

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Time for the attorney general?

The imminent closing of the Pottstown YMCA dominated the discussion at the Montgomery County commissioners' "listening tour" last week at the Pottstown campus of the county community college.

In November, without warning, the Philadelphia Freedom Valley YMCA announced it was closing the Pottstown Y because it was becoming too costly to operate and maintain the building.

A task force of Pottstown civic leaders recruited by YMCA officials to show how the Y could provide its services without the facility said instead it couldn't be done.

"After considerable research, discussion and feedback from the community, we conclude that the YMCA in Pottstown is rooted in a physical location and that a decision to close the facility, without local input or representation, is unacceptable," the task force said.

But the Y leadership so far has been unbending.

"I don't think they really understand how important this is to the community," said Val Arkoosh, chairman of the commissioners. She said she would try to serve as an 'honest broker' ... "but they are a private entity. We have zero authority over them."

The commissioners may not, but the Pennsylvania Attorney General has vast powers to oversee the YMCA and other Pennsylvania non-profits.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court has said non-profits "must benefit a substantial and indefinite class of

persons who are legitimate objects of charity."

As The Mercury has reported, the YMCA is spending tens of millions of dollars for lavish facilities in affluent areas like Haverford, Spring-Ford and Upper Moreland. How can it claim it doesn't have the resources to maintain a relatively modest Y in Pottstown, where the need is greatest?

Back in 2002, the fabulously wealthy Hershey Trust, which owns and operates the Milton Hershey School for underprivileged children, tried to sell Hershey Foods Co. (the chocolate maker)

to the Wrigley Co. of Chicago.

Residents of the town of Hershey were outraged the Trust would sell a major employer and cherished community institution.

Then-Attorney General Mike Fisher swung into action. He successfully sued the Hershey Trust in Dauphin County Orphan's Court to quash the sale.

Later, under pressure from the attorney general's office, the Hershey Trust reorganized itself, reducing the number of board members from 17 to 11. All those who voted to sell Hershey Foods were dropped from the board.

Interestingly, the current attorney general is Josh Shapiro, who was chairman of the Montgomery County commissioners until his election as the state's top law enforcement officer in 2016.

The YMCA leadership can easily ignore its own task force in Pottstown. But it can't ignore the attorney general. Perhaps he can get the Y's attention.



Commentary by
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WHAT DO THE YMCA AND THE HERSHEY TRUST HAVE IN COMMON? They are both non-profit organizations under the aegis of the Pennsylvania Attorney General. The attorney general's office has frequently involved itself with the management of the Hershey Trust, which owns and operates the Milton Hershey School. Maybe the AG needs to look at the Philadelphia Freedom Valley YMCA, as well.