

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## ULI themes still a work in progress

Last week, a panel of nationwide experts from ULI — the Urban Land Institute — visited Pottstown to evaluate the community's strengths and weaknesses and advise ways we can promote economic development. It was the fourth time



Commentary by  
Thomas Hylton

a ULI panel has visited Pottstown since Bethlehem Steel closed in 1976, the harbinger of Pottstown's industrial decline in the 1970s and 1980s.

As we discussed last week, the ULI reports of 1976 and 1989 suggested many initiatives that were subsequently implemented, such as creating historic districts to protect Pottstown's historic architecture; rediscovering the riverfront with a new park and trail system, and creating a town center anchored by a new borough hall and plaza.

But these initiatives took years to evolve. For example, it took 11 years from the original 1989 ULI vision for a town center until borough hall was actually built, and two more years for the Smith Family Plaza to be realized.

The most recent ULI report — presented by panel members Friday to about 70 stakeholders at the Steel River Playhouse — continued many of the same themes as a third ULI report in 2009: making better use of the riverfront; connecting Riverfront Park with Memorial Park, creating a better entryway to Pottstown along King Street from Route 100; encouraging the revitalization of the downtown, including filling vacant upper floors with housing; fostering a business-friendly culture in borough hall; and improving the effectiveness of PAID, Pottstown's economic development entity.

The most tangible result of the 2009 report was the reorganization of PAID (Pottstown Area Industrial Development Authority).

Originally formed in 1965 as a non-profit to promote commercial and economic

development, PAID did not have a full-time economic development director at the time of the 2009 ULI report.

In 2011, as recommended by ULI, PAID was restructured with a new board of directors led by a rotating annual presidency of the Pottstown borough manager, the superintendent of the Pottstown School District, and the director of the Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority. (This year's president is Jerry Nugent, director of the county redevelopment authority).

PAID also hired its first economic development director, Steven Bamford, who was replaced by Peggy Lee-Clark in 2017. An assistant was hired last year.

Some of the other 2009 recommendations have been carried out. The Schuylkill River Greenway was extended from Hanover Street east to Moser Road earlier this year, and it will soon be extended across the new Route 422 bridge into Chester County and on to Parker Ford, Phoenixville, Norristown, and Philadelphia.

Since the 2009 report, the Montgomery County Community College has expanded into the old Reading Railroad freight terminal building on the west side of Hanover Street, with the campus now extending west to the Manatawny Creek.

The completion of Hanover Square townhouses and two mixed-use buildings have provided the first market rate housing along the river in more than a century. Conversion of the historic Meyerhoff shirt factory into 27 condominiums and apartments is underway.

On the other hand, prime land along the river from Evans Street to Washington Street has yet to be redeveloped.

**More Thursday.**



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