Pottstown Patriotism

Last week, the Limerick Township supervisors unanimously approved the preliminary site plan for what a developer euphemistically calls the “Limerick Town Center.”

Of course, Limerick is not a town, and it has no center. It is a formerly rural township, dotted with a few villages, that has been transformed into a mishmash of housing subdivisions, power centers, highway retail, golf courses, schools, an airport, and a nuclear power plant. All destinations must be reached by car.

Every type of land use requires its own pod, connected only to the nearest road. Although there are a few sidewalks here and there, mostly leading nowhere, it would be dangerous to try to walk or bike through the township. There’s not much of visual interest anyway.

Even the proposed “town center” will have nothing resembling a downtown. It will consist of one pod with 160 townhouses, a second pod with an assisted living complex, and a third pod with three commercial buildings, all surrounded by parking lots.

Unfortunately, much of developing Montgomery County has become a similar hodgepodge of buildings plopped along the roadways. It’s hard to see how people can love these places or call them home.

Perhaps they feel completely secure on their own lot or in their own subdivision. There’s no chance of strangers walking past your house, or, worse, up to your door. Most people look pretty much the same and enjoy about the same income.

Pottstown is different. It’s a real community.

I moved to Pottstown in 1972, but it wasn’t until I started walking several miles a day in 1978 that it really started to feel like home. I experienced the town at a much closer and personal level than I ever did by car — really seeing people, buildings and yards that, from behind a windshield, are just a blur. In time I explored every block.

George Orwell, the author of Animal Farm and 1984, defined patriotism as “devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on others.”

There’s much to love about Pottstown. We’ve got residents of all ages, races, and incomes. We’ve got 70 miles of streets, with sidewalks along nearly all of them, and everything is interconnected for walking and biking as well as driving.

We all have our individual dwellings. But we also have lots of shared public space. Pottstonians can feel patriotic about the 5 square miles we call home.