pollock Park.

Pollock Park is one of 10 neighborhood parks scattered around the borough. Most of these parks were created from small vacant parcels of land in the 1970s using federal revenue-sharing money.

At one time, Pollock Park was the Mayer Pollock scrap yard. The adjacent site to be acquired, which is currently surrounded by a chain link fence, was a BASF chemical company polyurethane sealant manufacturing plant, now torn down. The soil is contaminated with two cancer-causing chemicals. The ground needs to be capped off to isolate the chemicals so people don't come into contact with them.

Pollock Park is mostly a grass field. It has a usable swing set and the remains of a tennis court and a mini-basketball court. At present, there are plans to make perhaps \$450,000 in improvements to the park, hopefully to be funded with grant money.

The borough plans to cover the BASF site with asphalt for basketball courts and a parking lot.

Meanwhile, Pottstown has a huge stormwater runoff problem created when rain water "runs off" impervious surfaces. A borough consultant recently forecast it will cost millions of dollars to manage this runoff in coming decades.

Considering that almost 40 percent of the borough is covered with impervious surfaces, we question why the parks department would want to create more.

There are 40 on-street parking spaces on Cross Street, which are rarely used, and an under-utilized private parking lot with 105 spaces nearby. On the other hand, why does a small neighborhood park need spaces for cars at all?

A much better use for the BASF site would be as a meadow. Lots of public parks have meadows. Contaminated soil can be capped with a geomembrane (a sheet of strong plastic-like material) and then covered with a layer of soil and vegetation to absorb stormwater and prevent runoff.

Pottstown has far too much pavement already.



Commentary by
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