1990s

From downtown to Route 100

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.

The decline of Pottstown’s traditional industries continued in the 1990s, when Mrs. Smith’s Pie Co., a home-grown industry, was sold to a Georgia firm which promptly closed its Pottstown plant. But there was good news as well. After steadily losing downtown stores over a 30-year period, Pottstown regained all the lost retail space—and more—in one fell swoop.

Using land formerly owned by the Clow Corp. west of Route 100 at Robinson Street, a developer created a 40-acre shopping center anchored by a Wal-Mart in 1994. Numerous stand alone stores, restaurants, banks, and a hotel opened as well.

Overnight the “Pottstown Center” became the borough’s most valuable taxable property.

Meanwhile, 1998 saw a breakthrough on High Street. For more than two decades, the downtown had endured a 2-acre open lot in front of the former Reading passenger station. The lot had been sold to The Mercury for a new office that never materialized. A chain link fence had been erected around the lot which had become weedy and trash-strewn.

At one point, the Montgomery County commissioners decided to build the satellite campus of the county community college on the lot, but then changed their mind. This led to a bitter lawsuit between the county and the newspaper which prevented any development from taking place.

Finally, the county bought the lot from The Mercury and donated it to the non-profit Preservation Pottstown, which then sold the tract to the borough for $1. Construction of a new borough hall began in late 1998.

Commentary by Tom Hylton

THE POTTSTOWN CENTER at Route 100 and Shoemaker Road opened in 1994. Featuring a Wal-Mart and other stores, the center has more retail space than all of downtown Pottstown ever did.

AFTER SITTING VACANT for nearly 25 years, the 2-acre lot in front of the Reading passenger station on High Street was acquired by the county in 1998 and, in a complicated transaction involving Preservation Pottstown, donated it to the borough for a new borough hall and town park.