Is YMCA selling out its mission?

The Philadelphia Freedom Valley YMCA has prospered mightily since a 2013 merger which created a four-county, two-state giant with 140,000 members and 15 branches.

In less than five years, annual revenues have grown from $60 million to $86 million, with two new branches built and another under construction.

At the time of the merger, YMCA officials said there would be no layoffs or closures. The merger was not about money, but about enhancing services.

Pottstown now finds those high-minded promises ring hollow. Without prior notice, the YMCA announced last fall it would close our 138-year-old Pottstown institution as of June 29, 2018.

Ironically, Pottstown’s demographic fits precisely the young people the YMCA was founded to serve more than a century ago.

Unlike the middle class and affluent populations cultivated by other Y branches, Pottstown is one of the lowest-income communities in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Two-thirds of Pottstown School District students come from low-income and minority families. They desperately need the social skills and character-building activities the Y was created to provide.

Our third graders learn to swim at the Y. Seventh graders are offered free memberships. Because of its central location, next to the Pottstown high school-middle school complex, everyone can walk or bike there.

Grants help fund after-school care for students at the Y as well as the district’s pre-K counts kindergarten readiness program. Older students use the Pottstown Y evenings and weekends.

For an organization that claims to be “community-centered,” there was no community involvement whatsoever in the parent organization’s decision to close the Pottstown facility.

The YMCA provided no financial records to back up claims that the Pottstown operation is losing money, and its building has millions of dollars in deferred maintenance needs.

The YMCA believes that “everyone should have the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive.” Apparently, that no longer includes Pottstown.

Commentary by Thomas Hylton

A NEW $30 MILLION FACILITY, featuring three indoor pools, is under construction in Upper Moreland to replace the current Abington and Hatboro YMCAs.