50 years
Pottstown drained by car culture

At a recent Progress Pottstown luncheon, borough officials expressed optimism about Pottstown’s future. The following sums up the last five decades:

During the last five weeks, I’ve reviewed some significant public and private events of the last 50 years that have affected Pottstown’s quality of life.

Pottstown gained a community college and a new hospital. It built a new borough hall, renovated its schools, and expanded its parks system, including upgraded playing fields and a riverfront trail system.

A score of magnificent historic buildings have been restored for offices and apartments.

Yet, mirroring national trends, downtown Pottstown lost most of its stores to new suburban malls with ample free parking.

Nearly all of Pottstown’s heavy manufacturing jobs were lost to automation and cheap labor overseas.

Most of its middle class residents moved to new homes on large lots outside of town, leaving behind an increasingly poor population.

Most new office jobs have been located in fashionable suburban office parks.

As America adopted a culture based on unfettered use of the automobile and segregated housing based on income, Pottstown — and other traditional towns — fell out of fashion.

Yet the assets that Pottstown has retained or created in recent decades — even as the borough has declined overall — promise a bright future.

As America faces significant climate change, an aging population, onerous debt, and increased competition from abroad, compact towns like Pottstown will become increasingly attractive as communities to live and work.