1970s
Declining, but seeds of renewal

At a recent Progress Pottstown luncheon, borough officials expressed optimism about Pottstown’s future. The following is one of a series about where we’ve been in the last five decades.

In the 1970s, even as Pottstown began losing the heavy industries that had been the backbone of the borough for two centuries, Pottstown Borough Government began planning for the future.

In 1973, the Clow Corp., maker of clay pipe, partnered with borough government to extend Shoemaker Road and utilities to 85 acres of vacant Clow land between the present-day Wal-Mart and Glasgow Street. The land, subdivided into nine parcels, became Pottstown’s first industrial park, now used by such firms as Eastman Co., U.S. Axle, and Specialty Chemical Co.

(Other Clow land eventually became a second business campus and the Pottstown Center, where the Wal-Mart is now located.)

Meanwhile, the Pottstown School District began downsizing to reflect its declining enrollment, closing the Washington Elementary School (now part of the administration building), Central Junior High School (later demolished), and the Jefferson Elementary School (now senior apartments).

By far the most significant development in the 1970s was the construction of Pottstown Memorial Medical Center in 1972, completing the merger of Pottstown Hospital (now a nursing home) and Pottstown Homeopathic Hospital (now an office building).

Today, the medical center is Pottstown’s largest employer, and its sale in 2003 to Community Health Systems for $81.5 million created the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation, which gives away millions of dollars in grants annually to promote healthy lifestyles.

The Brookings Institution reports that educational and medical facilities have become, by far, the largest employers in many American cities, including Philadelphia.

Commentary by Tom Hylton

CONSTRUCTION of Pottstown Memorial Medical Center in 1972 completed the merger of two smaller hospitals

In 1973, Pottstown created its first business campus by rezoning 85 acres owned by the Clow Corp. between Glasgow Street and Shoemaker Road, where such firms as Eastman and U.S. Axle are now located.

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