2000s
Downtown renaissance begins

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.

Beginning in the 1970s, proposals to renovate or rebuild Pottstown Borough Hall had consumed an enormous amount of time and money without anything getting done.

In its 1989 plan, the Urban Land Institute recommended creating a town center with a borough hall and downtown park on a weedy, vacant 2-acre tract in front of the Reading passenger station that was the site of an aborted 1975 urban renewal project.

Although Pottstown Council had advertised bids to build a new borough hall at its original site on King Street, a 1998 citizens' campaign led to the acquisition of the High Street site and a change of heart by Council.

The new borough hall was completed in 2000, and a town park, called Smith Family Plaza, was built two years later next to borough hall.

The entire town center concept was completed in 2006 when the adjacent 1880 Security Trust building, whose upper floors had been vacant since the 1960s, was restored to historic standards as offices and a restaurant.

Meanwhile, in May 2003, High Street was reconfigured with back-in angle parking, which immediately added 93 more parking spaces downtown — a 25 percent increase — without acquiring any more land.

Commentary by Thomas Hylton

THE TRICOUNTY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER (now Steel River Playhouse), funded by private donations and a county grant, opened in 2008 in a renovated former 5&10 store at 245 High Street.

THE SECURITY TRUST BUILDING, whose upper floors had been vacant since the 1960s, was restored as offices and a restaurant in 2006. Historic tax credits helped finance the $4 million project.

AFTER NUMEROUS PROPOSALS to renovate or rebuild borough hall at its original King Street location or various other sites, a new borough hall opened in 2000 on High Street. An $875,000 town park was completed two years later, mostly funded with federal transportation grants.