PAID important to Pottstown

Last May, the Pottstown School Board was asked to double its annual contribution to PAID, Pottstown Area Industrial Development, Inc., from $10,000 to $20,000. The request was tabled until Peggy Lee-Clark, PAID's new executive director, could make a presentation to a joint meeting of the Pottstown School Board and Pottstown Council on June 20.

I was favorably impressed with her performance, and I'm in favor of raising the school district's donation for one year only to see if PAID can attract development.

Our tax base has been steadily declining for 20 years, and we desperately need more revenue-generating businesses.

In 2016, PAID was given $150,000 by the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation, which promised another $150,000 donation if PAID could raise a matching amount on its own. So the school district's contribution will be doubled if PAID reaches its fundraising goal.

The performance of PAID's previous director, who resigned in January after five years on the job, was less than stellar. In 2009, when PAID reorganized, it adopted by-laws requiring PAID's director to submit an annual progress report. These reports turned out to be bare bones Power Points which failed to provide a comprehensive picture of Pottstown's challenges and opportunities.

Business inventory
The reports were supposed to include an inventory of borough businesses, which never happened, even though the borough's tax collector provides a list of employers and the number of employees annually to the borough. We should expect a complete business inventory by the spring of next year.

Developable properties
PAID's director should also inventory and publicize what properties are available to be developed, including underutilized space in the downtown.

PAID website
I was pleased that Lee-Clark recognizes PAID has an uninspiring website which needs to be revamped. A website is an opportunity to make a good impression on prospective investors and offer information about the community. Above all, the website should provide complete contact information for Lee-Clark instead of a generic online form to fill out.

Business friendly?
Pottstown has a reputation for being difficult to deal with — especially codes and public works. Lee-Clark says she already has a good working relationship with borough officials, and she plans to facilitate meetings with prospective investors early on to try to avoid problems.

Pottstown has plenty of untapped development potential, and with new leadership, PAID should be able to help investors discover all that Pottstown has to offer.

Commentary by Tom Hylton

GOOD NEWS — After being vacant for 20 years, the upper floors of the BB&T bank building, High and Hanover streets, will be remediated and occupied by Cedarville Engineering later this year. PAID facilitated the project.