

Ironically,

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POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

We're closing. No input wanted

The Philadelphia Freedom Valley YMCA continues to insist there is no hope of keeping the Pottstown YMCA building open beyond June 29.

A few months ago, YMCA executives assembled a task force of Pottstown civic leaders to explore alternative ways to provide the Y's services after the building is closed.

Task force members were specifically instructed not to question the decision to close the Pottstown Y.

But they did.

Last week, the task force met with Shaun Elliott, the president and CEO of the parent YMCA, seeking data to support Elliott's contention that the Pottstown YMCA is financially unsustainable.

None was provided.

Here's what we do know:

According to the last IRS filing of the Pottstown YMCA as an independent entity (in 2007), the YMCA made a profit of almost \$200,000.

When Pottstown merged with Phoenixville to create Freedom Valley YMCA on Jan. 1, 2008, it brought a \$2.8 million endowment, of which \$1 million was earmarked for a new Upper Perkiomen YMCA. The rest was to go to the Pottstown facility.

When Freedom Valley merged with the YMCA of Philadelphia and Vicinity in 2013, Pottstown lost all representation on the YMCA board. It now serves the lowest income population of the Y's ten suburban branches.

Last November, without prior

warning, CEO Elliott announced the Y would be closed. Elliott claimed the Pottstown Y had been losing \$700,000 annually and needed \$11 million in repairs over the next 10 years.

(Interestingly, Pottstown pays an annual intercompany charge to Philadelphia Freedom Valley of up to \$750,000.)

Dan Boyer, a longtime patron of the Pottstown YMCA and member of the task force, questions why Elliott didn't come to the community for input before deciding to close the facility.

"If they had come to us and said the building is failing, let's take a year to discuss the problems and try to come up with solutions, they would have buy-in from the community.

"But we were blindsided."

Boyer says there is supposed to be a study of the Pottstown facility, "but we didn't get it, and after three or four meetings, I'm leery of accepting Elliott's numbers at face value."

Boyer, a Hill School graduate with 40 years' experience as a financial advisor, says he can go to any fitness center he wants. "I've been to the upscale Ys, but I prefer Pottstown because it reflects the diversity of our community. I see youth playing basketball, the elderly exercising. It's an important part of our culture.

"We are the poster child of the kind of community the Y should be serving."



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton



THE UPPER PERKIOMEN YMCA, opened in 2015, features a two-story atrium lobby, fitness center, double gymnasium, three indoor pools under a cathedral ceiling, two outdoor pools, and an indoor track circling group exercise rooms on the second floor. The 72,000-square-foot facility, situated on a 48-acre tract, is completely car-oriented, with parking for more than 430 cars. A walking trail surrounds the complex. The Philadelphia Freedom Valley YMCA financed \$14 million of the \$18 million cost, with the rest of the money raised locally.